

P L RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

UPSC



YEARLY COMPILATION

2025 – 2026

MAINS CONTENT (QUESTIONS WITH ANSWER)

JANUARY (PART –6)

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2. Tariffs Are Gone. Now, Let's Build on India-Australia Pact (IE)

1. The U.S. Tariff Shock, India's Pharma Future (TH)

General Studies 2- International Relation

Topic- Effect of policies of developed countries on India's interests

Introduction

In September 2025, the global pharmaceutical landscape faced a seismic shift with the U.S. announcing a 100% tariff on branded and patented pharmaceutical imports. For India, known as the "Pharmacy of the World," this presents a dual reality- a critical threat to its export-driven model and a strategic opportunity to leverage its dominance in generic medicines (which remain currently exempted). The crisis has accelerated India's push for market diversification, domestic reforms (like GST rationalization), and self-reliance in Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients (APIs).

1. Global Market Context & India's Position

Global Scale- Global pharma exports crossed \$850 billion in 2024, driven by aging populations and chronic disease management.

Leading Players

1. Top Exporters- Germany (\$119.8 bn), Switzerland (\$99 bn), and the U.S. (\$90 bn).
2. Top Importer- The U.S. remains the world's largest buyer, importing \$212.67 billion (2024).

India's Standing

1. Rank- 3rd largest exporter by volume.
2. Growth- Exports rose from \$27 billion (2023) to \$30.47 billion (FY2025).
3. US Dependence- Approximately 35% of India's pharma exports are bound for the U.S., making this tariff regime a high-stakes geopolitical issue.

2. The U.S. Tariff Shock- Risks vs. The "Generics Cushion"

The U.S. move is framed as a protectionist measure to boost domestic manufacturing, but its impact is nuanced.

The Threat (Branded Drugs)- The 100% tariff targets branded and patented drugs not manufactured in the U.S.

Impact- Firms with high U.S. exposure (>30%) face rerouting costs, regulatory hurdles, and potential R&D slowdowns.

Domino Effect- If tariffs extend to generics, India could face a 10-15% revenue cut, dragging GDP down by 0.2-0.3%.

The Cushion (Generic Dominance)

Market Share- Generics make up 70% of India's exports to the U.S./Europe.

US Reliance- India supplies 40% of U.S. generics, saving the American healthcare system an estimated \$219 billion (2022).

Strategic Safety- Currently, generics are excluded from the tariff, shielding the bulk of India's trade. However, any future inclusion would risk triggering massive drug shortages in the U.S.

3. Domestic Policy Response- The GST Shield

To insulate the domestic market from export volatility, the Indian government implemented significant tax reforms in September 2025.

GST Rationalization

Medicines- Rates slashed from 12% to 5%; 36 essential items (including life-saving drugs) now at Nil rate.

Medical Devices- GST reduced from 18% to 5%, easing the cost of \$5 billion worth of imports.

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

Economic Impact

Consumer Savings– Estimated at \$1.2 billion annually.

Consumption Boost– Expected to raise domestic consumption by 8–10%, aided by alignment with the *Ayushman Bharat* scheme.

Supply Stability– No re-labelling requirements for pre-existing stock ensured zero supply disruption during the transition.

4. Strategic Pivot– "Eastern Scale" & Diversification

Recognizing the risks of over-reliance on the West, India is aggressively pivoting towards the Global South and "Eastern" manufacturing hubs.

Diplomatic Expansion

New Alliances– 6 MoUs signed with nations like Trinidad and Tobago; new API pacts with Singapore.

South-South Cooperation– Collaboration with the Serum Institute of India for dengue treatments in low-income countries.

China Factor

Vulnerability– India still imports 72% of its APIs from China (\$5 billion/year).

Opportunity– As the U.S. targets China, the "China-plus-one" strategy is driving global firms to look at India, Africa, and Southeast Asia as alternative hubs.

Africa Potential– Platforms like iPHEx aim to double export volumes to Africa, potentially offsetting 20–25% of the risks arising from U.S. tariffs.

5. Structural Challenges & Future Forecasts

Despite the headwinds, the long-term outlook remains bullish, contingent on structural upgrades.

Growth Projections

Market Size– Expected to jump from \$50 billion (2024) to \$130 billion by 2030 (11–12% CAGR).

Exports– Projected to reach \$120–\$130 billion.

Production Linked Incentive (PLI)

Goal– Reclaim 20% of domestic API production by 2030 to reduce Chinese dependence.

Value– API sector to grow to ₹1.82 trillion (\$22 bn).

Affordability & Access

PMBJP Scheme– 16,912 *Jan Aushadhi Kendras* (as of June 2025) provide generics at 80% lower prices than branded alternatives.

Oncology– The PMBJP basket has cut cancer treatment costs by ~70%, protecting patients from the global trend of rising therapy costs (\$8k–\$10k hikes in the U.S.).

Conclusion

The U.S. tariff shock of 2025 serves as a wake-up call for India's pharmaceutical sector. While the generics cushion prevents immediate collapse, long-term survival depends on three pillars– diversifying markets towards the Global South, reducing API dependence on China through PLI schemes, and strengthening domestic consumption via GST reforms. By balancing "Western innovation" with "Eastern scale," India can transition from being just a volume player to a resilient global pharma power.

Source– <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/the-us-tariff-shock-indias-pharma-future/article70457995.ece#~~~>

[text=U.S.%20tariffs%20risk%20causing%20shortages,and%20equitable%20access%20is%20key.](https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/the-us-tariff-shock-indias-pharma-future/article70457995.ece#~~~text=U.S.%20tariffs%20risk%20causing%20shortages,and%20equitable%20access%20is%20key.)

2. Tariffs Are Gone. Now, Let's Build on India-Australia Pact (IE)

General Studies 2– International Relation

Topic– Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

Introduction

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

The editorial highlights a significant milestone in India's trade diplomacy- the successful operationalization of the Australia-India Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (ECTA). With Australia eliminating all tariffs on Indian goods as of January 2026, the partnership has emerged as a beacon of stability amidst rising global trade protectionism. This agreement has not only accelerated bilateral trade and job creation but also cemented Australia's role as a key partner in India's energy transition and Indo-Pacific strategy.

1. Key Achievement- Complete Tariff Elimination

Zero Duty Access- From January 2026, 100% of Indian exports to Australia now enjoy zero-tariff access. This provides a massive competitive edge for Indian textiles, leather, gems, and jewellery in the Australian market.

Reciprocal Benefits- In return, India has strategically reduced or removed duties on key Australian commodities (like wines, almonds, and lentils), ensuring the deal is mutually beneficial without harming sensitive domestic sectors.

2. Surge in Bilateral Trade and Employment

Trade Volume- Bilateral trade has witnessed exponential growth, crossing AUD 50 billion, with two-way trade effectively doubling in just five years.

Outpacing Global Trends- Indian exports to Australia are growing at a rate significantly higher than India's overall global export growth. This indicates a high degree of "trade complementarity"—meaning Australia needs exactly what India sells, and vice versa.

Job Creation- The expansion in labor-intensive export sectors (like textiles) in India and service sectors in Australia has contributed to substantial employment generation in both nations.

3. Economic Complementarity & Strategic Synergy

The economies of the two nations are naturally compatible rather than competitive-

Australia's Role (Raw Materials)- It serves as a vital supplier of critical minerals (Lithium, Cobalt) and rare earths, which are indispensable for India's "Make in India" initiative, EV battery manufacturing, and renewable energy transition.

India's Role (Finished Goods)- India supplies high-quality manufactured goods, pharmaceuticals, and agricultural products that are in demand in Australian consumer markets.

4. Strategic Significance for India

Reliability in Uncertainty- At a time when Western markets are becoming protectionist and global supply chains are volatile, Australia offers a stable, predictable, and rule-based trade relationship.

Indo-Pacific Engagement- The economic pact deepens India's strategic footprint in the Indo-Pacific, complementing the **Quad** security dialogue.

Supply Chain Security- Access to Australian critical minerals allows India to diversify its supply chains, reducing strategic vulnerability and dependence on single-source countries (like China) for key inputs.

5. Future Outlook- Upgradation to CECA

Moving Beyond Goods- The partners are currently negotiating to upgrade the ECTA to a Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA).

Scope- CECA aims to expand cooperation into deeper areas such as

1. **Services-** Greater access for Indian IT and professional services.
2. **Investment-** Facilitating Australian pension funds to invest in Indian infrastructure.
3. **Digital Economy-** Collaboration on digital trade and standards.

6. Challenges and Concerns

MSME Competitiveness- There is a need to ensure that Indian Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) remain competitive despite the increased exposure to Australian imports.

Non-Tariff Barriers- Addressing sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) measures that often hinder agricultural exports.

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

Standards- Navigating strict environmental and labor standards that may be incorporated into the broader CECA framework.

Way Forward

Fast-Track CECA- Prioritize negotiations on services and technology transfer to unlock the full potential of the relationship.

Capacity Building- India must strengthen domestic manufacturing standards and skilling to fully utilize the duty-free access provided by Australia.

Leverage Critical Minerals- Actively pursue joint ventures for exploration and processing of critical minerals to secure India's green energy future.

People-to-People Ties- Enhance institutional cooperation in education and tourism to sustain the long-term momentum of the partnership.

Conclusion

The India–Australia ECTA stands as a model of how trusted partners can create mutually beneficial economic frameworks. In a volatile global environment, this partnership not only drives growth and jobs but also secures India's supply chains. Moving towards a full-fledged CECA will be the decisive next step in cementing India's economic and strategic interests in the Indo-Pacific region.

Source- <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/tariffs-are-gone-now-lets-build-on-india-australia-pact-10449172/>



Editorial of the Day – 02.01.2026

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1. The Water Divide- on Water Contamination, Piped Water Supply in India

2. Between India and EU, A Carbon Gap and an FTA Bridge

1. The Water Divide- on Water Contamination, Piped Water Supply in India

General Studies 2- Social Justice

Topic- Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

The Water Divide- Governance and Public Health Crisis

1. Introduction

Public health serves as a barometer for the State's commitment to its citizens, particularly the poor and vulnerable. While India has made strides in expanding access to water, recent tragedies highlight a critical gap between access and quality. The provision of piped water is meaningless if rigorous testing at the point of delivery is absent, turning an essential service into a potential public health hazard.

2. The Mandate of Public Health and Basic Needs

Defining Development- The true measure of public health is not aggregate data but the well-being of the most vulnerable sections of society.

Rights vs. Privileges- Essential services such as safe drinking water, healthcare, education, clean air, and infrastructure are basic human necessities, not privileges reserved for the few.

State Responsibility- Institutions are duty-bound to work proactively—not just reactively—to protect citizens' lives.

Current Status- Despite economic growth, India is falling short on these critical human development indicators, necessitating urgent institutional introspection.

3. Case Study- The Indore Tragedy (Administrative Failure)

The Incident- In Indore, Madhya Pradesh, the consumption of municipality-supplied contaminated water led to a severe health crisis.

1. **Casualties-** At least four deaths, including an infant.

2. **Morbidity-** Over 2,000 people fell ill, with 200+ hospitalized and 32 admitted to the ICU.

The Irony of Governance- The tragedy is particularly stark because Indore has been repeatedly ranked as India's cleanest city under the Swachh Survekshan surveys. This exposes a disconnect between surface-level cleanliness and deep-rooted infrastructural hygiene.

Accountability Deficit- The response has been characterized by post-crisis blame-shifting and the formation of committees, which are insufficient excuses for the failure to prevent a predictable disaster.

4. Systemic Lapses- Recurring Crisis in Madhya Pradesh

Pattern of Negligence- The Indore incident is not an isolated accident but the second major water related crisis in the state within two months, indicating systemic rot.

Previous Precedent- In November, a jaundice outbreak occurred at a Vellore Institute of Technology (VIT) campus near Bhopal due to contaminated water, leading to student protests.

Failure of Warning Systems- These repeated incidents highlight a lack of early detection mechanisms and public warning systems that could have prevented the loss of life.

5. Policy Gaps and Infrastructural Challenges

Mission vs. Reality- While flagship schemes like the Swachh Bharat Mission and Jal Jeevan Mission have improved coverage, water safety failures persist. Coverage targets are being met, but quality assurance is lagging.

Infrastructure Decay- The root causes of contamination are structural

1. Aging pipelines that have outlived their utility.
2. Sewage leaks infiltrating drinking water lines (cross-contamination).
3. Chemical contamination in groundwater sources.

Demographic Risk- With India's population nearing 147 crores, the supply of unsafe water is not just a local issue but a grave national health risk that can overburden the healthcare system.

6. The Way Forward

Quality over Quantity- Access to water must be legally coupled with assured quality. Testing must be rigorous at the **point of delivery**, not just at the treatment plant.

Infrastructure Overhaul- Immediate identification and replacement of old pipelines and sealing of sewage leaks are required.

Strict Enforcement- States must enforce strict water-quality norms with zero tolerance for negligence.

Proactive Governance- Implementation of early warning systems and regular public awareness campaigns regarding water safety.

7. Conclusion

The recurring water contamination crises in Madhya Pradesh serve as a grim reminder that public health goals cannot be met through accolades alone. Systemic reform, rather than post-disaster blame games, is the need of the hour. Ensuring safe drinking water through upgraded infrastructure and strict monitoring is non-negotiable to restore citizen trust and prevent further preventable deaths.

Source- <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/the-water-divide-on-water-contamination-m-piped-water-supply/article70460544.ece>

2. Between India and EU, A Carbon Gap and an FTA Bridge

General Studies 2- International Relation

Topic- Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

Carbon Trade Challenge- CBAM and India's Competitiveness

1. Introduction

The global trade landscape is undergoing a structural shift where carbon footprints are becoming a decisive factor in economic competitiveness. Effective from January 1, 2026, the European Union's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) has begun imposing taxes on imports based on their embedded carbon emissions. This move directly impacts Indian steel and aluminium exports, necessitating a dual strategy of domestic industrial adaptation and robust international diplomatic negotiation.

2. Understanding the Impact on Indian Exports

Economic Exposure- The EU is a critical market, absorbing approximately 22% of India's total steel and aluminium exports.

Immediate Trade Compression- Even prior to the full implementation of the tax, the transition phase (involving data reporting) led to a 24% decline in exports in FY2025. This indicates that compliance costs and administrative hurdles are already acting as non-tariff barriers.

Price and Margin Erosion

1. Coal-based steel production in India faces the highest financial burden.
2. Realised export prices could potentially drop by 16–22%.
3. Although the legal liability to pay CBAM lies with the EU importer, the cost is effectively passed back to Indian exporters through demands for lower supply prices to offset the tax.

3. Structural Challenges for Indian Industry

Absence of Carbon Credit Offset- India currently lacks a comprehensive national carbon tax or a mature emissions trading system. Consequently, Indian exporters cannot claim "credits" against taxes paid domestically, forcing them to pay the full levy to the EU.

Verification Hurdles- CBAM requires rigorous verification of both Scope 1 (direct emissions) and Scope 2 (indirect emissions from electricity used). Verification must be conducted by ISO 14065-accredited auditors, creating a bottleneck for Indian firms.

The "Default Value" Trap- If Indian exporters fail to provide verified, actual emission data, the EU applies default emission values. These defaults are often 30–80% higher than actual emissions, artificially inflating the tax burden and severely damaging competitiveness.

Technology Disadvantage- The mechanism inherently penalizes coal-intensive production. Competitiveness will now shift toward manufacturers using cleaner methods like Gas-based Direct Reduced Iron (DRI) or Electric Arc Furnaces.

4. The Geo-Economic Debate- Climate Action or Green Protectionism?

Equity Concerns (CBDR)- Applying the high carbon prices of rich nations to developing economies violates the principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR). It forces developing nations to pay for carbon constraints without having the financial or technological legacy of the West.

Protectionist Trends- Steel and aluminium are rapidly becoming the most "protected" sectors globally. Combined with high US tariffs (50%), CBAM acts as a tool for industrial protection under the guise of climate action. Revenue vs. Emissions Critics argue that CBAM generates revenue for the EU and slows industrial growth in the Global South, while having a minimal impact on reducing actual global emissions.

5. Strategic Role of India-EU Free Trade Agreement (FTA)

Negotiation Lever- The ongoing FTA talks offer a critical window for India to negotiate transitional relief or specific exemptions for MSMEs and developing sectors.

Mutual Recognition- A key goal for India is to secure mutual recognition of carbon accounting frameworks. If the EU accepts India's reporting standards, compliance costs would drop significantly.

Finance and Tech Transfer- Negotiations must extend beyond trade facilitation to include climate finance and the transfer of low-carbon technologies, balancing industrial needs with environmental goals.

6. The Way Forward

Accelerate Domestic Carbon Markets- India must fast-track the operationalization of the Indian Carbon Market (ICM) under the *Energy Conservation (Amendment) Act, 2022*. A domestic price on carbon allows funds to remain in India rather than being paid as tax to the EU.

Technological Upgrade- Incentivize the steel and aluminium sectors to shift toward cleaner production technologies (Green Hydrogen, renewable energy integration) to naturally lower the CBAM burden.

Strengthen MRV Systems- Robust Measurement, Reporting, and Verification (MRV) systems must be established to ensure Indian data is accepted globally, avoiding the punitive "default values."

Diplomatic Push- Use FTA forums to ensure fair treatment, arguing against the imposition of non-tariff barriers that disproportionately hurt developing economies.

7. Conclusion

The implementation of CBAM is a wake-up call that emission efficiency is now as vital as cost competitiveness. India cannot afford passivity; it must aggressively pursue domestic policy reforms to establish its own carbon market while engaging in proactive diplomacy to protect its export interests. Survival in high-value markets like the EU now depends on green transitions as much as economic efficiency.

Source- <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/between-india-and-eu-a-carbon-gap-and-an-fta-bridge-10450577/>

Editorial of the Day – 03.01.2026

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2. Energy transition will need more than chasing the sun and harnessing the wind (IE)

1. Unenviable choice- On the government's fiscal policy space (TH)

General Studies 3- Economy

Topic- Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.

Fiscal Dilemma- Balancing Growth-Oriented Capex and Fiscal Targets

1. Introduction

The latest economic data highlights a critical challenge for the Indian government in the fiscal year 2025-26- a constrained fiscal space amidst efforts to stimulate demand. While the government has implemented tax reductions (both GST and Income Tax) to ease economic pressures, these measures have weakened short-term revenue collections. Simultaneously, public expenditure obligations remain high, creating a growing tension between the need to support economic growth through Capital Expenditure (Capex) and the necessity of maintaining fiscal prudence.

2. Narrow Fiscal Space Exposed by GST Trends

Stagnant Revenue Growth- The GST revenue for December 2025 stood at ₹1.74 lakh crore, registering only a marginal rise over the previous month.

Limited Demand Revival- The lukewarm collections indicate that the recent GST rate reductions have not yet triggered a significant revival in consumption demand.

Shift in Consumer Behaviour- Rather than increasing immediate spending, consumers appear to be prioritizing savings and debt reduction. A similar trend was observed following the income-tax relief measures announced in Budget 2025, suggesting that tax cuts are being saved rather than spent.

3. Short-Term Pain from Tax Relaxations

Fiscal Cost of Policy Shifts- While the cuts in GST and income tax were welcomed as necessary policy interventions to support households, they have proven fiscally costly in the short run.

Revenue Contraction- Total tax revenue collections up to November 2025 stood at ₹13.9 lakh crore, which is 3.4% lower year-on-year.

Time Lag in Benefits- The revenue losses from these cuts are "front-loaded" (immediate), whereas the demand-side benefits (increased consumption driving future tax revenue) are likely to materialize only in the medium term.

4. Expenditure Pressures and Inflexibility

Surge in Capital Expenditure- The government has aggressively pushed for growth, with Capital Expenditure (Capex) rising sharply by 28% year-on-year to reach ₹6.58 lakh crore. This is vital for infrastructure and long-term asset creation.

Rigidity of Revenue Expenditure- While revenue expenditure grew at a slower pace (2.1%), it largely consists of non-discretionary items such as salaries, pensions, and interest payments.

Constraint- These expenditures are rigid and cannot be compressed indefinitely, severely constraining the government's fiscal manoeuvrability.

5. Emerging Fiscal Risks

Delayed Impact of New Levies- The newly announced excise duties, GST rates, and cesses on tobacco and pan masala will only come into effect from February 1, 2026. Consequently, the revenue benefits

from these measures will largely accrue in the *next* financial year, offering little relief for the current fiscal targets.

The Nominal GDP Trap

Low Inflation- The economy is witnessing very low wholesale inflation (average -0.08%).

Impact- This results in a lower Nominal GDP than what was budgeted. Since fiscal deficit is calculated as a percentage of Nominal GDP, a lower denominator mechanically inflates the fiscal deficit and debt-to-GDP ratios, even if borrowing remains constant.

6. The Unenviable Choice

The government faces a tough trade-off

Option A- Protect growth-supporting Capex to ensure long-term economic momentum, risking a breach of fiscal deficit targets.

Option B- Cut back on spending to meet fiscal targets, potentially stalling the economic recovery.

7. Conclusion

The government stands at a critical juncture, facing sluggish revenue growth, inflexible expenditures, and delayed benefits from revenue-augmenting measures. While sustaining capital expenditure is vital for long-term growth, doing so in the face of falling revenues risks fiscal slippage. The core challenge for the remainder of the financial year lies in balancing the imperative of fiscal discipline with the need to safeguard economic momentum in an uncertain environment.

Source- https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/unenviable-choice-on-the-governments-fiscal-policy-space/article70464114.ece#google_vignette

2. Energy transition will need more than chasing the sun and harnessing the wind (IE)

General Studies 3- Economy

Topic- Infrastructure- Energy

Power Sector Reforms- Shifting Focus from Generation to Systemic Optimisation

1. Introduction

India has achieved a significant milestone with solar and wind capacity crossing 180 GW and costs falling sharply. However, the energy transition has moved from a phase of generation constraints to systemic bottlenecks. The core challenge is no longer just adding capacity but addressing structural issues in distribution companies (discoms), tariff designs, and market mechanisms to prevent the renewable transition from becoming financially disruptive and operationally unstable.

2. The Distribution Sector- The Core Bottleneck

Central Role of Discoms- Discoms are the critical interface between power generation and end consumers. Their financial health dictates the pace of grid modernization.

Operational Inefficiencies

High AT&C Losses- Persistently high Aggregate Technical and Commercial (AT&C) losses (approx. 16%) indicate continued power theft, billing inefficiencies, and technical weaknesses.

Lack of Modernization- Financial stress prevents discoms from investing in necessary forecasting tools, balancing capacity, and grid upgrades.

Failure of Past Reforms- Schemes like UDAY and RDSS improved infrastructure and liquidity but failed to fix the fundamental incentive structures and tariff distortions.

3. Rising Renewable Penetration and System Stress

Intermittency Issues- The increasing share of solar and wind energy introduces variability and forecasting uncertainty into the grid.

Peak Demand Management- Misalignment between renewable output (e.g., solar peaks at noon) and consumption patterns leads to sharper, more expensive peak demand periods.

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

Incentive Mismatch- Discom incentives are currently focused on electricity sales volumes rather than reliability or flexibility, discouraging proactive renewable integration.

4. Cross-Subsidisation and Revenue Erosion

Structural Flaw- Tariffs rely heavily on cross-subsidisation, where Commercial and Industrial (C&I) consumers pay higher rates to subsidize households and agriculture.

The Vicious Cycle- High tariffs drive C&I consumers toward rooftop solar, energy efficiency measures, and open access.

Revenue Loss- The exit of these high-margin consumers erodes the discoms' revenue base while subsidy obligations remain constant.

Result- This forces tariffs higher for remaining users, prompting further exit and deeper financial stress.

5. Fixed Costs vs. Volumetric Tariffs

Cost Structure Mismatch- Discom costs are largely fixed (network O&M, long-term Power Purchase Agreements), but revenue is collected via volumetric tariffs (per unit sold).

Impact of Efficiency- Adoption of energy efficiency and behind-the-meter solar reduces sales volume (revenue) without reducing the discom's fixed costs.

Need for Reform- The absence of separate fixed charges distorts price signals. Demand response initiatives may lower peak demand but ironically reduce discom revenues before cost savings are realized.

6. Rooftop Solar and Net Metering Challenges

Hidden Costs- Net metering compensates exported solar power at retail tariffs, which include network and cross-subsidy components, effectively overpaying prosumers at the cost of the discom.

Backup Supplier Dilemma- Discoms act as "backup" providers during non-solar hours (evenings/nights) without adequate remuneration for this reliability service.

Financial Stress- Without tariff restructuring, increased rooftop solar adoption deepens discom financial distress rather than enabling decentralized energy.

7. Technological Solutions- Smart Meters & Automation

Smart Metering- The installation of nearly 49 million smart meters provides the foundation for granular consumption measurement and dynamic pricing.

Time-of-Day (ToD) Tariffs- A nationwide mandate for ToD tariffs is shifting the sector toward cost-reflective pricing.

Automated Demand Response (ADR)

Limitation of Price Signals- Manual demand shifting is unrealistic for households.

Automation- Smart appliances and EV chargers can shift load automatically without consumer intervention.

Benefit- ADR offers grid flexibility comparable to battery storage but at a significantly lower cost.

8. Wholesale Market Limitations and Reforms

Current Fragmentation- Despite a physically interconnected grid, markets are institutionally fragmented. Power exchanges handle only 7–9% of electricity, restricting true price discovery.

Self-Scheduling- Long-term PPAs encourage self-scheduling, preventing the "least-cost dispatch" of power and leading to the curtailment of cheaper renewable energy.

Solution - Market-Based Economic Dispatch (MBED)

Concept- Prioritizes the dispatch of the lowest-cost generation on a national level.

Economic Impact- The CERC estimates annual savings of \$1.6 billion from MBED implementation.

Efficiency- It improves liquidity and ensures zero-marginal-cost renewables are utilized effectively.

9. Redefining the Role of Discoms

Paradigm Shift- Discoms must evolve from passive bill collectors to active system managers.

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New Incentives- Regulatory frameworks should reward reliability, peak load management, and loss reduction rather than just sales volume.

Performance-Linked Regulation- Aligning discom interests with climate goals ensures that energy efficiency and distributed generation become assets rather than threats to their viability.

10. Conclusion

India's renewable energy journey has reached a critical juncture where system optimization outweighs capacity addition. Success depends on fixing distribution finances, modernizing tariff designs (to recover fixed costs), enabling automated demand response, and integrating wholesale markets. Without these structural reforms, the transition to clean energy risks being inefficient and financially unsustainable.

Source- <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/energy-transition-will-need-more-than-chasing-the-sun-and-harnessing-the-wind-10452456/>



Editorial of the Day – 05.01.2026

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1. High and dry– On gig workers, social security (TH)

2. Going forward, much depends on states' room for spending (IE)

1. High and dry– On gig workers, social security (TH)

General Studies 2– Social Justice

Topic– Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes.

High And Dry– Social Security for Gig Workers

1. Introduction

The gig economy in India is at a critical juncture where the rapid expansion of platform-based work has outpaced the legal frameworks designed to protect labour. The recent nationwide strike by gig workers served as a flashpoint, exposing the deep structural insecurity—or "precarity"—inherent in app-mediated labour. While the government has signaled an intent to provide social security through new draft Labour Rules, the current framework risks offering merely formal recognition without addressing the root causes of vulnerability. The challenge lies in moving beyond the "intent" of the law to ensuring social security is genuinely accessible, reliable, and secure in practice.

2. Context of the Strike and Policy Backdrop

Magnitude of Unrest– The fragility of the sector was highlighted on December 31, when nearly one lakh gig workers went on a nationwide strike. This mass mobilization underscored that the precarity in the sector is deepening, not improving.

Power Asymmetry– The power imbalance between platforms and workers was starkly illustrated by a platform CEO publicly praising police intervention against striking workers, signaling a refusal to engage with worker grievances democratically.

Policy Anxiety– The protest was not just about immediate wages but coincided with the release of the draft Labour Rules. Instead of alleviating fears, the release sharpened workers' anxieties about their future legal standing.

Selective Inclusion– A critical grievance is the selective nature of the new legal framework. While gig workers are included under the ambit of "social security," they remain explicitly excluded from protections regarding "wages" and "working conditions," leaving them vulnerable to exploitation.

3. Limits of the Current Labour Code Framework

Exclusion from Wage Code– The Code on Wages does not recognize the gig worker-platform relationship as a formal "employment" relationship. Consequently, gig workers are denied basic statutory protections like minimum wage or overtime pay.

Superficial Contribution Model– Platforms are only mandated to make a "gross contribution" (1-2% of turnover) to a social security fund. This acts as a generic welfare cess rather than a defined benefit contribution linked to individual workers.

Algorithmic opacity– The core operational grievances of workers—such as arbitrary algorithmic pay cuts, opaque incentive structures, and dynamic pricing—remain completely unregulated and untouched by the new codes.

Mismatch of OSH&WC Rules– The Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions (OSH&WC) Rules are designed around traditional, physical workspaces (factories/offices). They rely on the "Shram Suvidha Portal," which fails to capture the dispersed, digital, and mobile reality of app-based work.

4. Flaws in Social Security Eligibility Design

Registration Hurdles- The onus is placed on workers to register on a government portal to claim benefits. Meanwhile, aggregators (platforms) are only required to upload worker data quarterly. This lag creates a data mismatch that can delay or deny claims.

Arbitrary Eligibility Thresholds- To be eligible for social security, a worker must have worked for 90 days with a single aggregator or 120 cumulative days across multiple platforms. This "time-based" threshold ignores the nature of gig work, which is often task-based rather than time-based.

Illusion of Flexibility- While the rules allow for "multi-platform work" to accelerate eligibility (reaching the 120-day mark faster), this does not empower the worker. It effectively locks them into a cycle of continuous work without limiting the platform's control over work allocation.

Penalizing Vulnerability- The fixed time windows for eligibility are rigid. They risk penalizing workers who take breaks due to illness, caregiving duties (disproportionately affecting women), or simple market demand slumps. A worker who falls sick and misses the 90-day target could lose social security access entirely.

5. Need for Redesign to Ensure Real Security

From Promise to Practice- Social security must be designed to be accessible in reality, not just on paper. The current "intent" is insufficient if the administrative barriers (portals, thresholds) prevent access.

Protection During Downturns- Eligibility criteria must be redesigned to protect, rather than exclude, workers during periods of maternity, illness, or economic downturns (when demand for rides/deliveries drops).

Defined Benefits & Guarantees- The rules must move beyond vague "funds" and clearly define specific benefit entitlements (health, pension, insurance). Minimum fund guarantees (what happens if the fund runs dry?). Robust dispute resolution mechanisms for when claims are rejected.

Data Transparency & Rights- Workers must receive periodic, transparent work statements from platforms. Crucially, they must have the legal right to contest faulty data uploaded by aggregators, ensuring they aren't denied benefits due to clerical errors or platform malice.

6. Conclusion

The current draft Rules, if implemented without change, threaten to institutionalize precarity rather than resolve it. By offering social security that is hard to access while denying wage protection, the state legitimizes the gig model without fixing its exploitative elements. To restore worker trust and prevent further unrest, the government must ensure accessible social security, clear entitlements, and aggregator accountability. Without safeguards for care work, illness, and demand shocks, the reforms will remain "high and dry," failing to protect the very workforce they aim to serve.

Source- <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/high-and-dry-on-gig-workers-social-security/article70470838.ece>

2. Going forward, much depends on states' room for spending (IE)

General Studies 3- Governance

Topic- Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Education, Human Resources.

State Spending Capacity- Balancing Welfare and Growth

1. Introduction

In recent years, India has witnessed a debate regarding the fiscal health of states, specifically concerning the breach of the 3% fiscal deficit limit and the potential "crowding out" of capital expenditure by populist welfare schemes. The editorial clarifies that the increased fiscal deficits were not

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a result of fiscal indiscipline but were enabled by deliberate policy interventions—specifically, enhanced borrowing flexibility and Centre-supported loans. The data indicates that despite rising social welfare costs, states have managed to keep capital expenditure resilient, supported by structural reforms and central assistance.

2. Borrowing Flexibility and Higher Fiscal Deficits

Policy-Driven Expansion- The breach of the traditional fiscal deficit limit (3% of GSDP) by several states was a permitted policy response, not an anomaly.

Relaxed Limits- For the period FY2021–FY2025, states were authorized to borrow beyond the base limit of 3–4% of GSDP.

Crisis Response- Additional borrowing space of 0.5–1.1% of GSDP was specifically granted to support economic recovery during periods of stress (post-pandemic).

Conclusion- The higher deficit numbers reflect utilized flexibility rather than fiscal mismanagement.

3. Role of Central Loans in Expanding Fiscal Space

GST Compensation Loans- To bridge the revenue shortfall caused by the pandemic and GST implementation issues, the Centre extended back-to-back loans worth ₹2.6 trillion to states during FY2021–FY2022.

Special Capex Assistance- The Centre introduced a "Scheme for Special Assistance to States for Capital Investment," providing 50-year interest-free loans.

Scale- States received ₹3.7 trillion under this window during FY2021–FY2025.

Impact- These loans were over and above normal borrowing limits, directly boosting the funds available for infrastructure without adding to the immediate interest burden.

4. Reform-Linked Borrowings and Incentives

Incentivizing Reforms- The Centre linked additional borrowing permissions to the successful completion of specific structural reforms (e.g., One Nation One Ration Card, Ease of Doing Business).

Quantifiable Impact- Total reform-linked borrowings amounted to ₹1.1 trillion (FY2021–FY2025).

Power Sector Focus- Specific reforms in the power sector allowed states to borrow an additional ₹1.3 trillion, linking fiscal leeway to the financial turnaround of DISCOMs.

5. Carry-Forward of Unutilized Borrowings

Smoothing Spending- Recognizing that capital projects have long gestation periods, states were allowed to carry forward unutilized borrowing limits from FY2021 to FY2022.

15th Finance Commission Support- The Commission permitted the carry-forward of borrowing space within its award period. This prevented a "use it or lose it" rush and allowed states to sustain spending even during fragile recovery phases.

6. Welfare Spending vs. Revenue Deficit Management

Surge in Welfare Costs- There has been a significant rise in cash transfer schemes, particularly targeting women.

Data Point- Cash transfers to women across 11 states skyrocketed from ₹120 billion (FY2023) to an estimated ₹1.5 trillion (FY2026).

Fiscal Prudence- Despite this massive increase in welfare bills, revenue deficits widened only marginally.

Balancing Act- States managed this by rationalizing older, less efficient schemes and adjusting spending under other heads, indicating a degree of fiscal prioritization.

7. Resilience of Capital Expenditure (Capex)

Myth of Crowding Out- Contrary to the fear that "freebies" (welfare) would eat into infrastructure funds, capital expenditure has remained robust.

Strong Growth- The combined capital expenditure and loans by states grew at a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 18.5%.

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Doubling of Assets- In absolute terms, capital spending by 28 states doubled to ₹8.4 trillion during the FY2021–FY2025 period, proving that welfare and growth-oriented spending co-existed.

8. Future Fiscal Space and the 16th Finance Commission

Critical Dependencies- The sustainability of this high-spending model is uncertain and depends on the 16th Finance Commission.

Key Determiners- Future state capex will be dictated by Vertical devolution (tax sharing ratio). New borrowing limits set for the next cycle. Decisions on whether to continue the "interest-free capex loan" scheme.

Risk- If borrowing flexibility is withdrawn without a corresponding increase in revenue share, states may be forced to cut back on capital expenditure to maintain welfare schemes.

9. Conclusion

The fiscal expansion seen in Indian states over the last five years was an "exceptional" phase driven by central hand-holding and relaxed norms. States successfully utilized this space to balance rising welfare demands with record capital investment. However, as these emergency measures wind down, the 16th Finance Commission bears the responsibility of designing a framework that prevents a hard landing, ensuring states do not have to choose between social security and economic growth.

Source- <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/going-forward-much-depends-on-states-room-for-spending-10455496/>



Editorial of the Day – 06.01.2026

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1. The Parallel Track that Keeps U.S.-India Ties Going (TH)

2. Supreme Court's bail order in Delhi riots case raises deep concerns (IE)

1. The Parallel Track that Keeps U.S.-India Ties Going (TH)

General Studies 2- International Relation

Topic- Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

The Parallel Track of India-U.S. Relations (2025-2026)

1. Introduction

In the landscape of 2025-2026, India-U.S. relations are defined by a distinct "dual-track dynamic." While high-level political engagements face headwinds due to trade frictions and geopolitical shifts, the institutional relationship—specifically in defence, technology, and bureaucratic cooperation—continues to deepen. This structural resilience ensures that strategic partnership survives leadership-level volatility.

2. Current Political and Economic Frictions

The political track faces significant strain, characterized by muted high-level engagement and economic divergence.

Summit Deferment- The Quad Leaders' Summit, scheduled to be hosted by India, was postponed amidst opaque communication, signaling underlying bilateral tension.

Trade Wars & Tariffs- Relations have worsened due to a U.S. tariff regime on Indian goods. Specific economic pressures are linked to India's continued purchase of Russian crude oil.

Result- India's exports to the U.S. saw a sharp drop in 2025.

Geopolitical Realignment Concerns

New Delhi's Fear- A perceived U.S.-China "G-2" style rapprochement.

U.S.-Pakistan Thaw- Washington has improved ties with Pakistan. Islamabad is offering port access and critical mineral shipments to American firms to serve U.S. geopolitical imperatives.

Different Standards- China and Pakistan are seemingly benefiting from lower tariffs compared to India.

3. Institutional Resilience- The Quad

Despite the postponement of the Leaders' Summit, the functional aspect of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) remains active and robust.

Ministerial Continuity- The Quad Foreign Ministers' Meeting (Washington, July 2025) successfully launched initiatives in maritime security and critical technologies.

Operational Momentum- The Quad Counterterrorism Working Group met in December 2025, proving that the grouping's relevance extends beyond "political optics" to ground-level security operations.

Regional Infrastructure

Quad Ports of the Future Conference- Held during India Maritime Week 2025 in Mumbai.

Focus- Convened 24 Indo-Pacific partners to discuss quality infrastructure and regional connectivity, marking infrastructure as a new pillar of cooperation.

4. Defence & Technology- The Core Pillars

Defence cooperation acts as the "backbone" of the relationship, insulating ties from political shocks.

New Strategic Frameworks

10-Year Defence Framework Agreement (Oct 2025)- Signed by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and U.S. Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth. It focuses on information sharing, technological collaboration, and regional deterrence.

SOSA (2024)- The signing of the Security of Supply Arrangement strengthened defence industrial resilience between the two nations.

Foundational Agreements (The History)– The current resilience is built on past agreements like LEMOA (2016), COMCASA (2018), and BECA (2020) which enable logistics, secure comms, and geospatial data sharing.

Industrial Integration

Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) & GE Deal– A billion-dollar deal signed in Nov 2025 for fighter jet engines signifies deep industrial integration.

Space Cooperation

NISAR Launch– The NASA–ISRO Synthetic Aperture Radar satellite (July 2025) is now aiding in disaster management and agriculture planning.

Military Exercises– Continued regularity of exercises like Yudh Abhyas, Tiger Claw, and Malabar ensures interoperability.

5. Challenges and Way Forward

While the "parallel track" works, reliance solely on defence institutions has limitations.

Existing Constraints– Domestic regulatory hurdles in both nations. Technology interoperability concerns. Analysts warn that full momentum is hard to restore if trade disputes remain unresolved.

The Need for "Institutional Literacy"– Looking toward 2026, there is a need to understand the decision-making cultures (structures and processes) of the partner country. This literacy must expand beyond defence into civilian and non-traditional sectors.

Conclusion

The partnership survives because institutional mechanisms (bureaucracy, military) keep the dialogue alive even when political leaders pause. To future-proof the ties, this cooperation must broaden into the civilian domain to withstand political downturns.

Source– <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/the-parallel-track-that-keeps-us-india-ties-going/article70474887.ece>

2. Supreme Court's bail order in Delhi riots case raises deep concerns (IE)

General Studies 2– Polity & Governance

Topic– Structure, organization and functioning of the Executive and the Judiciary.

Bail, Dissent, and the UAPA – The Supreme Court's 2026 Ruling

1. Introduction

The Supreme Court's recent decision to deny bail to Umar Khalid and Sharjeel Imam in the Delhi riots case—over five years after their arrest—has reignited the debate on civil liberties in India. The judgment highlights the friction between the constitutional norm that "bail is the rule, jail is the exception" and the stringent provisions of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA). While five co-accused were granted bail, the continued detention of Khalid and Imam based on their "central role" raises critical questions regarding evidentiary reasoning, judicial overreach, and the criminalisation of democratic dissent.

2. Legal & Constitutional Concerns regarding Bail under UAPA

The judgment reflects the systemic difficulties accused persons face when charged under anti-terror laws.

High Threshold for Bail– The UAPA mandates a rigorous standard for granting bail, making courts historically reluctant to provide relief in terror-related cases. The burden often shifts to the accused to prove innocence at a preliminary stage.

"Substantial" vs. "Impermissible" Detention– The Supreme Court acknowledged that the pre-trial incarceration of over five years was "substantial." However, it ruled that this duration did not yet cross the threshold of "constitutional impermissibility," leaving the definition of "too long" dangerously vague.

Arbitrary Re-application Clauses– The provision allowing the accused to re-apply for bail after one year suggests an arbitrary judicial threshold rather than one based on substantive change in circumstances or evidence.

Hierarchy of Participation- The Court justified the differential treatment (granting bail to some but not others) based on a "hierarchy of participation." Critics argue this effectively acts as a mini-trial, judging the accused's guilt at the bail stage itself, bypassing due process.

3. Expansion of "Terrorist Acts" & Criminalisation of Dissent

The interpretation of what constitutes terrorism under the UAPA is expanding, potentially encompassing standard forms of protest.

Broad Interpretation of Section 15- The prosecution has utilized the phrase "any other means" within Section 15 of the UAPA to widen the definition of terrorist acts.

Blurring Lines- Activities such as non-violent protests, organizing roadblocks (chakka jams), or coordinating via WhatsApp groups are being categorized as terrorism.

Stifling Democracy- The Supreme Court's implicit acceptance of these broad definitions' risks creating a chilling effect, where legitimate democratic dissent is equated with threats to national security.

4. Judicial Overreach and Evidence Assessment

The manner in which the Court evaluated the bail plea raises concerns about the separation of pre-trial evaluation and actual trial adjudication.

Depth of Participation Analysis- The Court engaged in a deep dive into the "depth of participation" of the accused. By doing so without a full trial, it risks giving the prosecution the "benefit of the doubt" rather than the accused.

Pre-judging the Case- This approach blurs the critical line between a prima facie evaluation (standard for bail) and a final adjudication of guilt (standard for conviction).

Need for Restraint- The text highlights a need for greater judicial restraint, particularly when dealing with special laws that allow for the serious deprivation of liberty based on untested evidence.

5. Implications for Democracy and Legal Precedent

The ruling sets a significant precedent for how the state handles political activism and dissent.

Erosion of Presumption of Innocence- Prolonged pre-trial incarceration effectively punishes the individual before conviction, undermining the foundational legal principle that an accused is innocent until proven guilty.

Chilling Effect- The loose framing and application of UAPA provisions serve to deter public participation in protests, as citizens may fear draconian repercussions for political expression.

Future Precedents- This judgment establishes a benchmark for future cases involving dissenters, protesters, and political activists, potentially lowering the bar for the state to deny bail in politically sensitive cases.

6. Conclusion

The Supreme Court's order underscores the delicate and often contentious balance between safeguarding national security and upholding civil liberties. While the Court has affirmed its authority to interpret the law, its reasoning exposes the tension between state interests and democratic freedoms. Moving forward, there is an urgent need for

1. **Judicial Vigilance-** To ensure "process does not become the punishment."
2. **Legislative Clarity-** To narrow the definitions within UAPA to prevent misuse.
3. **Timely Trials-** To prevent the erosion of constitutional rights through indefinite pre-trial detention.

Source- <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/editorials/supreme-courts-bail-order-in-delhi-riots-case-raises-deep-concerns-10457254/>

Editorial of the Day – 07.01.2026**Index****1. At a crossroads– On Iran's unrest, its re-engagement with the world****2. CBAM is a trade barrier. Government must lend exporters a hand****1. At a crossroads– On Iran's unrest, its re-engagement with the world****General Studies 2– International Relation****Topic–** Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.**Crisis in Iran– At A Crossroads****1. Introduction**

Iran is currently navigating a critical period defined by a convergence of economic distress, political rigidity, and external geopolitical pressure. What began as a localized strike has rapidly metamorphosed into nationwide unrest, arguably the most significant since the 2022–23 protests. The situation highlights the urgent need for the Islamic Republic to undertake structural reforms and renew engagement with the international community to prevent a total collapse of state legitimacy.

2. The Trigger and Spread of Unrest

The current wave of instability was not spontaneous but the result of accumulating grievances.

The Spark (Dec 28)– The unrest began with a strike by shopkeepers in Tehran, specifically protesting the catastrophic devaluation of the Iranian rial.

Rapid Escalation– The initial economic strike quickly snowballed into broad, nationwide protests. The scale is now comparable to the unrest following the custodial death of Mahsa Amini in 2022.

State Response

Carrot– The government offered assurances to address the specific economic grievances of traders.

Stick– Simultaneously, security forces issued warnings of harsh crackdowns against "rioters."

Human Toll– Reports indicate at least 12 deaths occurred within the first week as the protests spread beyond Tehran.

3. The Geopolitical Backdrop

The timing and external perceptions of the protests have heightened the regime's anxiety.

Post-War Vulnerability– The unrest erupted just six months after a 12-day conflict with Israel, leaving the state apparatus fatigued and sensitive.

Foreign Involvement Narratives

Mossad Claims– On December 29, Israel's Mossad claimed its operatives were "in the field" alongside protesters, fueling regime paranoia.

US Rhetoric– On January 2, Donald Trump warned that the U.S. was "locked and loaded" if protesters were killed, adding external pressure.

Regime Perception– The Iranian leadership views the protests not merely as economic dissent but as a hybrid threat—economic grievances weaponized by external enemies to foster instability.

4. Economic Crisis at the Core

The primary driver of public anger is a debilitating economic collapse, evidenced by alarming macroeconomic indicators.

Inflation Shock– Food inflation hit 64% in October, ranking as the second-highest globally. This has caused severe cost-of-living stress for the average citizen.

Currency Collapse– The Rial has lost approximately 60% of its value since the war in June, obliterating savings and making imports prohibitively expensive.

Energy Insecurity– The country faces daily electricity outages, disrupting both industrial output and household life.

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Declining Revenue- Oil exports are projected to decline by ~7% in 2025 compared to the 2024 average, further shrinking state coffers.

Official Helplessness- Highlighting the severity, President Masoud Pezeshkian publicly admitted the government was "stuck" and could not perform "miracles."

Key Economic Indicator	Status	Implication
Food Inflation	64%	Severe cost-of-living stress
Rial Value	-60% (since June)	Loss of savings, import shock
Oil Exports	-7% (2025)	Reduced state revenues
Electricity	Daily Outages	Industrial & household disruption

5. Governance Constraints and the "Repression Loop"

The state finds itself in a cycle of diminishing returns regarding its governance strategy.

Contradictory Policies- While there has been some "social easing" regarding the enforcement of morality police mandates, the "hard limits" on economic policy and national security remain rigid.

The Repression Loop

1. Economic Decline triggers public anger.
2. External Threats (real or perceived) cause the regime to increase repression.
3. Increased Repression fails to solve the root cause, leading to a deeper crisis and further alienation.

6. The Role of External Pressure

Western policies play a significant role in exacerbating the internal situation.

Washington's Strategy- The current U.S. approach relies on an "economic squeeze" combined with military threats.

Domestic Impact- This strategy primarily hurts ordinary Iranians while making the regime more paranoid and insular.

Proposed Alternative- Analysts suggest a policy of engagement that empowers President Pezeshkian to pursue reforms, rather than escalating threats on Israel's behalf, which only bolsters hardliners.

7. The Old Narrative is Failing

The regime's traditional tools for maintaining control are losing efficacy.

Blame Game vs. Reality- The default state narrative attributes all crises to "foreign conspiracies." However, the public increasingly sees the crisis as a structural reality of shrinking opportunities and eroded freedoms.

Societal Shift- The traditional pillars of state legitimacy—Religion and Nationalism—are no longer sufficient to offset the despair caused by economic ruin.

8. The Way Forward (Reforms Needed)

To ensure stability, Iran must pivot from its current trajectory.

Structural Reforms- Initiate genuine economic and political reforms rather than cosmetic changes.

Tackle Corruption- Address systemic corruption that drains state resources.

Restore Opportunity- Create pathways for economic recovery to appease the disillusioned youth and trading class.

Re-engagement- Move away from isolation and re-engage with the international community to lift the burden of sanctions.

Acknowledgment- The state must acknowledge public anger as a result of internal mismanagement, not just external interference.

9. Conclusion

The protests in Iran are a symptom of a deep-seated structural crisis rooted in economic mismanagement, shrinking freedoms, and public disenchantment. While external actors may exploit the situation, the root causes are domestic. Without meaningful reforms and a shift away from reliance on repression, the Islamic Republic risks recurring instability and a potentially irreversible erosion of state legitimacy.

2. CBAM is a trade barrier. Government must lend exporters a hand

General Studies 2- Environment

Topic- Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora.

Carbon-Linked Trade- Challenges & Opportunities (CBAM)

1. Introduction

Global trade dynamics are undergoing a structural shift where climate policy is increasingly determining market access. The European Union's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) represents a watershed moment where "carbon intensity" becomes a key metric of trade competitiveness. Scheduled for full implementation in 2026, this policy forces Indian exporters—particularly in steel and aluminium—to grapple with carbon-linked levies that could raise costs by 16–22%. While framed as a climate mitigation tool, CBAM poses significant risks to developing economies like India that rely on cost-efficient, albeit carbon-intensive, production methods.

2. Understanding the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM)

The Mechanism- CBAM imposes a carbon price on imports entering the EU, equivalent to the carbon price paid by domestic EU producers under the EU Emissions Trading System (ETS).

Sectoral Coverage- Initially targets high-carbon sectors- Steel, Aluminium, Cement, Fertilisers, Electricity, and Hydrogen.

Future Scope- There is a high probability of expanding to other sectors, fundamentally altering global trade norms and compliance requirements.

3. Impact on Indian Export Competitiveness

High Exposure- The EU is a critical market, absorbing nearly 22% of India's steel and aluminium exports.

Erosion of Edge- The imposition of carbon levies will significantly increase compliance costs, eroding profit margins.

Market Displacement- Indian exporters risk losing market share to competitors from economies with cleaner production baselines or those with pre-existing trade preferences with the EU.

4. Equity Concerns and Climate Justice

Violation of CBDR- CBAM effectively applies developed-world carbon standards to developing economies. This conflicts with the foundational UNFCCC principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR), which argues that developed nations should shoulder a larger burden of climate action.

Disproportionate Impact- Data from UNCTAD suggests that while CBAM may reduce global emissions by a negligible 0.1%, it will disproportionately penalize exports from the developing world, raising questions about its true efficacy versus its economic harm.

5. Trade Protectionism vs. Climate Action

Green Protectionism- Steel and aluminium are already among the most heavily protected sectors globally via tariffs and non-tariff barriers.

Cost Shifting- Critics argue CBAM functions as a "green trade barrier," effectively shielding EU industries from external competition while shifting the cost of climate adjustment onto the Global South.

6. Expanding Global Precedent

The Domino Effect- The UK has proposed a similar mechanism, indicating that carbon-linked trade measures are becoming a global norm rather than an EU-specific policy.

Uncertainty- This creates long-term unpredictability for Indian exporters, who must now prepare for a global trade environment where carbon metrics are as important as price and quality.

7. Domestic Industrial and Technological Constraints

Energy Mix- Indian manufacturing relies heavily on coal-based energy, making the carbon footprint of exports naturally higher than European counterparts.

Capital Intensity- Rapid decarbonization requires massive capital investment and technology upgrades.

Barriers- A lack of access to affordable green finance and restricted technology transfer from developed nations constrains the ability of Indian industries to comply swiftly.

8. The Way Forward (Strategic Response)

Strategic Trade Negotiations

FTA Leverage- Use ongoing India-EU Free Trade Agreement (FTA) negotiations to seek sector-specific carve-outs, extended transition periods, or mutual recognition of carbon certificates.

Diplomatic Pressure- Emphasize climate equity and the developmental impact of such unilateral measures in diplomatic dialogues.

Accelerating Green Industrial Transition

Incentivization- Provide targeted incentives for adopting energy-efficient furnaces, green hydrogen in steelmaking, and low-carbon aluminium smelting.

Policy Alignment- Align domestic industrial policies (like PLI schemes) with India's Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) to bolster credibility.

Carbon Accounting and Standards

Robust MRV- Develop a rigorous domestic system for Measurement, Reporting, and Verification (MRV) of carbon emissions.

Harmonization- Ensure domestic carbon standards are harmonized with global norms to reduce "information asymmetries" and compliance friction for exporters.

Financial and Policy Support

Green Finance- Operationalize "Viability Gap Funding" and concessional green credits to help industries upgrade technology.

MSME Support- Create special support structures for MSMEs within export supply chains, as they are most vulnerable to compliance costs.

Multilateral Engagement

Global Forums- Challenge CBAM at the WTO and UN Climate Change Conferences, arguing for rules that balance trade facilitation with sustainability.

Coalition Building- Form negotiating blocs with other affected developing nations (e.g., BRICS, Global South) to strengthen leverage against unilateral green trade barriers.

9. Conclusion

CBAM signals an irreversible structural shift where international trade and climate policy are becoming inextricably linked. While global decarbonization is imperative, the economic burden must not be unfairly transferred to developing nations. For India, the path ahead requires a calibrated strategy—protecting current export competitiveness through diplomacy and negotiation, while simultaneously accelerating a credible domestic green transition to future-proof its economy.

Source- <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/editorials/cbam-is-a-trade-barrier-government-must-lend-exporters-a-hand-10459121/>

Editorial of the Day – 08.01.2026

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2. Supreme Court reproach should be a wake-up call for pollution watchdog (IE)

1. Letter against the spirit- On the Election Commission, barring foreigners (TH)

General Studies 2- Constitution / Governance

Topic- Appointment to various Constitutional posts, powers, functions and responsibilities of various Constitutional Bodies.

Letter Against the Spirit- ECI's Electoral Roll Revision

1. Introduction

The Election Commission of India (ECI) is constitutionally mandated to superintend, direct, and control elections, a core component of which is maintaining accurate electoral rolls. Recently, the debate surrounding the ECI's Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls has intensified. While the objective of ensuring only Indian citizens vote is undisputed, the methodology employed has raised fundamental questions regarding constitutional duty, democratic fairness, and the protection of genuine citizens' rights against administrative overreach.

2. ECI's Stance Before the Supreme Court

The Commission has taken a rigid legal position to justify its actions.

Constitutional Mandate- In its submission on January 6, the ECI asserted its non-negotiable constitutional responsibility to ensure electoral rolls contain *only* Indian citizens.

Zero Tolerance- The Commission explicitly stated that "not even a single foreigner" can be permitted on the voter list.

Defense of SIR- This argument was the primary defense for the ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR), which has resulted in the deletion of millions of names from voter lists across various states.

3. Concerns of Civil Society and Opposition

The criticism is not against the removal of ineligible voters but against the collateral damage to eligible citizens.

Burden of Proof- There is deep concern over the onus being shifted onto ordinary citizens to repeatedly prove their identity and citizenship, causing harassment and inconvenience.

Faulty Rolls- All stakeholders agree that current electoral rolls are faulty and difficult to navigate.

Consensus on Foreigners- Notably, no political party or civil society group has argued for the inclusion of foreigners. The contention is strictly about the *process* of removal and its impact on genuine Indian voters.

4. The Core Conflict- Constitutional Duty vs. Procedural Fairness

The heart of the controversy is a conflict between the *objective* (clean rolls) and the *process* (mass deletions).

Institutional Legacy- Historically, the ECI has built credibility by expanding the "right to vote" as a substantive democratic right, ensuring no eligible citizen is left behind.

Current Risk- The present approach risks reversing this legacy by treating the right to vote as a mere administrative formality that can be stripped away through bureaucratic procedures.

5. Democratic and Ethical Implications

Inversion of Justice- The process appears to violate the principle that "no innocent individual should suffer in the pursuit of wrongdoers."

Distraction and Polarization- An excessive, almost singular focus on the "fear of foreigners" Distracts from other genuine threats to electoral integrity (e.g., money power, criminalization). Potentially fuels political polarization by creating a narrative of "infiltration."

6. Constitutional Authority and Public Trust

Article 324- While Article 324 indisputably grants the ECI independent control over electoral rolls, the exercise of this power is under scrutiny.

Question of Impartiality- The key concern is whether this power is being exercised independently and impartially, or if the ECI is aligning too closely with executive narratives.

Litmus Test- A fair electoral process is defined by the trust of the losers. If the losing side (or the electorate) loses faith in the neutrality of the umpire (ECI), the democratic mandate is weakened.

7. The Unique Responsibility of the ECI

Primary Mandate- While multiple agencies (police, border forces) are tasked with identifying illegal foreigners, **only the ECI** has the specific constitutional duty to enroll every eligible Indian citizen.

Misalignment of Priorities- By prioritizing the *exclusion of foreigners* over the *inclusion of citizens*, the ECI appears to be misaligning its priorities.

Credibility Crisis- Recent rule changes and their selective application have led to accusations that the ECI is diluting its sacred constitutional role.

8. Conclusion

The Election Commission stands at a critical juncture. In its zeal to exclude foreigners, it must not forget its primary mandate- ensuring that no eligible Indian citizen is denied the right to vote. Democracy relies on public trust, which is sustained by fair, humane, and transparent procedures. The ECI must ensure its "intensive revisions" do not become tools of exclusion that impose avoidable hardship on the very citizens it is meant to serve.

Source- <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/letter-against-the-spirit-on-the-election-commission-barring-foreigners/article70483028.ece>

2. Supreme Court reproach should be a wake-up call for pollution watchdog (IE)

General Studies 3- Environment

Topic- Environmental pollution and degradation; Conservation.

Supreme Court's Reprimand- A Wake-Up Call for Air Pollution Governance

1. Introduction

The Supreme Court of India has issued a stern reprimand to air pollution regulatory authorities, specifically targeting the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM). The Court highlighted a fundamental failure in diagnosing and addressing the chronic air pollution crisis in Delhi-NCR. By noting that pollution levels remain dangerously high even outside the peak winter months, the judiciary has flagged deep-seated governance deficits, moving the discourse beyond seasonal blame games to structural institutional failures.

2. Background- The Context of the Crisis

Chronic Hazard- Delhi-NCR faces hazardous air quality annually, with the situation becoming catastrophic during winter.

Ineffective Band-Aids- Temporary, reactive measures like the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP), odd-even vehicle rationing, and construction bans have proven insufficient.

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Health & Economy– The situation has evolved from an environmental issue to a public health emergency, causing respiratory diseases, reducing life expectancy, and inflicting massive economic losses through healthcare costs and lost productivity.

3. Key Arguments & Analysis

The "Year-Round" Reality

Beyond Seasonality– The Court emphasized that pollution is not merely a winter phenomenon triggered by stubble burning.

Continuous Sources– Persistent contributors include vehicular emissions, industrial discharge, road dust, construction activities, and waste burning, which degrade air quality throughout the year.

Institutional Failure of Watchdogs (CAQM)

Mandate vs. Reality– The CAQM was established specifically to ensure coordinated regional action across states (Delhi, Punjab, Haryana, UP, Rajasthan).

Judicial Rebuke– The Supreme Court's criticism points to weak enforcement, poor diagnostic capabilities, and a distinct lack of accountability within the body. It has failed to act as a cohesive regional regulator.

The Trap of Emergency Responses

Reactive Approach– Authorities largely rely on emergency measures during peak pollution episodes rather than tackling root causes.

Policy Credibility– The absence of long-term, consistent planning undermines public trust and policy credibility.

Public Health– A Silent Emergency

Health Impact– Pollution is directly linked to respiratory illnesses, cardiovascular diseases, and stunted cognitive development in children.

Constitutional Violation– The crisis violates Article 21 (Right to Life) of the Constitution. The Supreme Court effectively linked the right to a clean environment with the fundamental right to life.

Governance and Federalism Challenges

Trans-boundary Issue– Air sheds do not respect administrative boundaries, necessitating cooperative federalism.

Blame Game– Political blame-shifting between state governments undermines collective action.

Lack of Binding Mechanisms– The absence of strictly enforced, binding coordination mechanisms allows states to evade responsibility.

Urbanization and Planning Failures

1. **Unchecked Expansion**– Rapid urban growth lacks necessary environmental safeguards.
2. **Infrastructure Deficits**– Inadequate public transport leads to rising private vehicle ownership.
3. **Systemic Issues**– Shrinking green spaces, poor waste management, and weak enforcement of construction norms contribute significantly to particulate matter (PM) load.

Technology and Data Gaps

1. **Underutilization**– Real-time air quality monitoring and scientific source-apportionment studies are not being effectively used for policy decisions.
2. **Lack of Foresight**– The absence of predictive analytics prevents early intervention.
3. **Precision Deficit**– Limited integration of technology results in "carpet bombing" bans rather than precise, targeted interventions.

Climate Change Linkages

Common Sources– Fossil fuel combustion drives both local air pollution and global climate change.

Short-Lived Pollutants– Pollutants like Black Carbon worsen local air quality while accelerating warming. Ignoring this link misses the "co-benefits" of integrated mitigation strategies.

4. Key Issues Identified

1. Fragmented Governance- Overlapping responsibilities among multiple agencies dilute accountability.
2. Data Deficits- Policy is often driven by optics rather than scientific data.
3. Urban Planning Rot- The transport and construction sectors act as permanent pollution engines.
4. Health Neglect- Environmental health costs are rarely factored into economic planning.

5. Way Forward

1. Strengthen CAQM- The body needs a clear mandate, teeth for enforcement, and strict performance benchmarks.
2. Source-Based Mitigation- Move from general bans to scientific targeting of specific sources (vehicles, thermal plants, dust).
3. Urban Mobility Reforms- Aggressive promotion of public transport (Metro, buses), Electric Vehicles (EVs), and Non-Motorised Transport (NMT).
4. Regional Coordination- Enforce a binding framework where Punjab, Haryana, UP, and Delhi must collaborate, penalizing non-compliance.
5. Public Participation- Enhance transparency to foster citizen awareness and drive behavioral change.

6. Ethical and Constitutional Perspective

Intergenerational Equity- Failing to control pollution compromises the future of the next generation.

State Responsibility- Governance apathy towards such a severe health crisis raises ethical questions about the State's duty to protect its citizens' well-being.

7. Conclusion

The Supreme Court's intervention is a critical pivot point. It signals that the era of "managing" pollution through temporary fixes is over. Without enforcing institutional accountability, embracing scientific planning, and adhering to the constitutional mandate of Article 21, Delhi's air crisis will remain a permanent blot on India's governance record.

Source- <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/editorials/supreme-court-reproach-should-be-a-wake-up-call-for-pollution-watchdog-10460920/>

Editorial of the Day – 09.01.2026**Index****1. Top Court's Green Governance, Cause for Uncertainty (TH)****2. Don't Count Faith to Kill a college, lot at Stake (IE)****1. Top Court's Green Governance, Cause for Uncertainty (TH)**

General Studies 2 & 3 – Governance / Environment

Topic– Structure, organization and functioning of the Judiciary; Separation of powers between various organs; Statutory, regulatory and various quasi-judicial bodies. / Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.

Top Court's Green Governance– A Cause for Uncertainty

1. Introduction

Over the last decade, the Supreme Court of India has undergone a significant transformation in environmental jurisprudence. It has shifted from its traditional role of reviewing the legality of administrative actions to issuing prospective, quasi-regulatory directions. While this "managerial" role emerged due to the failure of statutory regulators, it has inadvertently created a parallel regulatory structure. The sustained use of continuing mandamus—where the Court keeps cases open to issue serial orders—has led to policy flip-flops, creating uncertainty for the State, regulated entities, and the public.

2. The Shift– From Adjudicator to Substitute Regulator

The Court's intervention was initially triggered by regulatory gaps such as fragmented enforcement, delayed notifications, and weak monitoring. However, the nature of this intervention has evolved –

Substitute Regulator– Instead of compelling the executive to fulfill its statutory duties, the Court often assumes the role of the executive itself.

Consequentialist Reasoning– Judicial reasoning has moved from strict "legality" (what the law says) to "consequences" (weighing economic and practical fallout against environmental principles).

Govern First, Manage Later– The trend involves announcing broad, principled rules first and then managing the fallout later through modifications, reflecting an impulse to govern rather than strictly adjudicate.

3. Evidence of Policy Reversals (Key Rulings)

The Court's approach has resulted in several "U-turns" where initial strict orders were later diluted or modified due to practical constraints–

Eco-Sensitive Zones (ESZ)

1. June 2022– Directed a mandatory 1-km ESZ buffer for all protected areas.
2. April 2023– Diluted the order to exempt areas where the Environment Ministry had already notified ESZs, following state protests over implementation.

Diesel Vehicle Ban (Delhi–NCR)

1. Dec 2015– Imposed a ban on registration of diesel cars/SUVs above 2,000 cc.
2. Aug 2016– Lifted the ban and replaced it with a 1%–2% "Green Cess" (compensatory charge), shifting from prohibition to mitigation.

Old Vehicle Scrappage

1. 2025– Initially ordered no coercive action against 10-year (diesel) and 15-year (petrol) old vehicles.
2. Later– Narrowed protection only to vehicles below Bharat Stage-IV standards.

Firecrackers– Alternated between near-total bans in NCR (pollution concerns) and partial relaxations (festivals), permitting "green crackers" due to enforcement and public order challenges.

Ex Post Facto Clearances (Vanashakti vs Union of India)

1. May 2025– Held that post-facto environmental clearances violate core norms.
2. Nov 2025– Reconsidered the stance to avoid disrupting ongoing commercial activity.

4. The Challenge of Expertise

The Court often relies on expert committees to bridge the gap in its technical institutional capacity, but this has created a "push-pull" dynamic

The Aravalli Case (Nov 20)– The Court adopted a uniform definition of "Aravalli hills" based on a committee report to regulate mining.

The Reversal– Within weeks, the order was kept in abeyance, and a *fresh* committee was constituted after realizing the definition had unintended legal consequences.

Regional Variance– Similar to the ESZ issue, uniform expert recommendations often fail when faced with the reality that ecological feasibility differs widely across regions.

5. Consequences for Public Participation and Institutional Integrity

The Court's entry into the administrative domain has significant negative externalities–

De Facto Approving Authority– Project proponents and governments now approach the Court for permissions *before* statutory authorities' complete scrutiny.

Premature Finality– This gives an early sense of finality to projects, discouraging objections in lower forums (National Green Tribunal) or public hearings.

Stifling Review– By becoming the first point of approval, the Supreme Court inadvertently stifles meaningful judicial review in other forums, reshaping the terrain of environmental adjudication.

6. The Need for Stability and Restraint

The current framework of "continuing mandamus"—marked by serial interim orders, affidavits, and constant modifications—makes course correction easy but destroys regulatory stability.

Way Forward for the Court

Return to Core Function– Limit role to reviewing legality and procedural compliance rather than ongoing administration.

Compel, Don't Substitute– Focus on holding the State accountable and compelling it to return to effective regulation.

Define Thresholds– Clearly define when "managerial" directions are necessary and when they should be avoided.

Time-Bound Regulation– Require the executive to take time-bound action supported by public data and reasons.

Avoid Sweeping Rules– Reduce uncertainty by avoiding broad rules that immediately require exceptions. Clarify in advance what constraints justify modifications.

7. Conclusion

To safeguard the environment effectively, the Supreme Court must recalibrate its approach. By establishing clear, enforceable rules rather than flexible, negotiable directives, the Court can ensure stability. This would spare the government from parallel decision-making structures and provide the public with clarity on accountability, ultimately strengthening both the rule of law and environmental protection.

Source– <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/top-courts-green-governance-cause-for-uncertainty/article70487766.ece>

2. Don't Count Faith to Kill a college, lot at Stake (IE)

General Studies 2– Governance

Topic– Statutory, regulatory and various quasi-judicial bodies (National Medical Commission)

The Katra Medical College Decision– Legal, Social, and Constitutional Stakes

1. Introduction

The National Medical Commission (NMC) recently ordered the closure of a newly approved MBBS course at the Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Institute of Medical Excellence (SMVDIME) in Katra. While officially attributed to gaps in teaching resources following an inspection, the decision has ignited a fierce debate. It is viewed not merely as an administrative step but as a complex flashpoint involving

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procedural irregularities, alleged religious discrimination, and the constitutional guarantee of equal opportunity in education.

2. Process and Due Diligence Concerns

The manner in which the closure was ordered raises significant questions about the robustness of the regulatory framework.

Bypassing Safeguards- Standard regulatory protocol dictates that institutions facing adverse actions be given a show-cause notice, an opportunity to respond, and access to an appeals mechanism. In this instance, the NMC reportedly bypassed these essential procedural safeguards.

Procedural Injustice- The "short-circuiting" of established processes suggests a failure of procedural justice.

Erosion of Trust- When regulatory bodies deviate from transparent processes that protect the rights of institutions for remediation, it erodes the trust that educators, students, and the public place in governance structures.

3. Allegations of Prejudice and Political Influence

Underlying the administrative reasons are allegations that the decision was influenced by ideological pressure rather than educational merit.

Student Composition- A significant portion of the admitted students were Muslim, selected entirely on merit through a nationally competitive examination.

Discriminatory Demands- This demographic outcome sparked protests from several organizations arguing that an institution affiliated with a religious trust should reserve seats for specific communities.

Regulatory Capitulation- The NMC's response appears to have accommodated these discriminatory demands rather than upholding neutrality. This signals a dangerous intertwining of ideological pressures with educational governance, undermining the constitutional principle of equality.

4. Constitutional Protections and Minority Rights

The decision presents a conflict with India's constitutional framework regarding discrimination and minority rights.

Prohibition of Discrimination- The Constitution (under Article 15) strictly prohibits discrimination on grounds of religion.

Minority Institution Rights- While Articles 29 and 30 allow minorities to establish institutions to preserve culture, these right balances management autonomy with universal access.

Lack of Justification- In the case of SMVDIME, neither the protections for minority institutions nor general equality provisions justify the NMC's action. There is no evidence that the college failed educationally in its short tenure; rather, the shutdown appears rooted in external pressures unrelated to academic standards.

5. Impact on Students and Social Trust

The fallout of this decision extends beyond the administration to the immediate stakeholders—the students.

Disruption of Education- The primary victims are meritorious students whose academic aspirations have been abruptly halted.

Chilling Effect- The move sends a negative signal to future applicants regarding the stability and fairness of professional courses in the region.

Career Uncertainty- The livelihoods and career prospects of the faculty and staff are now in jeopardy.

Social Cohesion- In a region like Jammu & Kashmir, which is historically sensitive, actions perceived as discriminatory can deepen communal distrust, undermine integration efforts, and weaken the social fabric.

6. Urgency of Judicial Review and Policy Clarity

The situation demands immediate legal and judicial intervention to restore order and fairness.

Judicial Scrutiny- Courts must assess whether constitutional rights and principles of natural justice were violated by the NMC.

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Setting a Precedent- A clear judicial directive is necessary not just for this specific case but to reinforce the principles of non-discrimination and procedural justice across the entire educational sector.

7. Conclusion

The closure of SMVDIME is a litmus test for India's commitment to the rule of law, equal opportunity, and secular governance. It highlights the dangers of regulatory bodies acting as instruments of social exclusion rather than guardians of the public interest. To prevent the further erosion of state legitimacy, it is crucial to reverse this decision and reaffirm that educational governance must be grounded in merit and constitutional standards, immune from ideological pressure.

Source- <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/editorials/vaishno-devi-medical-college-dont-count-faith-to-kill-a-college-lot-at-stake-10463115/>



Editorial of the Day – 10.01.2026**Index****1. Somaliland is No Longer a Diplomatic Endnote (TH)****2. US Exit from Global Climate Governance Can be an Opportunity (IE)****1. Somaliland is No Longer a Diplomatic Endnote (TH)****General Studies 2– International Relation**

Topic– Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora.

Somaliland's Recognition & Great Power Rivalry in the Horn of Africa**Introduction**

In December 2025, Israel's decision to recognize Somaliland as an independent sovereign state caused a significant diplomatic rupture in the Horn of Africa. This move transcends regional politics, positioning Hargeisa (Somaliland's capital) at the center of global great-power competition. It threatens to militarize the Red Sea corridor further, provoke Cold War-style proxy rivalries, and challenge existing sovereignty norms, creating a complex strategic dilemma for China.

I. China's Core Strategic Dilemma

China views the Horn of Africa through a lens of three competing vital interests. The recognition of Somaliland forces Beijing to balance these often-contradictory goals

Upholding the "One China" Principle– Protecting its domestic stance on sovereignty (specifically regarding Taiwan).

Securing Maritime Corridors– Protecting trade flows through the Red Sea.

Managing Power Rivalry– Countering the influence of the US and its allies in Africa.

II. The Sovereignty & Taiwan Factor

The Legitimacy Paradox– China condemns the move as "legitimizing separatism," viewing Somaliland as an inseparable part of Somalia. However, Somaliland's 30+ years of stability, functioning institutions, and competitive elections contrast sharply with Somalia's instability, exposing the limits of Beijing's rigid sovereignty doctrine.

The Taiwan Connection– Somaliland is a diplomatic outlier; in 2020, it established official ties with Taiwan. Alongside Eswatini, Somaliland is one of the few African entities aligned with Taipei. Israel's recognition risks validating a state that openly defies the "One China" principle, making Hargeisa a sensitive flashpoint for Beijing.

III. Strategic and Economic Stakes (The "Jugular Vein")

China's concerns are not just ideological but deeply geostrategic, centered on the Bab el-Mandeb Strait (linking the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden).

Maritime Silk Road– Beijing views this route as the "jugular vein" of its global commerce and energy security.

Djibouti Military Base– Established in 2017, China's first overseas base in Djibouti was designed to protect these specific maritime interests.

Threat to Regional Balance– Israel's entry disrupts the carefully managed security architecture China has cultivated, threatening to introduce a rival influence in China's logistical backyard.

IV. The Risk of a Rival Security Ecosystem

New Logistics Hub– International legitimacy could allow Somaliland to evolve into an alternative security and logistics hub supported by Israel, the UAE, and potentially the US.

Dilution of Leverage– A rival ecosystem near Djibouti would dilute Beijing's leverage, derived from its heavy investment in regional ports and political ties.

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The "Trade-off" Dilemma- If China exerts excessive pressure, it risks pushing Hargeisa closer to rivals (Taiwan, West). If it is too passive, it risks losing diplomatic space regarding Taiwan.

V. China's Policy Options & Hybrid Tactics

To manage this crisis without damaging its image as a "non-interfering" partner, China is likely to employ specific tactics

Hybrid Tactics- Utilizing selective economic pressure, elite lobbying, and targeted information campaigns to shape narratives on "territorial integrity."

Diplomatic Leverage- Using its permanent seat on the UN Security Council to block any momentum toward wider UN recognition of Somaliland.

Avoidance of Overt Coercion- Heavy-handedness is avoided to prevent contradicting its diplomatic stance of non-interference.

VI. Geopolitical Complexities & Realignment

The Palestine Card- China is using its vocal pro-Palestinian stance to counter Israel diplomatically. By framing itself as a champion of Arab/Palestinian rights, it garners support from the Global South and Arab states against Israel's move in Somaliland.

Regional Realignment- The status quo is further eroded by other actors

- Ethiopia- The 2024 MoU to recognize Somaliland in exchange for port access.
- USA- Rising Congressional interest in Somaliland as a democratic partner.
- UAE- Tacit backing of Somaliland's autonomy.

Conclusion

Somaliland is no longer a diplomatic footnote but a pivot point in global strategy. Israel's recognition has forced China into a delicate balancing act between its rigid sovereignty principles and geopolitical pragmatism. The move exposes the vulnerabilities in China's security framework in the Horn of Africa, as it faces the potential rise of a rival, Western-aligned security architecture at the gateway to the Red Sea.

Source- <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/somaliland-is-no-longer-a-diplomatic-endnote/article70491838.ece>

2. US Exit from Global Climate Governance Can be an Opportunity (IE)

General Studies 2 & 3- International Relation / Environment

Topic- Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests / Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation

Reimagining Leadership in Climate Action & The International Solar Alliance

Introduction

The global climate governance architecture is currently undergoing a significant stress test due to the retreat of the United States from key multilateral platforms. As one of the world's largest historical emitters and a primary agenda-setter, the US disengagement raises critical questions regarding the continuity of funding, coordination, and political momentum in global climate action. However, this vacuum presents a strategic opportunity for emerging economies like India to reshape climate diplomacy.

I. The US Retreat- Context and Implications

The US has scaled back its engagement with several multilateral climate mechanisms, including high-profile initiatives like the International Solar Alliance (ISA).

Symbolic vs. Financial Weight- While the direct US financial contribution to some of these mechanisms was limited, its symbolic leadership and role in setting global agendas carried immense weight.

Structural Vulnerability- The withdrawal exposes the fragility of current climate governance structures, which have historically been overly dependent on a few powerful Western nations for direction and momentum.

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Erosion of Trust- The retreat underscores the volatility of relying on developed nations whose commitment may fluctuate with domestic political changes.

II. Shift in Global Leadership (Features & Importance)

The vacuum left by the US is catalyzing a shift towards a more multipolar climate order.

Rise of the "Global South"- It highlights the growing institutional capacity of middle-income countries—specifically India, Brazil, and South Africa—to move beyond mere participation and assume leadership roles.

Reforming Outdated Hierarchies- The situation underlines the urgent need to reform multilateral institutions. Current structures often reflect post-World War II power dynamics rather than contemporary geopolitical realities.

III. Analysis of the Transition

Pros- Opportunities for Emerging Economies

Development-Aligned Agendas- Creates space for emerging economies to craft climate agendas that respect their specific developmental needs and poverty alleviation goals.

Multipolar Governance- Encourages a shift away from US-centric models toward a multipolar approach, democratizing global decision-making.

Self-Reliance- Reduces the psychological and political dependency on developed nations for moral leadership.

Cons- Risks to Global Action

Fragmented Bargaining Power- Without the convening power of the US, collective bargaining in global negotiations may be weakened.

Resource Scarcity- There is a significant risk of reduced flows in climate finance and technology transfer, which the US often facilitated.

Loss of Momentum- Leadership fragmentation may slow down coordinated rapid responses required for climate emergencies.

IV. Impacts and Challenges

Redistribution of Responsibility- The immediate impact is a shift in the burden of leadership. Platforms like the ISA are becoming critical vehicles for India's global diplomacy.

Shift in Diplomacy- Diplomatic focus may move from "target-setting" (often pushed by the West) to "equity, adaptation, and implementation" (prioritized by the Global South).

Key Challenges

Resource Constraints- Developing nations face limited financial depth and technology gaps compared to the West.

Diplomatic Coordination- Achieving consensus among diverse developing nations is diplomatically complex.

Institutional Inertia- Reforming existing multilateral bodies faces resistance from entrenched powers.

V. Suggestions and Way Forward

Strengthen South-South Cooperation- Prioritize frameworks for sharing climate finance and adaptive technologies among developing nations.

Coalition Building- Build robust coalitions of middle-income countries to provide stable, long-term leadership irrespective of Western political cycles.

Push for Equity- Use this moment to reshape governance around fairness and "Common But Differentiated Responsibilities" (CBDR).

India's Role- India must seize this moment to lead the narrative on practical implementation and shared responsibility, turning the crisis into a structural reform opportunity.

VI. Spotlight- The International Solar Alliance (ISA)

The ISA represents the practical manifestation of the shift towards non-Western leadership in climate action.

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1. Origin and Membership

Establishment- Launched in 2015 as a joint initiative by India and France during COP21 in Paris.

Institutional Landmark- It is the first international intergovernmental organization to have its headquarters located in India.

Global Reach- Currently comprises 125 Member and Signatory countries dedicated to the global adoption of solar energy.

2. Core Mission

Energy Security- To enhance global energy access and security.

Transition Enabler- To position solar power as the central pillar in the transition toward a low-carbon, sustainable future.

3. Strategic Pillars of Action

Catalytic Finance Hub- Aims to mobilize USD 1 trillion in investments by 2030 to fast-track solar deployment.

Global Capability Centre & Digitisation- Focuses on capacity building, innovation, and utilizing digital platforms to streamline solar adoption across member nations.

Regional & Country Engagement- Promotes decentralized action by encouraging partnerships and interventions tailored to specific regional and national contexts.

Technology & Policy Support- Facilitates the transfer of emerging technologies and provides policy guidance, best practices, and knowledge-sharing mechanisms.

4. Significance

Transformative Change- Aims to democratize access to clean, reliable, and affordable energy.

Holistic Development- Supports sustainable development goals (SDGs), enhances energy equity, and improves quality of life in underserved communities globally.

Source- <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/editorials/us-exit-from-global-climate-governance-can-be-an-opportunity-10465031/>

Editorial of the Day – 12.01.2026**Index****1. Young Love- On Weaponisation of the POCSO Act- POCSO Act Must Not Allow Parental Pushback (TH)****2. Express view on India-US relation- Hope ties with US hit reset, but hope isn't strategy (IE)****1. Young Love- On Weaponisation of the POCSO Act- POCSO Act Must Not Allow Parental Pushback (TH)****General Studies 2- International Relation****Topic-** Social Empowerment, Communalism, Regionalism & Secularism.**Sub Topic-** Issues relating to Women and Children; Role of family and kinship in social control. against adolescents**Balancing Adolescent Autonomy and Protection- The POCSO Act Dilemma****Introduction**

The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, enacted to shield children from sexual abuse, is facing scrutiny for its unintended weaponization against consensual adolescent relationships. The Supreme Court's recent acknowledgment of this issue highlights a critical conflict- a law designed for protection is being misused to enforce parental authority, thereby undermining the autonomy of adolescents and criminalizing consensual intimacy.

I. Judicial Recognition of Misuse

Supreme Court's Observation (Jan 9, 2026)- The Apex Court has formally acknowledged the growing trend of the POCSO Act being "weaponized" by families.

Stakeholder Concerns- Legal scholars, child rights experts, and young adults have raised alarms that the law is increasingly used to punish young men involved in consensual relationships rather than predatory offenders.

Shift in Focus- The judiciary notes that the law is drifting from its core purpose of preventing exploitation to becoming a tool for enforcing social and familial control.

II. Structural Flaws in the POCSO Framework

Rigid Age of Consent- The Act sets a strict age of consent at 18 years, adhering to international standards but failing to account for evolving adolescent maturity.

Strict Liability Model- Under current provisions, the consent of a minor is legally irrelevant. This means consensual acts between peers (e.g., a 17-year-old and a 19-year-old) are treated with the same severity as predatory abuse.

Mandatory Minimum Sentences- Provisions intended to deter heinous crimes compel judges to impose harsh sentences indiscriminately, even in cases of non-exploitative teenage romance.

III. Familial Control and Social Boundaries

Weaponization by Families- Parents opposing relationships often file false charges of kidnapping and sexual assault against the partner.

Social Policing- This misuse is particularly prevalent in cases of elopement across caste or religious lines, effectively using state machinery to punish socially "undesirable" matches.

Blurring Lines- The legal framework struggles to distinguish between "consensual intimacy" and "coercive abuse," allowing parental resistance to override adolescent agency.

IV. Institutional Responses & Recommendations**Law Commission (2023 Report)**

Nuanced Approach- While it rejected lowering the general age of consent, it strongly warned against equating teenage intimacy with predatory violence.

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Judicial Discretion– Recommended introducing "guided judicial discretion" for sentencing in cases involving adolescents aged 16–18 years.

Supreme Court's Directive– The Court has ordered its judgment to be shared with the Law Secretary to facilitate policy corrections and curb misuse.

V. The Need for Non-Punitive Interventions

Support Deficit– Adolescents caught between personal desires and family expectations currently lack institutional support.

Service Gaps– There is a severe shortage of

1. Confidential counseling services.
2. Comprehensive sexuality education.
3. Family mediation mechanisms.

Consequences of Neglect– Over-reliance on policing and prosecution exacerbates vulnerability, leaving young couples exposed to familial retaliation and the stigma of criminalization.

Conclusion

The current application of the POCSO Act risks perpetuating harm rather than preventing it. To safeguard the true rights of adolescents, the state must shift from a purely punitive approach to one of proportionality. Legal reforms introducing judicial discretion must be accompanied by robust social infrastructure—education, counseling, and mediation—to protect young people from both exploitation and over-criminalization.

Source– <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/young-love-on-a-weaponisation-of-the-pocso-act/article70497928.ece>

2. Express view on India-US relation- Hope ties with US hit reset, but hope isn't strategy (IE)

General Studies 2– International Relation

Topic– Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

Sub Topic– Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests; India-US Strategic Partnership

India-US Relations– Moving Beyond Optimism to Strategic Depth

Introduction

India-US relations currently stand at a pivotal juncture defined by geopolitical flux and economic reconfiguration. While high-level diplomatic engagements have generated significant optimism, the partnership now requires a transition from rhetorical goodwill to concrete strategic depth. A mature relationship cannot rely solely on leadership chemistry; it must be anchored in institutional mechanisms, policy predictability, and a mutual respect for each other's strategic constraints.

I. Context and Evolution of Ties

Transformation Arc– Over the last two decades, the relationship has fundamentally shifted from a period of "estrangement" to deep "engagement," spanning defence, technology, and education.

Current Geopolitics– The partnership is now being tested and shaped by macro-factors– protectionist trade trends, the restructuring of global supply chains ("China plus one"), conflicts in Europe/West Asia, and Chinese assertiveness.

Indo-Pacific Convergence– India's rise as a net security provider in the Indo-Pacific aligns perfectly with US interests, yet this strategic convergence is occasionally tested by divergences on trade, immigration, and climate commitments.

II. Key Areas of Engagement & Friction

1. Trade and Economic Engagement

Friction Points– Despite rising bilateral trade volumes, structural irritants persist–

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Tariffs & Market Access– Ongoing disputes over agricultural and industrial goods.

Digital Taxation– Differences over data localization and digital services taxes.

Visa Policies– H-1B visa issues affecting Indian professionals.

Opportunities– The focus on "friend-shoring" and supply chain resilience offers a pathway to deeper integration.

Gap– The absence of a comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (FTA) or broad trade framework limits the potential for long-term economic synergy.

2. Strategic and Defence Cooperation

Foundational Agreements– The signing of LEMOA, COMCASA, and BECA (detailed below) has institutionalized military cooperation.

Shift in Dynamic– There is a pressing need to move from a "buyer-seller" relationship to one based on **co-development and co-production**.

Emerging Domains– Future cooperation must focus on high-tech domains like Cyber Security, Space, and Artificial Intelligence (AI) rather than just traditional hardware.

3. Strategic Autonomy vs. Alignment

India's Stance– India strictly adheres to "Strategic Autonomy," engaging with the US while maintaining historical ties with Russia and leadership within the Global South.

US Expectations– The US often expects closer alignment on global geopolitical issues (e.g., Ukraine, Iran).

The Challenge– The core diplomatic challenge lies in managing these divergences without allowing them to breed mistrust.

4. Domestic Reforms as Foreign Policy Enablers

Internal-External Link– India's external diplomatic weight is directly proportional to its internal economic strength.

Reforms– Improvements in labour laws, ease of doing business, and regulatory certainty are not just domestic economic tools but foreign policy assets that enhance India's credibility and leverage.

III. Broader Analysis of the Partnership

Multi-Alignment Paradigm– The relationship should be viewed through the lens of multi-alignment rather than traditional alliance politics. India acts as a bridge between the West and the Global South.

New Pillars– Technology cooperation—specifically in semiconductors, clean energy, and Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI)—is replacing traditional aid/trade as the central pillar.

Values vs. Interests– While "shared democratic values" provide the normative glue, hard transactional interests (security and economics) continue to dictate actual policy outcomes.

IV. Challenges Ahead

Political Unpredictability– Leadership changes in the US can lead to policy shifts (e.g., isolationism vs. interventionism).

Divergent Worldviews– distinct approaches to dealing with systemic rivals like China and historical partners like Russia.

Regional Balance– Balancing commitments to the QUAD (India, US, Japan, Australia) while managing sensitivities of other neighbors and regional powers.

V. The Foundational Defence Agreements

Agreement	Full Form	Year	Key Purpose
LEMOA	Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement	2016	• Allows mutual access to military bases for refueling and supplies. • Note– Does <i>not</i> allow permanent basing; usage is case-by-case. • Critical for HADR (Disaster Relief) and operational reach.

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COMCASA	Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement	2018	• Enables transfer of encrypted, secure communication equipment. • Allows real-time sharing of high-end military data (air/sea/land). • Enhances interoperability between militaries.
BECA	Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement	2020	• Facilitates sharing of geospatial intelligence (maps, satellite imagery). • Crucial for the accuracy of missiles, drones, and precision weapons. • Acts as the final pillar for high-tech warfare cooperation.

VI. Way Forward

Institutionalize Frameworks- Build mechanisms that survive political cycles and leadership changes in both capitals.

Sector-Specific Agreements- Instead of a massive FTA, focus on mini-deals in technology, space, and critical minerals.

"Make in India" for Defence- Aggressively pursue defence co-production (e.g., jet engines, drones) to reduce dependency and boost local manufacturing.

Climate & Green Tech- Deepen cooperation on climate finance and technology transfer for the green transition.

Conclusion

India-US relations have outgrown the phase of platitudes. To convert mutual optimism into a durable partnership, both nations must exercise strategic patience and invest in institutional depth. As the adage suggests regarding this partnership- "Hope is good, but hope backed by strategy is better."

Source- <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/editorials/express-view-on-india-us-relation-hope-ties-with-us-hit-reset-but-hope-isnt-strategy-10468226/>

Editorial of the Day – 13.01.2026

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1. A Bill that reimagines higher education regulation (TH)

2. Equality is not the enemy of growth – oligarchy (IE)

1. A Bill that reimagines higher education regulation (TH)

General Studies 2– Governance

Topic– Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Education, Human Resources.

Sub Topic– Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors; Issues arising out of their design and implementation (Higher Education Regulatory Reform).

Reimagining Higher Education Regulation– The Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan Bill, 2025

Introduction

The poet Tiruvalluvar (in his 140th Thirukkural) emphasized that education is futile unless it teaches individuals to live responsibly within society. Echoing this ethos, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 envisions a holistic educational framework fostering social relevance. To realize the vision of Viksit Bharat 2047, the Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan Bill, 2025 (introduced in Lok Sabha on Dec 15, 2025) aims to radically transform India's higher education regulation through a "light but tight" framework, nurturing future-ready leaders.

I. The Urgent Need for Change

Despite the massive expansion of India's higher education sector (1,000+ universities, crores of learners), the regulatory architecture remains outdated and inefficient.

Fragmented Regulation– Multiple statutory bodies with overlapping roles have led to a labyrinth of complex approvals, inspections, and compliance burdens.

Process Over Purpose– Institutions are forced to prioritize paperwork and procedural compliance over their core missions of teaching, research, and innovation.

Reduced Agility– Excessive regulation stifles institutional flexibility, making it difficult to collaborate, innovate, or update curricula to match modern needs.

Outcome Deficit– The focus on "checking boxes" rather than educational quality has weakened overall learning outcomes.

II. Rationale Behind the Bill

The Bill addresses the gaps highlighted by NEP 2020 by shifting from a regime of heavy-handed inspection to one of facilitative regulation.

"Light but Tight" Philosophy– Implements strong standards (tight) but with minimal procedural friction (light).

Unified Architecture– Seeks to repeal older, fragmented Acts to create a single, modern regulatory framework.

Apex Umbrella Body– Proposes a centralized body with clearly separated verticals for regulation, accreditation, and standard-setting to ensure credibility and eliminate conflicts of interest.

Tech-Driven Transparency– Introduces a technology-enabled single-window system based on public self-disclosure, fostering accountability and continuous quality assurance.

III. Transformative Impacts

1. Youth Empowerment & Enhanced Learning Outcomes

Access & GER– Streamlined regulations will remove capacity bottlenecks, expanding access to quality institutions and raising the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER).

Focus on Quality– Institutions can pivot their energy toward value-based learning and interdisciplinary pathways rather than administrative hurdles.

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Lifelong Learning– Support for reskilling and upskilling ensures employability across evolving career landscapes.

Student Agency– Robust feedback and grievance redressal mechanisms turn learners into active stakeholders who can demand quality and drive institutional improvement.

2. Global Alignment with Indian Roots

Best Practices– Enables Indian institutions to adopt global best practices while remaining anchored in national values.

True Credibility– International standing will be built on genuine outcomes, ethics, and research culture, rather than mere imitation of Western models.

Talent Mobility– A unified standards framework facilitates student/faculty mobility and collaborative research, helping attract international talent and retain Indian scholars.

3. Modern, Transparent Governance

Reduced Discretion– The single-window digital system reduces human discretion, delays, and regulatory uncertainty.

Earned Trust– A culture of meaningful, audited public disclosure replaces the old inspection raj, fostering trust.

Differentiated Autonomy– High-performing institutions are granted greater autonomy to drive excellence, while common standards ensure a baseline of quality for all.

Conclusion

Atmanirbharta (Self-reliance) in higher education is achieved when institutions are empowered to set ambitious goals and innovate responsibly. By harmonizing standards, regulation, and accreditation into a coherent framework, the Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishtan Bill, 2025, promises to build an ecosystem that nurtures capable, socially responsible citizens—fulfilling Tiruvalluvar's vision of education that serves both individual growth and the collective good.

Source– https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/a-bill-that-reimagines-higher-education-regulation/article70502373.ece#google_vignette

2. Equality is not the enemy of growth – oligarchy (IE)

General Studies 3– Economy

Topic– Inclusive Growth and issues arising from it.

Sub Topic– Effects of Liberalization on the economy; Changes in Industrial Policy and their effects on Industrial Growth (Issues of Crony Capitalism/Oligarchy).

Introduction

A prevailing economic narrative often suggests a trade-off between equality and economic growth. However, this perspective is increasingly being challenged by the reality that the true barrier to sustainable, inclusive development is not the pursuit of equality, but the entrenchment of oligarchic interests. The central problem lies in structural economic distortions where a small elite monopolizes resources and policy influence, thereby stifling competition and limiting broader societal progress.

I. The Core Misunderstanding– Inequality vs. Oligarchy

Misplaced Focus– Public discourse often centers on simplistic metrics of inequality (like the Gini coefficient) without analyzing the root causes.

The Real Enemy– The actual impediment to growth is Oligarchy—a system where a minuscule economic elite captures markets and policy mechanisms to serve their exclusive interests.

Growth Illusion– Focusing solely on GDP growth rates without addressing wealth distribution creates an illusion of progress while denying the majority access to essential resources, education, capital, and employment.

II. Key Challenges & Mechanisms of Oligarchy

1. Concentration of Power & Suppression of Innovation

Market Dominance- High concentration of wealth leads to market dominance by a few large conglomerates.

Stifled Competition- Emerging businesses and startups struggle to survive as established players use their financial muscle to suppress competition, ultimately hurting innovation and efficiency.

2. Policy Capture (Regulatory Capture)

Elite Influence- Economic elites often exercise disproportionate influence over policymaking.

Profit over Public Interest- Policies are frequently tailored to protect incumbent profits (e.g., through tax loopholes or favorable regulations) rather than advancing the public interest, weakening the regulatory frameworks meant to ensure fair play.

3. Barriers to Social Mobility

The Opportunity Trap- Extreme inequality creates a rigid class structure where individuals are trapped in low-income brackets.

Access Denied- The lack of access to quality education, healthcare, and credit prevents talented individuals from non-elite backgrounds from contributing effectively to the economy.

III. Implications of Unchecked Oligarchy

Economic Stagnation- Widening inequality shrinks the middle class—the primary engine of consumption. Reduced consumer demand eventually slows down long-term sustainable growth.

Political Instability- Persistent inequality fuels social unrest, dissatisfaction, and a loss of trust in democratic institutions, which can lead to volatile electoral outcomes.

Global Competitiveness- As many nations grapple with these issues, India's ability to dismantle these structures will determine its long-term economic competitiveness and social cohesion.

IV. Proposed Solutions & Structural Reforms

1. Policy Focus on Structural Reform

Taxation- Implement progressive taxation reforms to redistribute excessive wealth accumulation.

Support for SMEs- Create a supportive ecosystem for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) to break the monopoly of large conglomerates.

Fair Competition- strictly enforce competition laws to prevent cartelization and market abuse.

2. Regulate Oligarchic Influence

Anti-Monopoly Laws- Strengthen the legal framework to check the dominance of large corporations.

Political Transparency- Enforce transparency in political funding to sever the nexus between big capital and policymaking.

3. Invest in Public Services (The Level Playing Field)

Human Capital- heavily invest in quality public education and healthcare. This ensures that the ability to succeed is based on talent, not the wealth of one's parents.

Safety Nets- Robust social safety nets to protect the vulnerable during economic transitions.

4. Balanced Growth Models

Beyond GDP- Shift economic planning from purely GDP-centric targets to models that integrate income distribution and social welfare indices as core metrics of success.

V. Way Forward

Inclusive Policymaking- Draft policies that prioritize the needs of the poor and the middle class, ensuring they are active participants in the growth story rather than just passive beneficiaries.

Institutional Strength- Empower institutions (like the Competition Commission of India, Labor Courts, etc.) to enforce labor rights and ensure fair access to essential services without fear or favor.

Accountability- Promote a culture of accountability where market power is constantly scrutinized to prevent it from morphing into political authority.

Conclusion

The narrative must shift from viewing equality as a hindrance to growth to recognizing that oligarchic structures are the true drag on economic dynamism. Allowing a small elite to dominate the economy creates systemic risks. Policymakers must realize that dismantling these entrenched interests is not just a social justice imperative but a prerequisite for a vibrant, competitive, and resilient economy.

Source- <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/p-b-mehta-writes-equality-is-not-the-enemy-of-growth-oligarchy-is-10469844/>



Editorial of the Day – 14.01.2026

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1. Language Of Harmony- On the Malayalam Language Bill (TH)

2. Delhi and Berlin seek common ground (IE)

1. Language Of Harmony- On the Malayalam Language Bill (TH)

General Studies 2- Governance

Topic- Functions and responsibilities of the Union and the States, Issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure.

Sub Topic- Linguistic Diversity & Regionalism, Constitutional safeguards for Linguistic Minorities, Inter-State Relations (Inter-State Council).

Language of Harmony- The Malayalam Language Bill, 2025

1. Introduction

The Malayalam Language Bill, 2025, passed by the Kerala Assembly, represents a legislative effort to cement the status of Malayalam as the official language of the state. While aimed at cultural and administrative enrichment, the Bill has sparked inter-state friction, particularly with Karnataka, regarding the rights of linguistic minorities. The legislation attempts to balance the promotion of regional identity with the Constitutional safeguards guaranteed to minority language speakers (specifically Tamil and Kannada).

2. Background and Operational Context

The Legislation- The Bill mandates the use of Malayalam for official purposes and promotes its development across various sectors.

The Conflict- Political leaders from neighboring states (primarily Karnataka) have opposed the Bill, fearing it will disenfranchise Kannada and Tamil speakers living in Kerala.

The Defense- The Kerala government asserts these concerns stem from a misunderstanding of the Bill's provisions, arguing that it strengthens Malayalam without violating the rights of minorities.

3. Core Objectives of the Bill

The primary aim is the "cultural and administrative enrichment" of the state through its mother tongue-

Official Adoption- Formally adopting Malayalam as the Official Language of the State of Kerala.

Mandatory Usage- Mandating Malayalam for all official purposes, within the bounds of the Constitution of India.

Sector-Wide Promotion- Encouraging the language's use in

1. Governance & Administration
2. Judiciary (Court proceedings)
3. Information Technology (IT)
4. Education

4. Provisions for Education

The Bill integrates language policy directly into the educational curriculum-

First Language Status- Malayalam is proposed as the first language for school children in the state.

Curriculum Alignment- Educational measures are aligned with the National Education Curriculum while ensuring the "mother tongue" takes precedence in state schools.

5. Safeguards for Linguistic Minorities (Key Provisions)

To address the concerns of exclusion, the Bill includes specific statutory protections for Tamil and Kannada speakers

Communication Rights- In "notified areas" (regions with high minority populations), linguistic minorities can communicate with State authorities in their respective mother tongues (Tamil/Kannada).

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Mandatory Replies- The State Secretariat, Heads of Departments, and local offices are legally bound to issue replies in the minority language (Tamil or Kannada) when addressed in such.

Educational Exemptions - Students whose mother tongue is not Malayalam can pursue education in other available languages.

Exemption from Exams- Students from other states or foreign countries are exempt from passing Malayalam examinations in Class IX, Class X, and Higher Secondary levels.

6. Legislative History and Judicial Intervention

The journey of the Bill highlights the friction between State autonomy and Central clearance

The Delay- An earlier iteration (2015) was pending Central clearance for 10 years.

Supreme Court Intervention- The Centre returned the Bill only after a Supreme Court ruling stating that Bills **cannot be indefinitely delayed** by the Governor/Centre.

Re-enactment- The Kerala government subsequently revised and passed the 2025 version.

7. Federal Perspective on Language Policy

The text offers a critical analysis of India's linguistic federalism

Linguistic Reality- The linguistic reorganization of states (1956) was an approximation. Migration and historical overlapping have blurred strict language boundaries, making states like Kerala and Karnataka inherently multilingual.

Central Policy- The Centre's stance is to promote all Indian languages. State-level promotion is legitimate provided it does not trample minority rights.

Nation-Building Challenge- Promoting regional languages while preventing inter-community hostility remains a key challenge for Indian federalism.

8. Way Forward

To ensure harmony between linguistic assertion and national integration

Inclusive Policies- National and regional policies must reflect multilingual realities rather than pursuing narrow, exclusionary agendas.

Reviving Institutions- The Inter-State Council, currently described as "largely dormant," must be strengthened and empowered to resolve such friction.

Dialogue- Good-faith dialogue across linguistic groups is essential for cooperative federalism.

Space for All- All Indian languages must find due space in the public sphere and administration.

Conclusion

The Malayalam Language Bill, 2025 serves as a case study in managing diversity. It demonstrates that regional language assertion is compatible with constitutional obligations if safeguard mechanisms are robust. However, the friction surrounding the Bill underscores the need for active institutional forums like the Inter-State Council to mediate perceptions and ensure that the "Language of Harmony" does not become a cause for discord.

Source- <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/language-of-harmony-on-the-malayalam-language-bill/article70505903.ece>

2. Delhi and Berlin seek common ground (IE)

General Studies 3- Economy

Topic- Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

Sub Topic- India-Germany Relations, Effect of policies and politics of developed countries on India's interests (Defense, Trade, Mobility).

India-Germany Relations- Finding Common Ground

1. Introduction

The India-Germany relationship has reached a pivotal moment following the conclusion of German Chancellor Friedrich Merz's official two-day visit to India in January 2026. Marked by substantive engagements with Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Ahmedabad and Gandhinagar, the visit signifies a

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shift from conventional diplomacy to a strategic, economic, and people-centric partnership. This engagement, coinciding with the celebration of 75 years of diplomatic relations, underscores Berlin's intent to elevate ties beyond traditional European priorities.

2. Strengthening Strategic and Economic Ties

The visit highlighted a mutual commitment to building consensus on key areas such as trade, security, and technology.

Record Bilateral Trade- Economic relations remain the anchor of the partnership. Bilateral commerce has crossed the USD 50 billion mark, a record high that reflects robust investment confidence from German companies in India.

Focus on Future-Ready Sectors- At the India-Germany CEO Forum, discussions centred on high-tech cooperation. Key focus areas included Green Technologies, Semiconductors, and Critical Minerals, which are essential for the economic resilience of both nations.

Elevated Engagement- As Chancellor Merz's first official visit since assuming office, the engagement signals a "broadening and deepening" of the partnership.

3. Key Agreements and Institutional Frameworks

A total of 19 agreements and MoUs were signed during the visit, spanning defence, clean energy, and infrastructure.

Defence Cooperation

1. Adoption of a Defence Industrial Cooperation Roadmap.
2. Focus on deepening industrial collaboration and the co-development of defence systems, aiming to reduce India's import dependencies.

Connectivity and Logistics

Visa-Free Transit- Germany announced a visa-free airport transit facility for Indian passport holders to boost connectivity.

Logistics Pacts- Agreements on postal and express services were signed to facilitate cross-border e-commerce and trade.

Clean Energy & Tech- Frameworks established for cooperation in renewable energy projects and climate action.

4. Shared Values- Mobility, Culture, and Education

Beyond strategic deals, the visit emphasized "soft power" and human capital exchange.

Skilled Labour Mobility- Focus on facilitating the movement of trained professionals, particularly in healthcare, to address Germany's workforce shortages.

Education and Research

1. Expansion of the education roadmap.
2. Invitations extended to German universities to establish campuses in India to foster academic and research collaboration.

Cultural Diplomacy- Chancellor Merz's participation in the International Kite Festival and visit to Sabarmati Ashram symbolized deep mutual respect for heritage and a warmer diplomatic tenor.

5. Global and Security Cooperation

Both nations reaffirmed their commitment to a rules-based international order while respecting India's strategic autonomy.

Multilateral Alignment- Collaboration on global challenges such as Climate Change and multilateral security issues.

Supply Chain Resilience- Discussions focused on diversifying supply chains to reduce vulnerabilities and external dependencies.

Strategic Autonomy- Germany acknowledged India's need to balance engagements with other global partners while strengthening bilateral security ties.

6. Conclusion

The editorial concludes that the India–Germany relationship has evolved from transactional interactions to a multi-dimensional alliance. By finding common ground in sustainable development, secure supply chains, and human connectivity, both democracies are laying the foundation for long-term stability. The partnership is now poised to contribute not just to bilateral gains, but to broader global economic growth and stability.

Source- <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/editorials/delhi-and-berlin-look-for-common-ground-10472226/>



Editorial of the Day – 15.01.2026

Index

1. An Exploration of India's Minerals Diplomacy (TH)

2. US exit from several climate bodies can mean both reliefs, challenges for India (IE)

1. An Exploration of India's Minerals Diplomacy (TH)

General Studies 2 & 1- IR & Geography

International Relation- Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests; Distribution of key natural resources across the world.

Geography- Critical Minerals Diplomacy, Energy Security, India's Bilateral & Multilateral Relations (Australia, Japan, USA, Africa, etc.).

1. Introduction

India's transition to clean energy is fundamentally dependent on securing a steady supply of critical minerals and rare earth elements. With global supply chains tightening due to China's export controls, the need for access has become urgent. India is currently executing a strategy focused on diversifying trade linkages, promoting sustainable production, and building transparent markets to secure its energy future.

2. Strategic Approach- Balancing Domestic & Global Needs

India employs a two-pronged strategy-

Global Access- Forging bilateral and multilateral partnerships to secure immediate resources. Over the past five years, nearly a dozen partnerships have been established across continents.

Domestic Capability- Strengthening internal mineral policies to support long-term self-reliance.

The Crucial Question- The current focus is evaluating what these engagements have delivered and whether a strategic recalibration is necessary.

3. Country-Specific Analysis of Partnerships

A. Australia- The Dependable Anchor

Status- The most reliable partner due to political stability, vast reserves, and strategic clarity.

Progress- Moved beyond mere intent to long-term supply discussions, joint research, and targeted investments.

Key Initiative- Under the India-Australia Critical Minerals Investment Partnership (2022), five specific lithium and cobalt projects have been identified for potential investment.

B. Japan- A Model for Resilience

Approach- Focuses on institutional planning rather than reactive deal-making.

History- Successfully diversified supply, stockpiled resources, and boosted R&D after China restricted rare-earth exports a decade ago.¹

Scope- Cooperation extends beyond Indian Rare Earths Limited to joint extraction, processing, and stockpiling, including operations in third countries (via a cooperation agreement signed last year).

C. Africa- Opportunity with Conditions

Potential- High mineral abundance with a growing local demand for value addition. India leverages historical trade ties here.

Recent Deals

1. Namibia- Agreements on Lithium, Rare Earths, and Uranium.

2. Zambia- Acquisition talks for Copper and Cobalt.

Challenge- India must adopt a long-term industrial mindset to compete with more coordinated global rivals.

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D. United States- Potential Amid Volatility

Status- High potential for technology and downstream innovation, but engagement is largely limited to dialogue.

Hurdles- Policy volatility (e.g., Inflation Reduction Act incentives), tariffs on Indian goods, and shifting trade rules.

Initiatives- TRUST and the Strategic Minerals Recovery Initiative focus on collaboration in rare-earth processing, battery recycling, and clean separation technologies.

E. European Union- Standards-Driven Alignment

Focus- Intertwines regulation, sustainability, and industrial strategy (e.g., Critical Raw Materials Act, European Battery Alliance).

Requirement- For meaningful progress, India must align with EU expectations on transparency, lifecycle standards, and environmental norms.

F. West Asia- Midstream Promise

Potential- Emerging as a key midstream processing partner.

Investments- UAE and Saudi Arabia are investing heavily in refining capacity, battery materials, and green hydrogen, with sovereign funds acquiring mining assets abroad.

Limitation- The region currently lacks deep institutional frameworks for long-term mineral cooperation.

G. Russia- A Hedge, not a Base

Assets- Substantial reserves of rare earths, cobalt, and lithium; strong scientific ties with India.

Limitations- Sanctions, financing constraints, and logistical uncertainty reduce dependability.

Role- Acts as a strategic hedge for diversification but cannot serve as the foundation of India's strategy.

4. New Frontiers and Emerging Partners

A. Latin America- Strategic Focus

Regions- Argentina, Chile, Peru, and increasingly Brazil (central for Copper, Nickel, Rare Earths).

Action- Increased public and private sector investment in exploration.

Key Milestone- Khanij Bidesh India Limited (KABIL) signed a ₹200 crore exploration and development agreement with Argentina.

Requirement- Strategy must move beyond extraction to include local processing and value-chain partnerships to counter intense competition.

B. Canada- The Emerging Partner

Status- Re-emerging as a key partner following the restoration of diplomatic ties.

Reserves- Significant holdings of Nickel, Cobalt, Copper, and Rare Earths.

Cooperation- A recent Trilateral Agreement (India-Australia-Canada) strengthens potential, though political stability remains crucial for long-term success.

5. The Way Forward- Developing Integrated Partnerships

A. Value Chain Strategy (Country-by-Country)

India must move beyond "ore securing" to a segmented strategy-

Upstream (Extraction)- Focus on Africa, Australia, Canada, Latin America.

Midstream (Processing Hubs)- Focus on West Asia (The Gulf) and Japan.

Downstream (Tech & Recycling)- Focus on the European Union and the United States.

Diversification- Maintain Russia as a hedge.

B. Processing Capacity

The Choke Point- Securing ore is insufficient; refining and midstream capacity is the real bottleneck.

Vulnerability- Without domestic refining, India remains vulnerable to supply-chain disruptions.

Focus- Prioritize technology, innovation, and on-ground execution over mere announcements.

C. Domestic Framework & ESG

Standards- Outcomes will be limited unless India strengthens its domestic framework for Responsible Mining.

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Global Norms- Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) standards and transparency are becoming decisive factors in global partnerships.

Conclusion

India has successfully built an impressive network of critical minerals partnerships, signaling strong strategic intent. The priority now must shift from expansion to execution—deepening effective arrangements, reassessing underperforming ones, and prioritizing technology acquisition and processing capacity. Only by ensuring supply certainty through the entire value chain can India translate its minerals diplomacy into durable energy security.

Source- https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/an-exploration-of-indias-minerals-diplomacy/article70510652.ece#google_vignette

2. US exit from several climate bodies can mean both relief, challenges for India (IE)

General Studies 3 - Environment

Topic- Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment; Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

Sub Topic- Climate Change Negotiations, Common but Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR), Clean Energy Transition, India & China's Role in Climate Action.

Climate Change and Global Responsibility

1. Introduction

Climate change stands as a defining challenge of the 21st century. While the global community has set ambitious targets for greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction and clean energy transition, progress is uneven due to disparities in historical emissions, financial resources, and technological capacity. The narrative centers on the tension between developed nations, who bear historical responsibility, and developing giants like India and China, who must balance rapid economic growth with environmental sustainability.

2. The Global Divide- Developed vs. Developing Countries

The core friction in global climate progress lies in the differing responsibilities and capabilities of nations.

Historical Responsibility vs. Current Contribution

Developing Nations (India/China)- Have limited historical responsibility for past emissions but are becoming major contributors due to rapid industrialization and urbanization.

Developed Nations- Bear high historical responsibility and possess superior financial/technological resources.

Expectations from Developed Economies

Fossil Fuel Phase-out- Must lead in reducing reliance on coal and expanding clean energy.

R&D Investment- Expected to invest heavily in advanced clean technologies.

Support Mechanisms- Crucial obligation to provide Climate Finance and Technology Transfer to the Global South.

The Action Gap

1. A significant lag exists in developed nations fulfilling financial commitments to poorer countries.
2. This gap forces developing nations to choose between accelerating clean energy adoption and maintaining economic growth stability.

3. India and China- Progress Amid Challenges

Both nations are pivotal to the global energy transition, facing the "twin tasks" of sustaining growth and curbing emissions.

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A. India's Strategic Approach

Ambitious Targets- India has set aggressive renewable energy targets, steadily increasing solar and wind capacity.

Innovation- Focus on distributed renewable systems and expanding energy access in both rural and urban sectors.

Diplomatic Stance- Champions the principle of Equity in global forums. India links climate mitigation with development rights, arguing for fairness in responsibility and support.

B. China's Climate Actions

Commitments- As the world's largest emitter, China has pledged to peak carbon emissions earlier than previously anticipated.

Manufacturing Leader- dominates the global supply chain for renewable technologies, specifically Solar Panels and Batteries.

Proof of Concept- China demonstrates that economic development and clean energy expansion can proceed concurrently.

C. Common Structural Challenges

Coal Dependence- Both nations continue to rely on coal for energy security and baseload industrial power.

Infrastructure Bottlenecks- Investment gaps in Energy Storage and modern Grid Infrastructure hinder the full integration of renewables.

Energy Efficiency- A pressing need exists to improve efficiency to reduce consumption without stifling growth.

4. The Role of Developed Countries

The text emphasizes that individual action is insufficient; collective responsibility is key.

Mitigation & Support- Developed nations must strengthen domestic mitigation while fulfilling promises of assistance.

CBDR Principle- The principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR) remains the bedrock of international negotiations. It dictates that contributions must align with a country's capabilities and historical culpability.

5. Way Forward for India

To successfully navigate this transition, India must adopt a multi-pronged strategy-

Renewable Expansion- Continue the aggressive push for solar and wind capacity addition.

Adaptation- Enhance strategies to protect vulnerable communities from climate impacts (adaptation vs. mitigation).

Global Advocacy- Push internationally for fair finance and equitable technology flows.

Conclusion

The transition to a green economy is not solely about emission reduction; it is fundamentally about supporting sustainable economic development globally. India and China play critical roles by sustaining their renewable transitions and pushing for equitable frameworks. Success depends on the international community recognizing the duality of this challenge—ensuring that climate action does not come at the cost of the developmental needs of the Global South.

Source- <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-climate/us-exit-climate-bodies-relief-challenges-india-10462603/>

Editorial of the Day – 16.01.2026**Index****1. Jana Nayagan controversy shows – film certification process is punishment (IE)****1. Jana Nayagan controversy shows – film certification process is punishment (IE)****General Studies 2– Polity**

Topic– Statutory, regulatory and various quasi-judicial bodies; Indian Constitution—historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments, significant provisions and basic structure.

Sub Topic– Fundamental Rights (Article 19), Censorship vs. Certification, Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC), Judicial Activism in Arts

Film Certification, Free Expression, and Democratic Maturity**1. Introduction**

Recurring controversies surrounding film certification in India have reignited the debate on the limits of freedom of expression. These disputes are not merely isolated cultural clashes but symptoms of a deeper institutional malaise– the tension between state regulation and creative liberty in a constitutional democracy. The central question is whether the state should act as a moral gatekeeper or a facilitator of informed choice.

2. Context and Background– Classification vs. Control

Original Intent– The Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) was originally conceived as a classification body. Its primary mandate was to guide audiences regarding age-appropriateness and content sensitivity (e.g., 'U', 'A', 'UA' ratings).

The Shift– Over time, the system has drifted from "certification" to "content control."

Current Reality– The CBFC often functions as a moral gatekeeper, imposing cuts, enforcing delays, or enacting *de facto* bans. This reflects an expanding regulatory mindset that prioritizes "perceived social order" over constitutional freedoms.

3. Core Constitutional Issue

The debate centers on the delicate balance between Fundamental Rights and State Restrictions–

Article 19(1)(a)– Guarantees the fundamental right to freedom of speech and expression.

Article 19(2)– Permitting "reasonable restrictions" in the interests of public order, decency, morality, or national security.

The Conflict– Restrictions must satisfy the tests of Reasonableness, Proportionality, and Necessity. Excessive intervention by the certification board often fails these tests, undermining the constitutional spirit.

4. Challenges in the Current System

The systemic inadequacies of the current framework include–

Subjective Decision-Making– Decisions are often driven by individual interpretations of morality or social sensitivity rather than objective, codified standards.

Lack of Transparency– Filmmakers frequently face arbitrary objections without clear, reasoned explanations, aggravating the sense of unfairness.

The "Chilling Effect"– The uncertainty of the process forces filmmakers into self-censorship. To avoid regulatory hurdles, artistic intent is diluted even before the film reaches the scrutiny stage.

Outdated Framework– The system fails to acknowledge the rising media literacy and critical capacity of modern Indian audiences, treating them with "moral paternalism."

Burden on Judiciary– The frequent need for courts to adjudicate certification disputes highlights the failure of the regulatory mechanism to resolve issues internally.

5. Constitutional and Democratic Perspective

Role of Citizens- A mature democracy must trust its citizens to engage critically with diverse, and even controversial, viewpoints.

Empowerment over Dictation- Certification should aim to empower viewers with information (content descriptors) rather than dictating what narratives are acceptable.

Democratic Resilience- Respecting creative freedom strengthens society by encouraging dialogue and dissent, rather than weakening the social fabric.

6. Global Practices

Mature Democracies- Most global jurisdictions favor classification over censorship.

Role of Boards- Film boards in these countries limit their role to providing age ratings and content warnings (e.g., violence, strong language), leaving the final choice to the viewer.

Philosophy- These systems acknowledge social pluralism and reject the state's role as a moral parent.

7. Suggested Reforms

To align the Indian framework with constitutional values, the following reforms are essential-

Objective Guidelines- Establish clear, narrowly defined, and objective guidelines to minimize subjective interpretation.

Independent Review- Create an independent and accountable review mechanism to check arbitrary decisions.

Shift to Certification- Move decisively away from the "censorship" model to a "viewer-oriented certification" model.

Time-Bound Process- Mandate time-bound decisions to prevent "indirect suppression" through indefinite delays.

Stakeholder Consultation- Institutionalize regular consultation with artists, filmmakers, and civil society.

8. Way Forward and Conclusion

Modernizing India's film certification framework is a test of its democratic maturity. A transparent, fair, and constitutionally grounded system is necessary to ensure that artistic expression flourishes. Social sensitivities should be addressed through reasoned engagement rather than coercive control. Ultimately, a democracy that is confident in its own stability does not need to fear the silver screen.

Source- <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/editorials/jana-nayagan-controversy-shows-film-certification-process-is-punishment-10476426/>

Editorial of the Day – 17.01.2026

Index

1. On mute- On the U.S., geopolitical turmoil, India's response (TH)

2. Indians are eating is changing. Farms that feed them need to as well (IE)

1. On mute- On the U.S., geopolitical turmoil, India's response (TH)

General Studies 2- Governance

Topic- Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests; India and its neighborhood- relations.

Sub Topic- India-US Relations, Strategic Autonomy, West Asia (Iran) Policy, Global Geopolitics & Unilateralism.

On Mute- The Cost of Strategic Silence

1. Introduction

India stands at a critical geopolitical crossroads amidst a rapidly shifting global order characterized by great-power rivalry and economic coercion. The article highlights India's current foreign policy dilemma- facing aggressive unilateral actions from the United States (under a renewed Trump administration in 2026), New Delhi has adopted a "muted" and cautious approach. The central argument is that India must balance its global ambitions and partnerships with a firm assertion of Strategic Autonomy to protect its national interests, rather than resorting to silence or appeasement.

2. Global Geopolitical Turmoil (The External Environment)

The new year (2026) has witnessed an escalation in geopolitical tensions driven by the U.S. administration's aggressive foreign policy

Unlawful Intervention- The U.S. has engaged in intervention in Venezuela, including the alleged kidnapping of its leadership, which breaches international law.

Regime Change Threats- Washington has issued threats of regime change against other South American nations (Cuba, Colombia).

Territorial Expansionism- There is open rhetoric regarding the annexation of Greenland, destabilizing established global norms.

3. Escalating U.S. Economic Coercion

The U.S. is utilising economic tools as weapons against rivals, which directly impacts India's strategic choices punitive Tariffs-Legislation is being considered to impose tariffs of up to 500% on countries importing Russian oil or uranium.

Pressure on Iran

- a. Intensified stance citing crackdowns on protesters.
- b. New sanctions and threats of military action.

Secondary Sanctions- President Trump has announced an additional 25% tariff on any country trading with Iran.

Targeting Strategic Assets- The U.S. is pressuring India to withdraw from the Chabahar Port project, a critical strategic asset for India's connectivity to Central Asia, despite significant financial investments already made.

4. India's Muted Response

In the face of these developments, New Delhi's diplomatic reactions have been notably restrained-

On Venezuela- The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) expressed only "deep concern" but stopped short of condemning the specific actions (kidnapping/breach of law).

On South America- Complete silence regarding threats to Cuba or Colombia, likely dismissed as non-strategic concerns.

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On Iran (The "Confusing" Silence)– Despite deep historical ties and proximity, the government has avoided commenting on U.S. threats or domestic protests in Iran.

Action Taken– Responses have been limited to issuing travel advisories for Iran and Israel and preparing evacuation plans for students.

Trade Policy– Officials have signaled a further reduction in trade with Iran, which is already at historical lows.

5. Rationale Behind India's Caution

The analysis suggests that India's reluctance to criticize the U.S. is driven by specific diplomatic calculations

1. Reviving Bilateral Ties– Hope to reset India–U.S. relations after a "tense year."
2. Trade Deal Expectations– Optimism regarding the resolution of the India–U.S. Bilateral Trade Agreement, encouraged by assurances from the U.S. Ambassador.
3. Technology Partnerships– Desire to secure inclusion in the U.S. high-technology partnership framework, 'Pax Silica'.
4. Risk Aversion– Policymakers fear that speaking out now would cause a dip in relations without offering immediate strategic gain.

6. The Costs of Strategic Silence

The article argues that this cautious approach has tangible negative consequences

Economic Strain– U.S. threats and tariffs are already hurting ordinary Indians and the broader economy.

Reputation Damage– Silence risks damaging India's global reputation as an independent power.

Diplomatic Strain– It places strain on other partnerships, particularly as India prepares to host the **BRICS+ Summit**, where members may view India's silence as alignment with Western unilateralism.

7. Lessons from the Past (2019 Precedent)

History serves as a warning against appeasement–

The 2019 Experience– India halted imports of Iranian and Venezuelan oil under U.S. pressure.

The Outcome– This "appeasement" did not safeguard India's interests; instead, it resulted in the loss of cheap energy sources and diplomatic leverage.

The Lesson– Yielding to pressure does not guarantee security; only a firm assertion of autonomy works.

8. Conclusion

The narrative concludes that silence and accommodation are ineffective strategies for a rising power.

Failure of Appeasement– Yielding to external pressure leads to economic loss and the erosion of policy independence.

The Way Forward– To protect sovereignty and strengthen global partnerships, India must act with **confidence and clarity**.

Final Imperative– A consistent assertion of Strategic Autonomy is essential to shape a balanced, multipolar world order rather than succumbing to dependence.

Source– <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/on-mute-on-the-us-geopolitical-turmoil-indias-response/article70515169.ece>

2. Indians are eating is changing. Farms that feed them need to as well (IE)

General Studies 3– Economy

Topic– Major crops cropping patterns in various parts of the country; marketing of agricultural produce; issues and related constraints.

Sub Topic– Food Security & Nutrition, Crop Diversification, MSP & Procurement Policy, Supply Chain Management.

Agriculture & Diet– Aligning Production with Changing Consumption

1. Introduction

India is undergoing a significant dietary transition driven by rising incomes, rapid urbanization, and evolving lifestyles. Consumption patterns are shifting away from a heavy dependence on traditional

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staples (rice and wheat) toward a more diverse basket including proteins (pulses, dairy), horticultural produce (fruits, vegetables), and millets. However, India's agricultural production systems and policy frameworks remain archaic, heavily biased towards cereals. This has created a structural disconnect between what Indian farms produce and what modern Indian consumers demand.

2. Background- The Legacy of Food Security

Historical Context- Post-Independence policy prioritized calorie security to prevent famine, successfully using instruments like Minimum Support Price (MSP), public procurement, and the Public Distribution System (PDS) for rice and wheat.

Current Rigidities- While these policies ensured basic food security, they have become rigid. They fail to respond to modern drivers such as higher disposable incomes, women's workforce participation, and increased nutritional awareness.

The Mismatch- Cropping patterns in 2026 continue to reflect 1970s incentives rather than current consumption realities.

3. Key Drivers of Change and Current Mismatch

Demand Shift- There is a clear move towards "high-value" agriculture—fruits, vegetables, dairy, and animal proteins—and "nutri-cereals" like millets.

Production Stagnation- Production remains cereal-centric.

Economic Impact- The gap is filled by imports (especially edible oils) or results in high price volatility (pulses), affecting inflation and food security.

Market Signals- Consumers are signaling a need for diversification, but farmers lack the supply chain support and price safety nets to respond.

4. Core Issues in the Current Framework

Policy Bias Toward Staples- MSP and procurement are effectively functional only for wheat and paddy. Lack of price assurance for pulses, oilseeds, and horticulture discourages farmers from shifting away from cereals.

Weak Post-Harvest Infrastructure- Perishable high-value crops suffer from inadequate cold storage and processing facilities. High post-harvest losses reduce farmer incomes and consumer availability.

Import Dependence (Edible Oils)- Domestic oilseed cultivation has declined relative to demand, leading to massive import bills. This exposes domestic food prices to international geopolitical and market fluctuations.

Fragmented Markets- Farmers lack integration with modern value chains. Price discovery mechanisms for non-cereal crops remain opaque and inefficient.

5. Challenges to Transition

Policy Realignment- Shifting the mammoth machinery of government support from cereals to a diversified basket is politically and administratively difficult.

Infrastructure Investment- Building the necessary cold chains and logistics for perishables requires massive capital.

Risk Mitigation- Farmers perceive high risks in shifting to new crops; ensuring their profitability during the transition is a major hurdle.

6. Proposed Solutions & Reforms

A. Reform MSP and Procurement

Expand Coverage- Extend effective price support and procurement to pulses, oilseeds, and millets.

Decentralization- Align procurement policies with regional consumption patterns (e.g., procuring millets in dryland states for local distribution).

B. Strengthen Agro-Infrastructure

Storage & Processing- heavily invest in cold storage and value-addition facilities to reduce wastage.

Financing- Leverage the Agriculture Infrastructure Fund (AIF) to build post-harvest assets at the farm gate.

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C. Demand-Responsive Farming

Digital Integration- Use platforms like eNAM (National Agriculture Market) for transparent price discovery.

Institutional Support- Encourage Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs) and contract farming to link small farmers directly to retail markets and processors.

D. Farmer Support & Climate Resilience

Transitional Safety Net- Use income support schemes (like PM-Kisan) and crop insurance to cushion farmers against the risks of diversification.

Sustainability- Promote water-efficient crops (millets/pulses) to address both nutritional needs and the water crisis, integrating these into the National Mission on Sustainable Agriculture.

7. Relevant Government Schemes

1. PM-Kisan Samman Nidhi- Direct income support to cushion financial risks.
2. Agriculture Infrastructure Fund (AIF)- Financing for post-harvest management infrastructure.
3. National Food Security Mission (NFSM)- Focuses on increasing the production of rice, wheat, pulses, coarse cereals, and nutri-cereals.

8. Way Forward and Conclusion

Aligning farm output with dietary changes is no longer optional—it is critical for India's nutritional security and economic stability.

Conclusion- A shift from "Food Security" (calories) to "Nutritional Security" (diet diversity) requires structural reforms in marketing and infrastructure.

Action Plan

- a. Launch aggressive Crop Diversification Programmes backed by research and credit.
- b. Conduct public awareness campaigns on sustainable consumption.
- c. Embed climate-resilient practices into the core national agricultural strategy to ensure that the diet shift is environmentally sustainable.

Source- <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/what-indians-are-eating-is-changing-farms-that-feed-them-need-to-as-well-10478454/>

Editorial of the Day – 19.01.2026

Index

1. Crisis in education- On the Supreme Court, higher education and student well-being (TH)

2. India has surpassed China in rice production.

But this love for paddy is not without pitfalls (IE)

1. Crisis in education- On the Supreme Court, higher education and student well-being (TH)

General Studies 2- Governance

Topic- Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests; India and its neighborhood- relations.

Sub Topic- Higher Education System in India, Governance in Higher Education, Judiciary (Judicial Activism/Intervention).

Crisis in Higher Education- Systemic Reforms and Supreme Court Intervention

1. Introduction

The Higher Education sector in India is currently facing a critical juncture characterized by deep-rooted systemic failures. The Supreme Court of India has recently intervened decisively in the matter of student suicides, identifying them not merely as isolated incidents but as symptoms of broader institutional decay. This decay is attributed to rapid privatization, inadequate institutional capacity, and persistent vacancies in faculty and governance roles.

2. Supreme Court Intervention on Student Suicides

The Court has issued firm directions to the Central and State governments to ensure accountability and transparency.

Context of Intervention- The directions stem from an ongoing case regarding student suicides.

Root Causes Identified

Unchecked Expansion- Rapid expansion of higher education driven largely by privatization without a corresponding improvement in educational quality.

Student Distress Factors- Acknowledgment of growing distress caused by

1. Financial pressures.
2. Social factors and social injustice.
3. Severe academic stress.

3. Constitutional Mechanisms and Specific Directions

To ensure these directions are not ignored, the Court invoked its extraordinary powers.

Use of Article 142- The Court invoked Article 142 of the Constitution to ensure the effective and mandatory implementation of its directions.

The Nine Directions

Data Management (7 Directions)- Focus on systematic record-keeping, mandatory reporting, tracking of student suicides, and ensuring separate data treatment for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).

Institutional Capacity (2 Directions)- Immediate filling of critical posts- Vice-Chancellors, Registrars, and Faculty. Explicit recognition that these administrative and academic roles are critical to maintaining student well-being.

4. The Crisis of Faculty Vacancies in Public HEIs

The shortage of human resources is a primary driver of institutional failure.

Magnitude of the Issue- Ground reports indicate approximately 50% faculty vacancies in many public universities across India.

Direct Impact- This chronic shortage directly compromises

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1. Teaching Quality- Overburdened existing staff and reliance on ad-hoc teachers.
2. Research Output- Stagnation in knowledge creation.
3. Student Support- Lack of adequate mentoring and support systems, which are crucial for preventing student distress.

5. Case Study- The Decline of the University of Madras

The University of Madras serves as a microcosm of the wider crisis affecting State-run HEIs.

A. Historical Significance

Legacy- A leading institution in Tamil Nadu, known for its high-quality research and conduct of examinations for affiliated colleges.

Regional Context- Tamil Nadu leads India in higher education enrolment and has a strong legacy of women's education.

Expansion- Teaching activities expanded significantly from the late 1970s.

B. Institutional Decline (Last Decade)

Staffing Crisis

Zero Appointments- No new faculty appointments have been made in the last decade.

Reduced Strength- Teaching strength has plummeted to nearly half of the sanctioned posts.

Erosion of Research Capacity

Weakened Centers- Once-prestigious centers for advanced studies in Philosophy, Botany, and Mathematics still exist but are functionally weakened.

Neglected Fields- Research in Humanities, Science, and Social Sciences has suffered.

Policy Gap- Research focused on Tamil Nadu, which is vital for evidence-based public policy, has been largely neglected.

6. Governance Paralysis and Appointment Bottlenecks

The inability to fill vacancies is exacerbated by administrative and political hurdles.

Vice-Chancellor Appointments- Stalled due to conflicts involving

- a. Recalcitrant Governors.
- b. Legal uncertainties following the Supreme Court's observations on a Presidential reference concerning the powers of Governors.

Faculty Recruitment Challenges

Procedural Delays- Recruitment must follow UGC-prescribed procedures, which typically require at least six months.

Financial Constraints- Demands substantial financial commitment, necessitating support from the Union government.

Talent and Integrity Issues

- a. Limited pool of qualified faculty.
- b. Issues of corruption in recruitment.
- c. Political or ideological appointments that weaken academic standards.

7. Conclusion and Way Forward

The Supreme Court has set a demanding four-month timeline for compliance, serving as a wake-up call for the education sector.

Prerequisites for National Goals- Rebuilding institutional foundations is not optional. Adequate staffing, effective governance, and robust research ecosystems are essential prerequisites.

Risk to Vision- Without these systemic reforms, ambitious national visions like 'Viksit Bharat' (Developed India) risk remaining purely aspirational rather than achievable.

Final Imperative- Student well-being is intrinsically linked to sound governance. Restoring academic integrity and strengthening public universities are urgent necessities.

Source- <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/crisis-in-education-on-the-supreme-court-higher-education-and-student-well-being/article70522242.ece>

2. India has surpassed China in rice production. But this love for paddy is not without pitfalls (IE)

General Studies 3– Economy

Topic– Major crops–cropping patterns in various parts of the country; Transport and marketing of agricultural produce and issues and related constraints; Food processing and related industries.

Sub Topic– Food Security, Public Distribution System (PDS), Buffer Stocks, Agricultural Exports, and Environmental Impact of Agriculture.

India's Record Rice Output– Agricultural Triumph and Policy Implications

1. Introduction

India has achieved a historic milestone in the 2024–25 agricultural year by producing approximately 150.18 million tonnes of rice, surpassing China's output of 145.28 million tonnes. This achievement firmly positions India as the world's largest rice producer. This record output is not just a statistical victory but a testament to long-term improvements in agronomy, irrigation, and institutional support, signaling a major shift in global food supply chain dynamics where India is now a central pillar.

2. Driving Factors Behind Record Output

The surge in production is the result of a convergence of climatic, technological, and institutional factors

Favourable Monsoons– The 2024 monsoon season provided adequate and well-distributed rainfall. This created ideal conditions for paddy cultivation in major rice-bowls of India– West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Punjab, and Andhra Pradesh.

Expanded Cultivation Area– The net sown area for rice has increased, driven by positive market signals.

Institutional Support– Assured government procurement at Minimum Support Prices (MSP) incentivized farmers to dedicate more land to paddy.

High-Yielding Varieties (HYV)

Scientific Innovation– Collaborative efforts by the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) and state universities have led to the adoption of superior seed varieties.

Recent Release– 184 new crop varieties across 25 crops were recently released, significantly boosting per-hectare productivity.

Technology and Mechanisation

- Enhanced access to fertilizers and pesticides.
- Increased mechanization of farm operations (sowing, harvesting).
- Improved irrigation infrastructure reducing dependency on erratic weather in some regions.

3. Economic and Policy Significance

This surplus production has dual implications—strengthening domestic stability while enhancing global influence.

A. Food Security and Domestic Stability

Buffer Stocks– The record output ensures robust buffer stocks for the government.

Social Welfare– It secures the supply chain for the National Food Security Act (NFSA), allowing the government to provide subsidized food grains to vulnerable populations without fear of shortage.

B. Export Competitiveness and Global Impact

Global Leadership– India is the leading global exporter of rice.

Export Surge– Following the removal of export curbs, rice exports rebounded by approximately 19.4%, reaching 21.55 million tonnes in 2025.

Geopolitical Soft Power

- Price Stabilizer–** Abundant Indian supplies dampen global food inflation.
- Market Share–** India has reclaimed markets in Asia and Africa, benefiting net food-importing nations with lower costs.

4. Challenges from Surplus (The Problem of Plenty)

Paradoxically, record production brings its own set of economic and logistical challenges.

Excess Stocks & Storage Crisis-

- Government granaries hold reserves far exceeding the strategic buffer norms.
- This increases carrying costs (storage, maintenance, wastage) and strains infrastructure.

Price Deflation- Oversupply leads to a crash in domestic and international market prices.

Farmer Distress- Without effective MSP intervention, open market prices may fall below the cost of production, squeezing farmer incomes.

5. Policy Responses to Manage Surplus

To manage the "excess," the government has pivoted from restriction to liberalization and diversification.

Export Policy Adjustments

reversal of Restrictions- The government lifted export bans/curbs, allowing free shipment to clear domestic stockpiles.

Ethanol Blending Programme (EBP)

- Diversion for Fuel- Surplus rice stocks are being diverted for ethanol production.
- Dual Benefit- This reduces the storage burden on the Food Corporation of India (FCI) while helping India meet its renewable fuel targets.

Procurement Strategy- Continued procurement at MSP acts as a safety net to prevent a price crash for farmers, despite the fiscal pressure it puts on the exchequer.

6. Impact on Rural Economy

Income Boost- Higher yields generally translate to higher income, provided price stability is maintained via MSP.

Employment Generation- The boom stimulates allied sectors including transportation, warehousing, milling, and export logistics.

Risk- If demand (export or domestic) lags behind supply, farm-gate prices could collapse, necessitating state intervention.

7. Environmental and Sustainability Concerns

The focus on quantity has raised serious ecological questions that need addressing for long-term viability.

Water Intensity- Rice is a water-guzzling crop; intensive cultivation depletes groundwater tables, especially in semi-arid regions like Punjab and Haryana.

Methane Emissions- Flooded paddy fields are a significant source of methane, a potent greenhouse gas.

Need for Reform- The current success relies heavily on resource-intensive practices that may not be sustainable.

8. Conclusion and Way Forward

India's emergence as the top rice producer is a victory for its agricultural policies and scientific capabilities. However, to sustain this without ecological or economic collapse, the following measures are essential-

Market Diversification- Aggressively expand export markets and promote value-added rice products (e.g., rice bran oil, processed foods) to absorb surplus.

Ethanol Utilization- Scale up rice-to-ethanol infrastructure to responsibly manage buffer stocks.

Sustainable Farming- Promote System of Rice Intensification (SRI) and Direct Seeding of Rice (DSR) to save water. Encourage crop diversification away from rice in water-stressed areas.

Price Stability Mechanisms- Implement robust crop insurance, calibrate MSP scientifically, and use demand forecasting to protect farmers from volatile price cycles.

Source- <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-economics/india-has-surpassed-china-in-rice-production-but-this-love-for-paddy-is-not-without-pitfalls-10475138/>

Editorial of the Day – 20.01.2026**Index****1. Fractured Yemen- On the Persian Gulf region's geopolitical fault line (TH)****2. America's Greenland claim could mean for NATO, Russia, and Canada (IE)****1. Fractured Yemen- On the Persian Gulf region's geopolitical fault line (TH)****General Studies 2- International Relation**

Topic- Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests.

Sub Topic- Regional stability in the Middle East (West Asia); Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

Introduction

The recent resurgence of violence in Yemen has exposed the deep-seated political fragmentation within the country and the widening geopolitical rift between Gulf powerhouses. The conflict has evolved beyond the original civil war into a proxy struggle involving the Saudi-backed Yemeni government and the UAE-supported Southern Transitional Council (STC). This internal discord threatens to dismantle state institutions further and exacerbate one of the world's most severe humanitarian crises.

1. Background to the Crisis

Internal Fragility- The renewed clashes highlight the inability of Yemen's central institutions to hold the country together.

Gulf Rivalries- The conflict is no longer just internal but serves as a theater for the divergent interests of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

Geopolitical Fault Lines- The confrontation has revealed deep cracks in the traditional alliances within the Gulf region.

2. Escalation of Fighting (Early December)

STC Offensive- The Southern Transitional Council (STC) launched a surprise military offensive targeting key oil-rich governorates

- a. Hadhramaut
- b. Al-Mahra

Temporary Gains- The STC managed to briefly capture nearly half of the territory formerly known as South Yemen.

Government Counter-Attack- The Saudi-backed government forces responded swiftly. With the aid of Saudi air power, they successfully reclaimed the territories lost to the STC.

3. Critical Developments in Aden (January 7)

Reclaiming the Capital- Government troops successfully entered Aden (the interim capital), forcing the STC into a defensive position.

Diplomatic Intervention- The military pressure compelled the STC to send a delegation to Riyadh for negotiations.

Dissolution and Treason

- a. Outcome in Riyadh- The STC announced its dissolution.
- b. Leadership Crisis- STC leader Aidarous al-Zoubaidi was charged with treason and reportedly fled to the UAE to escape prosecution.

4. Saudi-UAE Tensions

The conflict has strained the relationship between the two Gulf allies, Riyadh and Abu Dhabi.

Accusations- Saudi Arabia explicitly accused the UAE of arming Yemeni separatists to undermine the central government.

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Military Action (Mukalla)– Saudi forces conducted air strikes on the Mukalla port, allegedly targeting weapons shipments intended for the separatists.

UAE Withdrawal– Following a rare public rebuke from Saudi Arabia, the UAE declared two major shifts

1. A withdrawal of its forces from Yemen.
2. An official end to its counterterrorism operations in the country.

5. Shifting Alliances in the War

The alliances have evolved significantly since the conflict began in 2014.

Initial Coalition– Originally, the UAE joined the Saudi-led coalition to fight the Houthis (Ansar Allah) after they seized Sanaa in 2014.

Houthi Resilience– Despite years of war, the Houthis remained militarily strong and resilient.

Diverging Strategies

UAE– Shifted focus to backing the separatists (STC) in the south, challenging the central government.

Saudi Arabia– Facing direct security threats on its southern border, Riyadh pursued a dual strategy—seeking a ceasefire with the Houthis in the north while attempting to stabilize the south through the recognized government.

6. Consequences on the Ground

Houthi Consolidation– The infighting between the government and the STC in the south created a power vacuum, allowing the Houthis to consolidate control over northern Yemen, including major population centers.

Humanitarian Catastrophe– Civilians continue to bear the brunt of the conflict. Yemen faces

- a. Acute famine risks.
- b. Total economic collapse.
- c. Destruction of critical infrastructure.

Current Situation and Way Forward

The Status Quo

Uneasy Calm– A fragile peace currently exists in southern Yemen.

Lingering Tensions– despite the official dissolution, STC representatives in the UAE deny that the council has truly disbanded, suggesting potential for future insurgency.

The Path to Stability

Federal Governance– Sustainable peace relies on creating a federal governance framework. This must

- a. Reflect current power realities.
- b. Address historical grievances of all factions.

Gulf Cooperation– Saudi Arabia and the UAE must reconcile their strategic differences.

- a. They must prioritize long-term stability over regional rivalry.
- b. Active facilitation of dialogue among all Yemeni factions is required.

Conclusion

Lasting peace in Yemen is contingent upon an inclusive political process that integrates all factions into a viable federal structure. The "Fractured Yemen" scenario demonstrates that military solutions are insufficient; success depends on the ability of external actors—specifically Saudi Arabia and the UAE—to align their strategies. Only through coordinated efforts can the conflict be reduced, enabling humanitarian recovery and a transition toward sustainable regional security.

Source– <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/fractured-yemen-on-the-persian-gulf-regions-geopolitical-fault-line/article70525927.ece>

2. America's Greenland claim could mean for NATO, Russia, and Canada (IE)

General Studies 2- International Relation

Topic- Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora.

Sub Topic- Important International institutions, agencies and fora - their structure, mandate (NATO); Geopolitics of the Arctic Region.

Introduction

The geopolitical landscape of the Arctic is undergoing a seismic shift driven by renewed US interest in acquiring Greenland, an autonomous territory within the Kingdom of Denmark. Recent escalations in rhetoric and policy proposals by US President Donald Trump regarding the control of Greenland have sparked significant concerns about NATO's cohesion and the strategic balance with Russia. Situated at the crossroads of North America and the Arctic, Greenland's strategic value—ranging from resource potential to military surveillance—has made it a focal point of intense competition. This analysis explores the implications of such a move on the transatlantic alliance and the broader great power rivalry in the region.

Detailed Analysis & Developments

1. Context and Background

The Proposal- US President Donald Trump has actively pushed for the US to acquire control over Greenland, citing the need to counter foreign influence.

Sovereignty Status- Greenland is an autonomous territory under the Kingdom of Denmark. Denmark has firmly rejected the notion of a sale or cession, emphasizing self-determination.

Strategic Driver- The move is driven by the intensifying race for the Arctic, where melting ice is opening up new shipping routes, resource deposits, and arenas for military competition.

2. Strategic Significance of Greenland

Geopolitical Leverage

Surveillance Reach- Offers a prime location for enhanced surveillance capabilities (radars, listening posts) over the entire Arctic region.

Proximity to Rivals- Provides a forward operating base closer to Russian military deployments in the High North.

Resource Access- Potential access to vast, untapped deposits of critical minerals and rare earth elements essential for modern technology and defense (reducing reliance on China).

Military Basis

Existing Infrastructure- The US already operates Thule Air Base (now Pituffik Space Base), the US military's northernmost installation.

Early Warning Systems- It is a critical component of the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) for ballistic missile early warning systems protecting the US mainland.

3. Trump's Position and Actions

Unilateral Ambition- President Trump insists the US must control Greenland "one way or the other," framing it as a "large real estate deal" vital for national security.

Justification- He claims Denmark is failing to adequately check growing Russian and Chinese influence/investment in the territory.

Coercive Tactics

Economic Threats- Threatened to impose tariffs on European NATO allies if they oppose the US move.

Use of Force- Refused to explicitly rule out the use of force, breaking diplomatic norms and stoking international tension.

4. Impacts on NATO– A Fractured Alliance

Threat to Cohesion

Danish Stance– Denmark views the proposal as an insult to its sovereignty and warns that coercive moves could irreparably damage transatlantic ties.

Allied Unity– Other NATO members have rallied behind Denmark, rejecting unilateral US takeover ideas and reaffirming that Greenland's defense is a collective responsibility.

Undermining Norms

Trust Erosion– An attempt by one NATO member to annex the territory of another fundamentally violates the core principles of trust and reciprocity essential to the alliance.

Trade-Security Rift– Linking trade tariffs to security policy risks creating deep divisions, weakening the operational unity required for collective defense.

Operational Risks

Complicated Coordination– Unilateral US moves could disrupt joint exercises like *Operation Arctic Endurance*, making it harder to present a united front against adversaries.

5. Russia's Role and Reaction

Strategic Opportunism

Observing the Rift– Russia is keenly observing the internal NATO discord. A fractured alliance reduces the unified pressure on Moscow regarding its own Arctic expansion.

Reduced Negotiation Pressure– NATO infighting may reduce pressure on Moscow to negotiate cooperative Arctic security measures.

Exploiting Divisions

Diplomatic Wedges– Russia may use the division to strengthen ties with specific Nordic nations or other European states alienated by US aggression.

Energy Leverage– Weakened Western unity could allow Russia to advance its energy and resource interests with less resistance.

Economic Fallout

Global Instability– Transatlantic trade disputes could destabilize global markets, affecting energy, shipping, and mining sectors.

Pivot from US– European nations might be incentivized to seek alternative security or economic partnerships, reducing US influence in Europe.

6. Risks and Challenges

Military Escalation– A coercive attempt could theoretically trigger defensive deployments by Denmark and NATO, leading to an unprecedented intra-alliance standoff.

Credibility Loss– Public infighting reduces NATO's deterrence credibility in the eyes of adversaries like Russia and China.

Legal Obstacles

International Law– Forced annexation violates the UN Charter and principles of self-determination.

Sanctions– Such a move would likely invite international sanctions and legal challenges, isolating the US diplomatically.

Possible Solutions and Way Forward

Diplomatic & Cooperative Pathways

Respect for Sovereignty– The US must return to diplomatic norms, respecting Danish sovereignty while addressing security concerns through established channels.

Multilateral Frameworks– Utilize the Arctic Council and NATO mechanisms to collaboratively manage Russian presence and monitor Chinese investment, rather than acting unilaterally.

Economic Partnership– Instead of annexation, the US and NATO should support Greenland-led development through infrastructure investment and economic cooperation, securing influence through partnership rather than coercion.

Conclusion

The US ambition to control Greenland highlights the deepening great power rivalry in the Arctic, but pursuing it through coercion risks shattering NATO cohesion. The path forward requires a delicate balance- protecting alliance norms and respecting sovereignty while advancing a coordinated strategy to counter Russian and Chinese influence. How NATO navigates this internal crisis will define the resilience of the transatlantic alliance and the security architecture of the Arctic for the coming decade.

Source- <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-global/contradictions-america-greenland-nato-russia-10480857/>



Editorial of the Day – 21.01.2026**Index****1. Augean mess- On the SIR and the genuine voter (TH)****2. Secondary Particulate Matter (Secondary PM) (IE)****1. Augean mess- On the SIR and the genuine voter (TH)****General Studies 2- Governance**

Topic- Appointment to various Constitutional posts, powers, functions and responsibilities of various Constitutional Bodies.

Sub Topic- Election Commission of India (ECI); Electoral Reforms; Issues arising out of the electoral process; Salient features of the Representation of People's Act.

Introduction

The editorial "Augean Mess" critiques the Election Commission of India's (ECI) ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls. While the administrative objective was to ensure the accuracy and integrity of voter lists by removing duplicates and errors, the actual outcome has been the widespread disenfranchisement of genuine voters across 12 States. The process has become so flawed that it has necessitated judicial intervention, raising fundamental questions about administrative fairness and the protection of the constitutional right to Universal Adult Franchise.

1. Concerns over the SIR Process

Systemic Flaws- The SIR is currently in the "claims and corrections" phase. However, rather than functioning as a precise tool to clean the rolls, it has acted as a "dragnet," indiscriminately trapping and removing genuine voters.

Widespread Impact- The scale and nature of complaints arising from 12 different States indicate that these issues are systemic failures of the process, not merely incidental errors.

2. Supreme Court Intervention

Judicial Directive- The Supreme Court was forced to intervene, directing the ECI to "ease the strain and stress" faced by millions of voters, with specific reference to the situation in West Bengal.

Root Causes of Errors- The erroneous verification notices sent to voters were attributed to

Outdated Data- The use of the 2002 electoral list for voter mapping, which is obsolete.

Technological Failure- Technical glitches in software that was deployed hastily without adequate testing.

Precedent- This follows similar judicial corrective guidelines issued previously to mitigate voter hardship in Bihar.

3. Lessons from Bihar's SIR

Temporary Relief- In Bihar, the Court permitted the use of Aadhaar as an additional identity document to provide relief to electors facing exclusion.

Gender Bias Anomaly- A disturbing pattern emerged in the final voter rolls where more women electors were deleted than men, pointing to deep-seated flaws in the verification methodology.

Unaddressed Irregularities- Independent analyses by *The Hindu* of deleted lists in Bihar, Tamil Nadu, and West Bengal revealed irregular patterns. Despite these findings warranting deeper scrutiny, the ECI offered no response.

4. Tamil Nadu's Alarming Deletions

Aggressive Deletion- The deletion drive in certain booths was so aggressive that it resulted in a statistical impossibility. The sum of (Votes cast in 2024) + (Deleted names) exceeded the Original Electorate.

Implication- This mathematically proves that voters who actually exercised their franchise in the 2024 General Election have been subsequently removed from the rolls.

Erasure vs. Correction- Instead of deduplicating entries, the flawed exercise often led to the complete erasure of elector names.

5. Flaws in the 'Claims and Corrections' Phase

Illogical Burden on Voters- While lakhs of citizens are trying to restore their names, the ECI insists they register afresh using Form 6.

Procedural Issues

Misclassification- This approach treats long-standing voters as new entrants to the system.

Lack of Accountability- By forcing fresh registration, the ECI prevents an audit of exactly how many genuine voters were wrongly deleted in the first place.

6. The Uttar Pradesh Mismatch

Data Discrepancy- A staggering mismatch was discovered by the State Election Commission while preparing rolls for rural local body elections.

The Anomaly- The rural electorate alone was found to exceed the ECI's total voter count for the entire State in its draft rolls.

Integrity Questioned- Such a massive discrepancy raises serious doubts regarding the ECI's data integrity and the methodology used for the revision.

7. Broader Constitutional Implications

Delayed Judicial Review- By failing to rule early on the constitutionality of "aggressive self-enumeration," the Supreme Court is now left managing the fallout of a deeply flawed exercise.

Threat to Franchise- What was intended to be a routine administrative task—cleaning the rolls—has morphed into a process that threatens the bedrock of democracy—Universal Adult Franchise.

Conclusion and Way Forward

The debate has shifted from a technical discussion on "cleaning electoral rolls" to a core democratic concern—Are genuine voters being systematically scrubbed out of democracy? The ongoing SIR exercise highlights a troubling shift from electoral cleansing to voter exclusion. To preserve the legitimacy of Indian elections, the process requires immediate transparency, accountability, and corrective oversight. The ECI must ensure that administrative zeal to refine lists does not come at the cost of the fundamental right to vote.

Source- <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/augean-mess-on-the-sir-and-the-genuine-voter/article70529525.ece>

2. Secondary Particulate Matter (Secondary PM) (IE)

General Studies 3—Environment

Topic- Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment

Sub Topic- Air Pollution (PM_{2.5} and PM₁₀), Management of Air Quality, Government Policies (NCAP, CAQM), and Environmental Chemistry.

Introduction

India's battle against winter air pollution is undergoing a critical paradigm shift. While traditional narratives focus on visible sources like stubble burning and vehicular smoke, scientific evidence now indicates that a significant portion of winter pollution is dominated by Secondary Particulate Matter (Secondary PM). These are pollutants formed not by direct emissions, but through complex chemical reactions in the atmosphere involving precursor gases. This realization demands a fundamental restructuring of regulatory frameworks, moving from "visual pollution control" to "chemical precursor management."

1. Understanding the Shift— From Primary to Secondary Pollution

Traditional View- Air pollution was historically attributed to visible primary sources

- a. Vehicular tailpipe emissions.
- b. Crop residue (stubble) burning.
- c. Construction dust and industrial smoke.

Scientific Reality– During winter, a major fraction of PM_{2.5} is secondary in nature.

Mechanism– It forms in the atmosphere when precursor gases chemically interact.

Key Precursors– Sulphur Dioxide (SO_2), Nitrogen Oxides (NO_x), and Ammonia (NH_3).

The Catalyst (Meteorology)– Winter conditions amplify this chemical process through

- a. Temperature Inversion– Traps pollutants close to the ground.
- b. Low Wind Speed– Prevents dispersion of pollutants.
- c. High Humidity– Accelerates the chemical reactions that create secondary particles.

2. Sources of Precursor Gases

Power Plants & Industry– Major sources of Sulphur Dioxide (SO_2) and Nitrogen Oxides (NO_x).

Vehicles– Significant contributors to NO_x .

Agriculture– A critical but often overlooked source of Ammonia (NH_3).

Origin– High usage of urea/fertilizers and livestock emissions.

Impact– Ammonia reacts with acidic gases to form secondary aerosols (ammonium sulfate and ammonium nitrate).

3. Critical Issues in Current Strategy

Policy Mismatch– Regulations disproportionately target visible sources (dust, smoke) while neglecting invisible chemical precursors.

Reactive measures– heavy reliance on emergency responses (GRAP stages, odd-even schemes, construction bans) rather than preventive emission control.

Regulatory Gaps

- a. Inadequate regulation of agricultural ammonia emissions.
- b. Weak enforcement of industrial emission standards.

Monitoring Deficits– Limited real-time monitoring infrastructure for gaseous pollutants compared to PM monitoring.

4. Multi-dimensional Challenges

Scientific Challenges

- a. Policymakers often lack understanding of secondary aerosol chemistry.
- b. Attributing pollution to specific sectors is difficult due to the complex atmospheric mixing of gases.

Institutional Challenges

Siloed Approach– Lack of coordination between Pollution Control Boards (PCBs), Agriculture Departments, and Urban Local Bodies.

Outdated Frameworks– Rules have not evolved to match new scientific insights on secondary PM.

Economic Challenges

High Transition Costs– Industries face high costs adopting cleaner tech (e.g., Flue Gas Desulphurization).

Agricultural Resistance– Farmers fear livelihood losses if fertilizer use is restricted without alternatives.

Governance Challenges

- a. Absence of legally binding emission caps for precursor gases at regional levels.
- b. Governance is city-centric, ignoring the regional nature of air sheds.

5. Dimensions of Impact

Environmental

- a. Ecosystem stress due to acid deposition.
- b. Climate forcing– Secondary aerosols and black carbon contribute to regional warming/cooling patterns.

Health

1. PM_{2.5} Toxicity– Deep lung penetration causes respiratory and cardiovascular diseases.
2. Vulnerability– Disproportionate impact on children, the elderly, and the urban poor.

Economic

- a. Productivity losses due to health-related absenteeism.
- b. Escalating public healthcare expenditure.

Social

Environmental Injustice- Lower socio-economic groups often live in areas with higher exposure but have the least resources to mitigate it.

Solutions & Way Forward

1. Strategic Policy Measures

Target Precursors- Shift focus from monitoring PM concentration to actively reducing SO₂, NO and NH₃ emissions.

Sector-wise Standards- Implement strict emission standards for precursor gases across industry, transport, and agriculture.

Policy Integration- Air quality goals must be embedded into national Energy (power plant emissions) and Agriculture (fertilizer policy) policies.

2. Technological Interventions

Power Sector- Mandatory and expedited adoption of Flue Gas Desulphurization (FGD) technology in thermal power plants to cut SO₂.

Transport- Accelerate Electric Mobility (EVs) and adoption of cleaner fuels (BS-VI).

Agriculture- Promote Precision Agriculture to optimize fertilizer use, thereby reducing ammonia emissions.

3. Institutional & Governance Reforms

Airshed Approach- Move from city-centric plans to Regional Airshed Governance (treating the entire Indo-Gangetic Plain as one airshed).

Empower CAQM- Strengthen the Commission for Air Quality Management to enforce inter-state coordination.

Fiscal Federalism- Link central fiscal transfers to states with tangible pollution reduction targets.

4. Data & Monitoring

Real-time Gas Monitoring- Mandate the monitoring of gaseous precursors alongside PM₁₀/PM_{2.5}.

Advanced Modelling- Utilize satellite data and AI-based modelling for accurate pollution forecasting and source apportionment.

5. Behavioural Change

- a. Farmer Awareness- Campaigns linking fertilizer overuse to local air pollution and health.
- b. Household Transition- Incentivize the shift to cleaner household energy to reduce indoor precursors.

Conclusion

Resolving India's air pollution crisis requires looking beyond the smoke. The battle against Secondary Particulate Matter demands a transition from episodic "firefighting" to structural, science-driven reform. By targeting the invisible chemistry of the atmosphere—specifically precursor gases like ammonia and sulphates—and adopting a multi-sectoral, airshed-based approach, India can break the cycle of seasonal health emergencies and move toward sustainable urban living.

Source- <https://indianexpress.com/todays-paper/2026/01/21/>

Editorial of the Day – 22.01.2026

Index

1. Lowering the age of juvenility for crimes is a step back (TH)

2. Supreme Court for free digital oversight body, but the 'how' wide open (IE)

1. Lowering the age of juvenility for crimes is a step back (TH)

General Studies 2– Social Justice

Topic– Mechanisms, laws, institutions, and Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of vulnerable sections.

Sub Topic– Issues relating to children; Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

Critical Analysis of Lowering the Age of Juvenility

Introduction

The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015, marked a paradigm shift in India's legal framework by introducing a "transfer system" allowing children aged 16–18 accused of heinous crimes to be tried as adults. A new Private Member's Bill (introduced in December 2025) now proposes further lowering this threshold from 16 to 14 years. This proposal raises significant debates regarding the balance between retributive justice (punishment) and rehabilitative justice (reform), challenging the foundational principles of child rights and protection.

1. The Proposed Legislative Change

The Amendment– The Bill seeks to amend the JJ Act to treat children aged 14–15 years as adults if accused of "heinous offences."

Definition of Heinous Offence– Crimes that carry a minimum punishment of seven years' imprisonment or more.

Immediate Consequence– If passed, young adolescents (14–15) would face adult criminal trials and potential incarceration in adult prisons, stripping them of the protective shield of the juvenile system.

2. Philosophical and Legal Flaws

Shift from Reform to Retribution– The Indian juvenile justice system was historically built on the premise that children are developmentally distinct from adults and possess a unique capacity for reform. The 2015 Act (post-2012 Delhi gang rape) diluted this by prioritizing punitive measures over care and reintegration.

Lack of Empirical Support– The Parliamentary Standing Committee had previously opposed the introduction of the transfer system, noting it was inconsistent with both domestic needs and international justice standards. The shift assumes "adult-like" criminal intent without scientific backing regarding adolescent brain development.

3. Arbitrariness in the 'Transfer System'

Subjectivity in Assessment– Currently, 16–18-year-olds undergo a preliminary assessment by the Juvenile Justice Board (JJB) to determine if they should be tried as adults. These assessments rely on vague criteria like "mental capacity" or "understanding consequences," which diverts focus from the child's social context and developmental reality.

Lack of Scientific Tools– There are no reliable psychological tools to retrospectively assess a child's mental state at the time of the offence. Decisions are often influenced by irrelevant factors, such as the child's demeanour during arrest (e.g., lack of visible tears) or expressions of fear, leading to inconsistent outcomes.

Risk of Expansion– Extending this flawed system to 14-year-olds would entrench institutional arbitrariness at an even more vulnerable developmental stage.

4. Data Analysis- Myth vs. Reality (NCRB 2023)

The Narrative- Proponents argue that serious crimes by 14–16-year-olds are rising, necessitating deterrence.

The Data Refutation

Low Volume- Cases involving *Children in Conflict with the Law* (CICL) accounted for only **0.5%** of total crimes in India.

Age Distribution- Of all apprehended CICLs, 79% were aged 16–18. Only 21% fell into the 12–16 age bracket.

Conclusion- The data contradicts the claim that younger adolescents (14–16) are primary drivers of serious crime, making the legislation a reaction to perceived fear rather than statistical reality.

5. Structural Vulnerability and Systemic Failure

Socio-Economic Roots- Adolescent offending is frequently a result of poverty, neglect, and social inequality rather than inherent "criminal intent."

Dual Status- Many CICLs are simultaneously "children in need of care and protection," indicating a failure of the state to provide basic welfare before the crime occurred.

Consequences of Adult System

Disrupted Development- Exposure to adult criminal processes halts education and harms cognitive/psychological growth.

Stigma- It creates permanent social stigma, hindering reintegration.

Illegal Detention- Despite existing safeguards, children are often illegally detained in adult jails, proving that the system struggles to enforce current laws, let alone new, stricter ones.

6. Way Forward- Fix the System, Not the Child

Prioritize Prevention- The focus must shift from criminalizing childhood vulnerability to early intervention and strengthening family/educational support systems.

Mental Health Infrastructure- Accessible mental health care is required to address behavioral issues before they escalate to crime.

Uphold Child Rights- Blurring the line between childhood and adulthood violates the principle of the "best interests of the child" and equality before the law.

Systemic Accountability- Instead of punishing children for the state's failure to protect them, reforms should focus on strengthening institutions designed to support at-risk youth.

Conclusion

The solution to juvenile crime does not lie in stripping children of legal protection. Treating systemic failures—such as lack of education, poverty, and weak support structures—as grounds for harsher punishment shifts the burden onto those least capable of bearing it. Meaningful reform requires strengthening the community systems designed to support children before harm occurs, rather than lowering the age of incarceration.

Source- <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/lowering-the-age-of-juvenility-for-crimes-is-a-step-back/article70534626.ece>

2. Supreme Court for free digital oversight body, but the 'how' wide open (IE)

General Studies 2- Governance

Topic- Indian Constitution—historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments, significant provisions (Fundamental Rights); Statutory, regulatory and various quasi-judicial bodies.

Sub Topic- Freedom of Speech and Expression; Media Regulation; Communal Harmony and Public Order; Challenges to internal security through communication networks (GS III intersection).

Regulating Media – Balancing Freedom of Speech and Communal Harmony

1. Introduction

Context- In the last three years, Indian regulatory authorities have issued numerous orders to TV and digital news platforms. Significantly, nearly 60% of these orders cited violations of the communal code.

The Core Conflict- This statistic highlights the friction between two democratic pillars-

1. Individual Liberty- Freedom of speech and expression (Article 19(1)(a)).
2. Societal Stability- Maintenance of communal harmony and public order.

New Challenges- The explosion of digital platforms has complicated accountability, creating a media landscape where information travels faster than regulation can manage.

2. Constitutional and Legal Framework

The Guarantee (Article 19(1)(a))- Ensures the right to freedom of speech and expression for all citizens.

Acts as the bedrock of democracy, empowering the media to function as a "watchdog" over governance and society.

The Restrictions (Article 19(2))- Freedom is not absolute. The State can impose "reasonable restrictions" in the interest of

1. Public order (crucial for communal harmony).
2. Security of the State.
3. Friendly relations with foreign states.
4. Decency or morality.
5. Contempt of court and Defamation.

Institutional Mechanisms-

News Broadcasting & Digital Standards Authority (NBDSA)- An independent body that enforces ethical codes for broadcast and digital media. It handles complaints and issues directives/fines for violations.

Press Council of India (PCI)- A statutory body that governs print media, upholding journalistic standards and addressing grievances regarding misconduct.

3. Media's Role in Communal Harmony

The Dual Nature of Media- Media acts as a double-edged sword in a diverse society like India.

Constructive Role

- a) Disseminates information on government policies and development.
- b) educates citizens on rights and social justice.
- c) Exposes corruption and holds power accountable.

Destructive Potential

Sensationalism- Creating "breaking news" hysteria often biases coverage, which can inadvertently or deliberately inflame communal passions.

Digital Amplification- social media and digital news platforms can amplify unverified rumors and misinformation instantly.

Velocity of News- The race to be "first" often bypasses verification, leading to the rapid spread of checked, potentially dangerous narratives.

4. Analysis of Regulatory Data

Significance of the "60%" Statistic- The high volume of communal code violations suggests a systemic issue rather than isolated incidents.

Inadequacy of Self-Regulation- Current self-regulatory mechanisms are failing, particularly in the digital space where oversight is technically challenging.

Reactive vs. Proactive- The current system relies heavily on post-facto punitive action (punishing after the damage is done). The data indicates a need for preemptive measures to prevent the telecast/publication of inflammatory content in the first place.

5. Policy Implications and Recommendations

Strengthening Ethical Standards- Media houses must move beyond basic compliance to institutionalizing strict codes of conduct. Internal editorial reviews must be robust to ensure neutrality and accuracy before content goes live.

Enhancing Media Literacy- The public must be empowered to critically evaluate news sources. Citizens need the skills to identify bias and misinformation, reducing their susceptibility to manipulation on social media.

Balanced Regulatory Oversight- Regulators should adopt a "reformative" approach rather than just a "punitive" one. Guidance, warnings, and educational interventions should accompany fines to encourage long-term behavioral change in media houses.

Leveraging Technology

- a) Explore AI-driven solutions for real-time fact-checking and monitoring of hate speech.
- b) *Caveat-* Technology must be deployed carefully to avoid censorship or encroachment on legitimate free speech.

6. Conclusion

Freedom of expression is a fundamental right, but it carries the heavy burden of responsibility. The recurring violations of communal codes signal a breach of trust between the media and the society it serves. To preserve India's diverse fabric, the media ecosystem must evolve to inform without inflaming and educate without bias. A robust democracy requires a media that is not just free, but also fair, accountable, and ethically grounded.

Source- <https://www.newindianexpress.com/editorial/2025/Nov/30/sc-for-free-digital-oversight-body-but-the-how-wide-open>

Editorial of the Day – 23.01.2026

Index

1. BRICS India summit needs a green and resilient agenda- (TH)

2. Noida is like many modern Indian cities. It has a broken system – (IE)

1. BRICS India summit needs a green and resilient agenda

General Studies 2 – International Relation **Topic –** Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests; Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests.

Sub Topic – BRICS Summit 2026; Climate Diplomacy; South-South Cooperation; Global Climate Finance.

BRICS India Summit – A Green and Resilient Agenda

Introduction

As India prepares to host the BRICS Summit in 2026, it stands at a pivotal juncture to shape the global narrative. Building on the institutional capacity demonstrated during its successful G20 presidency in 2023, India is uniquely positioned to define a summit focus that addresses the urgent concerns of the Global South. The provided text argues that Climate Resilience and an Inclusive Green Agenda must be central to this summit, reinforcing India's leadership while navigating a polarized global order.

1. BRICS as a Stabilising Force in a Polarised World

Filling the Global Vacuum –

Weakened Multilateralism – Collaborative global action is under strain due to geopolitical polarization.

Western Retreat – The U.S. is increasingly questioning the credibility of climate cooperation and promoting fossil fuel expansion. Its withdrawal from various international platforms has created a leadership void.

European Fatigue – European nations, traditionally climate leaders, are now preoccupied with domestic fatigue and security pressures.

BRICS' Role – In this context, BRICS can step in as a "stabilizer," fostering collective action on sustainability where traditional powers are receding.

India's Diplomatic Tightrope –

Managing Perceptions – Washington often views BRICS with suspicion, seeing it as an anti-American bloc challenging the dollar-centric order.

Balancing Ties – India must balance its leadership in BRICS with its robust strategic partnership with the U.S.

Key US-India Priorities – Maintaining a viable trade deal, avoiding punitive tariffs, and managing sensitivities regarding Russian oil imports.

Strategic Autonomy – India's success lies in "multialignment"—demonstrating the ability to lead the Global South while maintaining independent relations with the West, as seen during the G20 Delhi Summit.

2. Climate Change as a Shared Priority

Consolidating Developing-Country Coordination –

The BASIC Group – The existing coalition of Brazil, South Africa, India, and China remains effective and relevant.

Expanded Weight – An expanded BRICS platform amplifies the voice of developing economies.

Precedent (Belém) – Recent discussions have successfully protected development needs while navigating the transition away from fossil fuels.

Common Vulnerabilities –

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

Shared Risks – All BRICS nations face severe climate impacts, including permafrost thaw (Russia), stress on the Amazon (Brazil), Himalayan fragility (India/China), and coastal/riverine risks.

Mutual Interest – Collective action on adaptation, resilience, and equity is not just charity but a self-preservation imperative for the bloc.

Leadership in Global Governance –

Steering the Process – BRICS nations (Brazil, Egypt, UAE) have been instrumental in sustaining climate momentum post-COVID through their leadership in recent COP summits.

Countering Unilateralism – BRICS serves as a platform to respond to unilateral trade measures that dilute UNFCCC principles, such as Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanisms (CBAM).

3. The Centrality of Climate Finance

A Key Milestone – The BRICS Leaders' Framework Declaration on Climate Finance (Rio, July 2025) set the stage for prioritizing financial equity.

India's Voice – India has been a vocal champion for the Global South, articulating demands for accessible and adequate finance.

Engaging Global Institutions –

Institutional Void – With the U.S. reducing climate commitments and private capital retreating from ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) investments, public institutions are crucial.

Proposal – There is a strong case for inviting leadership from the World Bank and IMF to the BRICS Summit to bridge the funding gap.

Leveraging Economic Weight –

The Expanded Bloc – Now including Egypt, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Iran, and the UAE.

The Numbers – Represents ~50% of the world's population, ~40% of global GDP, and ~26% of global trade.

Impact – This scale provides significant leverage to reshape the global financial architecture for climate action.

4. A Chance for India to Drive Change

Leadership Opportunity –

As the 2026 Chair, India can steer the group toward a Resilience and Inclusive Green Agenda. This focus unites the developing world and aligns perfectly with India's national interests.

Geopolitical Balancing – A proactive agenda allows India to balance China's ambitions for global climate leadership. It reinforces India as a credible, independent voice on sustainability.

Global Resonance & Continuity – An India-led focus on resilience will resonate with all members.

Strategic Link – It aligns with the priorities of Ethiopia, which is set to host COP32 in 2027, ensuring continuity in the climate narrative from India's presidency to future summits.

Conclusion

The 2026 BRICS Summit is a timely opportunity for India to reposition the grouping not as an anti-Western bloc, but as a stabilizing force in a fragmented world. By prioritizing climate resilience, equity, and sustainable development, India can leverage the economic weight of the expanded BRICS to address the urgent needs of the Global South. This approach will strengthen global climate governance while reinforcing India's own strategic autonomy and credibility as a bridge between the developed and developing worlds.

Source – <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/brics-india-summit-needs-a-green-and-resilient-agenda/article70539161.ece>

2. Noida is like many modern Indian cities. It has a broken system

General Studies 1 – Indian Society

Topic – Urbanization, their problems and their remedies.

Sub Topic – Urban Governance; Municipal Administration; Accountability in Public Service; 74th Constitutional Amendment Act.

Cracks Beneath Urban "Development"

Introduction

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

While Indian cities like Delhi, Indore, and Noida boast visible signs of modernity—such as metro networks and high-rises—recent urban tragedies expose a crumbling foundation of governance. These incidents are not mere accidents but symptoms of systemic apathy, weak accountability, and a dangerous neglect of routine administration. They highlight a paradox where physical infrastructure grows while the quality of governance and safety standards declines.

1. Core Issues – The Governance Deficit

Failure of Responsive Governance –

Delayed Response – Incidents are characterized by sluggish emergency responses and poor disaster management.

Ignored Grievances – Citizens' complaints regarding basic threats (e.g., contaminated water, unsafe structures) often hit a wall of bureaucratic silence.

Violation of Trust – This non-responsiveness violates the core principle of citizen-centric administration, leaving the public vulnerable.

The Accountability Crisis –

Scapegoating – When tragedies occur, blame is typically shifted to lower-level functionaries (junior engineers, clerks) rather than addressing institutional lapses at the top.

Symbolic Action – As noted by the Second Administrative Reforms Commission (ARC), accountability remains symbolic (punishing a few) rather than systemic (fixing the process), ensuring that failures recur.

Neglect of Routine Administration –

"Concrete" Bias – There is an excessive focus on new, visible infrastructure projects ("concrete achievements") to gain public or political recognition.

The Cost of Neglect – This sidelines the "invisible" but critical work – maintenance of existing assets, routine safety audits, and regular inspections.

CAG Flags – The Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) has repeatedly flagged Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) for poor asset management and lack of maintenance records.

2. The Infrastructure Paradox

Creation vs. Care – Urban budgets are skewed heavily towards Capital Expenditure (CapEx) for new projects. Operation and Maintenance (O&M) funds are chronically insufficient.

NITI Aayog's Warning – Inadequate maintenance reduces the lifespan of expensive infrastructure and drastically increases disaster vulnerability (e.g., collapsing bridges, waterlogging due to clogged drains).

3. Erosion of Civil Service Ethos

Visibility over Service – The pursuit of media visibility and recognition is undermining the traditional civil service values of anonymity and neutrality.

ARC Recommendation – Civil servants must re-prioritize actual service delivery and public welfare over the optics of development.

4. Structural & Constitutional Dimensions

Structural Failures –

Fragmentation – Urban governance is fractured across multiple agencies (Municipalities, Development Authorities, Parastatals) leading to a lack of coordination.

Capacity Crunch – ULBs suffer from severe staff shortages and a lack of technical skills at the local level.

Lack of Metrics – There are no performance metrics linking staff appraisals to service quality or safety compliance.

Constitutional Mandates –

Article 243W – Mandates ULBs to function as institutions of self-government responsible for public safety and basic services.

74th Amendment – The spirit of this amendment—devolution of power—remains unfulfilled as states have been reluctant to devolve funds, functions, and functionaries.

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

Article 21 – The Supreme Court interprets the Right to Life to include the right to safe and dignified living conditions, making urban safety a constitutional right.

5. Way Forward – Fixing the System

Paradigm Shift – Move focus from "Asset Creation" to "Asset Management."

Mandatory safety audits for all public infrastructure. Creation of dedicated Urban Maintenance Funds.

Strengthen Accountability – Clear fixing of institutional responsibility rather than individual blame games. Time-bound action on citizen complaints (e.g., strengthening Right to Public Services Acts).

Professionalize Urban Administration – Capacity building for municipal staff. Utilization of technology (GIS, AI, IoT) for real-time monitoring and predictive maintenance.

Citizen-Centricity – robust grievance redressal systems. Active community participation in urban monitoring (social audits).

Conclusion

Urban development cannot be judged solely by the scale of infrastructure but by the quality of governance. True progress lies in safety, responsiveness, and accountability. Unless the "un-glamorous" tasks of routine maintenance and ethical administration regain centrality, India's urban modernity will remain a fragile illusion, constantly vulnerable to preventable tragedies.

Source – <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/noida-is-like-many-modern-indian-cities-it-has-a-broken-system-10489546/>



Editorial of the Day – 24.01.2026**Index****1. Right To Dignity– On ASHA And Anganwadi Workers' Protests (TH)****2. The Familiar World Order Will Not Return. What India and EU Can Build (IE)****1. Right To Dignity– On ASHA And Anganwadi Workers' Protests (TH)****General Studies 2– Social Justice**

Topic– Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes; Mechanisms, laws, institutions and Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of vulnerable sections.

Sub Topic– Issues related to Scheme Workers (ASHA/Anganwadi); Labour Reforms; Centre–State Financial Relations regarding welfare schemes.

Right to Dignity – The Struggle of ASHA and Anganwadi Workers**Introduction**

The persistent protests by Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA) and Anganwadi workers highlight a critical failure in India's welfare architecture. Despite being the backbone of the nation's public health and nutrition delivery systems (including flagship schemes like ICDS and NHM), these workers are trapped in precarious employment. They are denied fair wages, social security, and legal recognition, signaling a deep erosion of the social contract between the State and its essential workforce.

1. Context and Background of Protests

Current Agitation– Protests, particularly in West Bengal, have intensified with workers demanding a monthly wage of ₹15,000.

Core Grievance– The demand focuses on ending the "honorarium" system and granting permanent employee status.

Paradox of Value– These workers are indispensable for national welfare programs (maternal health, immunization, nutrition) yet remain outside the safety net of formal labor protections.

2. Historical Denial of 'Worker' Status

Origin of Exclusion– Under the Indira Gandhi government, when the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) was launched, Anganwadi staff were deliberately denied formal 'worker' status.

Institutionalization– This precedent allowed the State to bypass standard labor laws. Even as a national union emerged in 1989 due to increasing workloads, the State continued to expand schemes without creating permanent government posts.

Liberalization Era– The classification of these employees as 'scheme workers' during the economic liberalization period further institutionalized their job insecurity.

3. Judicial and Policy Exclusion

The 'Ameerbi' Ruling (1996)– The tribunal ruling in *State of Karnataka vs. Ameerbi* explicitly excluded Anganwadi workers from being treated as government employees/civil servants.

Expansion Without Protection– In 2004, the "Right to Food" was expanded, heavily increasing the workload and dependence on these workers. The ASHA programme (mid-2000s) adopted the same exploitative model, branding workers as "activists" or "volunteers" to avoid paying statutory wages.

4. Administrative Apathy and Budgetary Cuts

Ignored Recommendations– The 45th Indian Labour Conference (2010s) recommended

1. Job regularisation.
2. Minimum wages.
3. Pension and gratuity coverage.

Bipartisan Failure– Both UPA and NDA governments failed to implement these recommendations.

Fiscal Assault (2015)– The Union government slashed the ICDS budget in 2015, triggering recurring financial distress and protests among workers.

5. Centre–State Fiscal Imbalance

The 2018 Freeze– The Central government froze its contribution to the honoraria of ASHA and Anganwadi workers in 2018.

Burden Shift– This forced State governments to bear the brunt of wage demands.

Regional Inequality

Wealthier States (or those with strong unions) could supplement wages from their own funds.

Fiscally Weaker States lagged behind, leading to significant wage disparities for the same work across different regions.

6. Erosion of the Social Contract

Parallel to Gig Economy– The situation of scheme workers mirrors the weak protections for gig workers under new labour codes.

Shift in Priorities– State policy has shifted towards "business metrics" and "fiscal headroom" at the cost of labor welfare.

Exploitative Nature– The continued denial of rightful status is described as "knowingly exploitative," given the State's reliance on their labor for health indices.

7. Way Forward– Restoring Dignity

Legal Reclassification– The Centre must reclassify these "volunteers" as statutory employees under the Code on Social Security.

Statutory Guarantees– This change must ensure

1. Minimum Wages.
2. Pension Coverage.
3. Social Security benefits (PF, ESI).

Fiscal Bridging– Both Centre and States must collaborate to bridge funding gaps and ensure "Equal Pay for Equal Work" across all regions.

Conclusion

The treatment of ASHA and Anganwadi workers as "volunteers" is a convenient legal fiction that allows the State to underpay its most essential workforce. To uphold the constitutional values of dignity and equity, the government must move beyond "honorariums" and institutionalize their rights through the Code on Social Security. Recognizing them as workers is not just an economic necessity but a moral imperative for a just republic.

Source– <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/right-to-dignity-on-asha-and-anganwadi-workers-protests/article70542869.ece>

2. The Familiar World Order Will Not Return. What India and EU Can Build (IE)

General Studies 1– Indian Society

Topic– Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

Sub Topic– India-EU Relations; Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests; Global Groupings (G20, TTC).

India–EU Relations in a Transforming World Order

Introduction

The strategic importance of India–EU relations was underscored by the presence of the European Council President and the European Commission President as chief guests at India's Republic Day and the concurrent EU–India Summit. This high-level engagement occurs against the backdrop of a shifting global order, characterized by geopolitical uncertainty, economic fragmentation, and the declining effectiveness of traditional multilateral institutions.

1. Nature of the Changing World Order

Weakening Transatlantic Framework- The traditional security and trade architecture led by the US is facing strain, creating a vacuum in global leadership.

Impact of Conflict- The Russia–Ukraine war has fundamentally altered the European security architecture and disrupted energy supply chains, forcing Europe to look for new partners.

China-Centric Vulnerabilities- There is a growing realization of the strategic risks associated with economic and technological over-dependence on China.

Decline of Multilateralism- Institutions like the WTO are facing paralysis, signaling a decline in rule-based multilateralism.

Rise of Multipolarity- The world is moving towards strategic autonomy and selective partnerships rather than rigid blocs.

2. Strategic Rationale for the Partnership

A. European Union's Perspective

Strategic Sovereignty- The EU aims to build capacity in defence, digital technologies, and critical supply chains to reduce reliance on external powers.

De-risking- A specific desire to reduce over-dependence on the US (for security) and China (for supply chains).

Indo-Pacific Pivot- The EU is actively searching for stable, democratic partners with large markets in the Indo-Pacific region, with India being a prime candidate.

B. India's Perspective

Foreign Policy Recalibration- India is adjusting its policy to navigate current geopolitical turbulence (e.g., balancing relations between the West and Russia).

Economic Transformation- India views external partnerships as essential tools to support domestic economic growth and technological modernization.

Strategic Autonomy- India seeks to maintain its independence while deepening ties, avoiding formal alliance entanglements.

3. Major Pillars of Cooperation

I. Trade and Economic Engagement

FTA Revival- Negotiations for the India–EU Free Trade Agreement (FTA) were revived in 2021 after a decade-long hiatus.

Current Status- The EU is already one of India's top trading partners and a leading source of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI).

Expected Benefits of FTA

- a. **Market Access-** Expanded access for Indian goods and services in Europe.
- b. **Investment-** Attraction of high-quality technology and capital.
- c. **Value Chains-** Stronger integration of India into global value chains (GVCs).
- d. **Resilience-** Improved supply-chain resilience against geopolitical shocks.

Connectivity- Collaboration on strategic connectivity projects like the India–Middle East–Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC).

II. Technology, Innovation, and Digital Cooperation

Strategic Importance- Technology is now viewed as a determinant of geopolitical influence.

Shared Concerns- Both sides worry about the concentration of technological power (Big Tech monopolies) and the ethical implications of digital tools.

Institutional Mechanism- The establishment of the EU–India Trade and Technology Council (TTC) to steer cooperation.

Priority Sectors

1. Artificial Intelligence (AI).
2. Semiconductor manufacturing.
3. Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI).
4. Research and Innovation ecosystems.

Mobility– Expansion of programs to facilitate the movement of students, researchers, and scientists.

III. Defence and Security Cooperation

Emerging Partnership– Europe is becoming a key supplier for India's access to advanced defence platforms.

Strategic Alignment

1. EU– Needs defence modernization and rearmament.
2. India– Focuses on Atmanirbhar Bharat (self-reliance) and defence indigenisation.

Key Areas

1. Maritime security and stability in the Indo-Pacific.
2. Cybersecurity and Space governance.
3. Joint Defence manufacturing and R&D.

Counter-Terrorism– Continued cooperation on intelligence sharing and capacity building.

IV. Role of Individual European States

France– A long-standing strategic partner in defence (Rafale, Scorpene), nuclear energy, and space.

Germany– A major economic engine with increasing engagement in defence.

Italy & Spain– Rising importance in trade and industrial collaboration.

Nordic Countries– Leaders in sustainability, green technologies, and innovation.

V. Cooperation in Global Governance

Rules-Based Order– A shared commitment to upholding international law.

Institutional Reform– Joint advocacy for reforming the UN Security Council, global financial institutions, and trade bodies.

Global Issues

- a. **Climate Change**– Commitment to the Paris Agreement.
- b. **Development**– Sustainable development initiatives in the Global South.
- c. **Financing**– Infrastructure financing and development partnerships.

4. Key Challenges in the Partnership

Russia-Ukraine Conflict– Divergent voting patterns and positions (India's neutrality vs. EU's active opposition).

Geopolitical Balancing– India's continued relations with Russia vs. the EU's complex engagement with China.

Values Gap– Occasional friction regarding political values and human rights discourse.

Economic Barriers– Regulatory hurdles and market-access issues (e.g., EU's carbon tax/CBAM).

Perception– Influence of negative public narratives and perception gaps between the two regions.

5. Way Forward

FTA Conclusion– Prioritize the early conclusion of a balanced, forward-looking Free Trade Agreement.

Deepening Ties– Strengthen technology and defence industrial cooperation to move beyond buyer-seller relationships.

People-to-People– enhance academic exchanges and tourism to build cultural understanding.

Multilateral Coordination– Align positions in global forums to advocate for shared interests.

Pragmatism– Focus on shared interests rather than getting bogged down by ideological rigidity.

Conclusion

The old-world order defined by past alliances is fading. India and the EU must leverage this global turbulence as a strategic opportunity. By building a partnership anchored in democracy, strategic autonomy, and economic resilience, they can act as stabilizing forces and contribute meaningfully to shaping an inclusive, multipolar global order.

Source– <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/the-familiar-world-order-will-not-return-what-india-and-eu-can-build-10491525/>

Editorial of the Day – 27.01.2026**Index****1. Mind the time- On the financial burden of India's ageing population (TH)****2. Let's recover the lost meanings of Ganaraj to face the political challenge of our time (IE)****1. Mind the time- On the financial burden of India's ageing population (TH)****General Studies 1-** Indian Society**Topic-** Population and associated issues.**Sub Topic-** Social empowerment, communalism, regionalism & secularism.**Introduction**

A recent RBI report has flagged the uneven nature of India's demographic transition, debunking the myth of a uniform nationwide demographic dividend. While southern states are rapidly ageing, northern states continue to see a surge in their working-age population. This divergence creates complex fiscal, political, and social challenges that require region-specific policy interventions rather than a "one-size-fits-all" approach.

1. The Three-Speed Demographic Transition (Key Details)

The report categorizes states into three distinct groups based on their demographic trajectory-

Ageing States (The South)**States-** Kerala and Tamil Nadu.**Projection-** By 2036, the elderly population will exceed 22% in Kerala and 20% in Tamil Nadu.**Implication-** Immediate pressure on pension and healthcare systems.**Youthful States (The North/East)****States-** Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and Jharkhand.**Projection-** Working-age populations will continue to grow well beyond 2031.**Implication-** Massive demand for education, skilling, and job creation.**Transitional States (The Middle)****States-** Karnataka and Maharashtra.**Status-** Balancing fading demographic growth with emerging ageing pressures.**2. RBI's Fiscal Advice****For Ageing States-** Rationalize subsidies to create fiscal space for rising pension and healthcare burdens.**For Youthful States-** Invest heavily in human capital (Education & Health) to harvest the demographic dividend before the window closes.**3. Critical Analysis- The Political & Economic Dilemma****The Southern Disadvantage (Double Whammy)****Fiscal Penalty-** Success in population control leads to reduced Central tax devolution (as Finance Commissions often use 2011 population data).**Political Penalty-** Impending Delimitation threatens to reduce their parliamentary representation, punishing them for better governance**The Northern Trap (Unrealized Potential)****Stagnant Spending-** Despite a "window of opportunity," education spending in youthful states has stagnated or declined.**Employability Crisis-** Mere population growth without quality skilling leads to unemployment, not a dividend.

4. Challenges in the Changing Labour Market

Automation Threat- Youthful cohorts are entering the workforce just as AI and automation are disrupting traditional labor-intensive sectors.

RBI's Risk- The advice to expand labor-intensive sectors might be outdated, risking a scenario where states "age before getting rich."

5. Social Dimensions of Ageing

Feminization of Ageing- Women live longer but often possess fewer assets. Many were never part of the formal workforce, leaving them without pension coverage and financially dependent.

Erosion of Family Support- The RBI's assumptions rely on traditional family care for the elderly.

Reality Check- Migration and the rise of nuclear families are rapidly eroding this informal safety net.

6. Way Forward

Beyond Fiscal Measures- Fiscal consolidation alone cannot solve the crisis; a holistic approach is needed.

New Industrial Policy- Focus on generating large-scale employment in future-ready sectors like Green Energy and the Care Economy.

Proactive Systems for Youthful States- They must build healthcare and pension systems *now* to cushion the fiscal shock when their fertility rates eventually decline.

Social Security Expansion

Social Pensions- Must be significantly expanded to prevent old age from becoming synonymous with poverty.

Public Geriatric Care- Without a major expansion of public facilities, "graceful ageing" will become a luxury available only to the wealthy, deepening inequality.

Conclusion

India's demographic transition is not a singular national event but a fragmented process with distinct regional timelines. Addressing this requires a nuanced federal approach- balancing the fiscal needs of ageing states with the developmental urgency of youthful ones. Without robust social security and future-ready industrial policies, the demographic dividend risks turning into a demographic disaster.

Source- <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/the-hindu-editorial-on-january-27-2026-mind-the-time/article70553485.ece>

2. Let's recover the lost meanings of Ganaraj to face the political challenge of our time (IE)

General Studies 2- Polity

Topic- The Preamble, Significant provisions, and basic structure.

Sub Topic- Democratic ideals, Republicanism vs. Democracy, and Ethical Governance.

Introduction

Republic Day 2026 has reignited the debate on the true meaning of India as a 'Ganarajya' (Republic). While the Constitution and Indian passports use the term 'Ganarajya,' Republic Day is officially celebrated as 'Ganatantra Divas.' This distinction highlights a conflict between Ganatantra (Procedural Democracy) and Ganarajya (Normative/Ethical Republicanism), raising questions about the ethical soul of the Indian state.

1. Ganatantra- The Procedural View (The Limited Meaning)

Negative Definition- In political science, a "Republic" is often simply defined as a state where the head is not hereditary (unlike a monarchy). This definition is analytically weak because even authoritarian regimes can be republics.

Electoral Mechanism- In common usage, *Ganatantra* refers to the machinery of elections, representation, and majority rule.

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Conceptual Redundancy- Since *Ganatantra* overlaps heavily with *Loktantra* (Democracy), it becomes a repetitive concept limited to procedures, lacking a deeper moral imagination.

2. Ganarajya- The Normative View (The Ethical Meaning)

Republic as a Moral Order- *Ganarajya* envisions the state not just as a system of governance, but as a community of equals.

Active Citizenship- Citizens are not passive voters but active custodians of power who hold rulers accountable.

Civic Virtue- The republic survives on shared ethical norms, civic responsibility, and public reasoning, not just laws.

Beyond Institutions- The strength of *Ganarajya* lies in the public conscience and moral restraints on power, rather than just in courts or parliament.

3. Indian and Global Republican Traditions

Western Republicanism- Historically, it emphasized "freedom as non-domination" (not being subject to the arbitrary will of another), rather than just the absence of a king.

Ancient Indian Parallels- Concepts like "Samanna-rajya" (rule by equals) existed in early India.

Caution- Ancient *Ganas* (like Vaishali) were lineage-based oligarchies, not modern mass democracies, but they still enrich our historical imagination of rule by discussion.

Continuity- Modern Indian republicanism is a blend of these civilizational ethics and modern constitutional values.

4. Jan-Gan-Man- The Indian Expression of Ganarajya

The article reinterprets the national anthem's trio of words to explain the Republic-

Jan (The People)- The ultimate source of sovereignty and legitimacy.

Gan (The Collective)- Represents citizens as a political community of equals, transcending fragmented identities (caste/religion).

Man (The Conscience)- Refers to the collective ethical conscience and moral judgment of the nation, which stands above temporary public opinion.

5. Contemporary Challenges & The 'Swadharm' of the Republic

Ethical Assault- Current political challenges are not just about "democratic backsliding" (weak institutions) but an assault on the ethical foundations of the republic.

Limits of Legal Defense- Merely defending the text of the Constitution is not enough if the values behind it lose public legitimacy.

Historical Roots- These values (Liberty, Equality, Fraternity) were forged during the century-long freedom struggle, not just written in the Constituent Assembly (1946-49).

Swadharm (Ethical Duty)- The core duty of *Ganarajya* is to uphold equality, dignity, and freedom from domination.

Conclusion

To address modern political crises, India must move beyond the ritualistic celebration of *Ganatantra* (machinery of state) and recover the lost ethical meaning of *Ganarajya* (community of equals). The true defense of the Republic lies in active citizenship, civic virtue, and the preservation of its moral soul—its *Swadharm*.

Source- <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/yogendra-yadav-writes-lets-recover-the-lost-meanings-of-ganarajya-to-face-the-political-challenge-of-our-time-10496087/>

Editorial of the Day – 28.01.2026**Index****1. Manufacturing Woes- on Non-Fossil Fuel Capacity and PLI Schemes (TH)****2. India-EU FTA- After Two Decades of Negotiations, How India and EU Finally Clinched a Trade Deal This Time (IE)****1. Manufacturing Woes- on Non-Fossil Fuel Capacity and PLI Schemes (TH)****General Studies 3- Economy**

Topic- Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development, and employment.

Sub Topic- Changes in industrial policy and their effects on industrial growth; Infrastructure (Energy).

The Crisis in India's Clean Tech Manufacturing (PLI Schemes)**Introduction**

India's Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme was designed to transform the nation into a global manufacturing hub. However, as of early 2026, the push for solar and battery manufacturing is facing a "structural mismatch." While simple assembly is growing, the high-tech "brains" of these industries remain stagnant, threatening India's 500 GW renewable energy target.

1. The PLI Framework- Intent vs. Reality

The Model- Incentives are paid based on actual sales, not upfront costs. No targets met = no payment.

Goal- To slash import dependence and build global competitiveness.

The Gap- While the intent is solid, the execution is stumbling in high-tech segments.

2. Performance Disparity (Solar & Batteries)

Segment	Status (Mid-2025/Late-2025)	Why?
Solar Modules (Downstream)	56% of target achieved	Low tech-intensity; simple assembly.
Polysilicon/Wafers (Upstream)	10-14% of target achieved	High capital and extreme tech complexity.
Advanced Battery Cells	2.8% of target achieved	Only 1.4 GWh of 50 GWh commissioned.

3. Core Challenges & Bottlenecks

Structural Imbalance- It is much easier to assemble parts (downstream) than to create the raw materials (upstream).

The Knowledge Gap- Polysilicon and battery cells require decades of R&D and a specialized workforce that India currently lacks.

Strict Local Content Rules- "Domestic Value Addition" (DVA) norms (25% to 60%) are raising costs and causing delays for firms that aren't ready.

Geopolitical Friction- Visa restrictions on Chinese technicians (who lead the world in this tech) have slowed down the setup of Indian factories.

Gigafactory Hurdles- These massive plants require stable mineral supply chains and precision environments that take years—not months—to build.

4. Policy Design Flaws

Money over Merit- The government prioritized companies with strong balance sheets (large conglomerates) rather than firms with proven technical expertise.

Capital vs. Capability- The policy assumed capital subsidies alone would trigger growth, underestimating the time needed to learn complex chemical and physical processes.

Fiscal Stress- Many firms are now facing heavy financial penalties for missing PLI deadlines.

5. The Way Forward (Course Correction)

To avoid becoming a mere "assembler" of foreign parts, India must-

1. Prioritize Tech Know-how- Give more weight to R&D and technical experience in selection.
2. Flexible Norms- Relax local-content rules temporarily during the early learning phase.
3. Invest in People- Focus on long-term skill development and industrial ecosystems rather than just financial incentives.
4. Strategic Collaboration- Facilitate smoother technology transfer, even if it requires navigating sensitive geopolitical ties.

Conclusion

The PLI scheme has provided the initial spark, but "manufacturing capability cannot be bought overnight." Without addressing the upstream bottlenecks, India's green energy dreams remain vulnerable to global supply shocks.

Source- <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/manufacturing-woes-on-non-fossil-fuel-capacity-and-pli-schemes/article70557957.ece>

2. India-EU FTA- After Two Decades of Negotiations, How India and EU Finally Clinched a Trade Deal This Time (IE)

General Studies 2- International Relation

Topics- Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

The EU's Regulatory Regime- A New Trade Frontier

Introduction

Following the conclusion of the India-EU FTA in January 2026, the focus has shifted from "tariffs" to "regulations." While the agreement removes 99% of duties, the EU is increasingly using its regulatory power (The Brussels Effect) to shape global trade through environmental and social standards, creating a "non-tariff wall" for Indian exporters.

1. The "Brussels Effect" & Regulatory Strategy

Standard over Tariff- Unlike the US (which uses direct tariffs), the EU uses high standards in environment, labor, and safety to control market access.

Global Influence- Because the EU is a massive consumer market, Indian firms often must adopt these standards for *all* their production to maintain efficiency, effectively "outsourcing" India's regulation to Brussels.

Trade Deterrence- Complex documentation and traceability requirements act as a barrier, particularly for Indian MSMEs who lack the capital to comply.

2. Key Regulatory Pillars & Impact on India

Regulation	Objective	Specific Impact on India
CBAM (Carbon Border Tax)	Taxing carbon-intensive imports (Steel, Al, Cement).	Steel/Al exports likely to drop; price cuts of 15-22% needed to stay competitive.
EUDR (Deforestation)	Ban on products linked to forest loss (Coffee, Rubber).	Hits \$1.3 billion in exports; difficult for small farmers to provide GPS-traceability.
CSDD (Due Diligence)	Monitoring human rights/environment in value chains.	Indian firms must share sensitive supplier data, raising privacy and cost concerns.

3. The Asymmetry Challenge

Marginal Gains- 80% of India's exports already faced <1% duty; thus, the FTA's tariff cuts offer limited "new" benefits compared to the high cost of new regulations.

Unbalanced Concessions- India is opening its market to high-value EU cars and machinery, while Indian goods face increasingly strict "process-based" scrutiny rather than just "quality-based" checks.

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Input Costs- The EU's restrictions on steel scrap exports (recycling policy) make it harder for Indian mills to produce the "Green Steel" the EU demands.

4. Strategic & Geoeconomic Context

China De-risking- Both India and the EU seek to reduce reliance on Chinese supply chains, making the FTA a strategic necessity despite regulatory friction.

Labor-Intensive Boost- Immediate zero-duty access for Textiles, Footwear, and Marine products remains a major win for Indian employment.

Services Integration- The deal opens 144 EU service sub-sectors, aiding India's IT and professional services.

5. Way Forward- Toward Inclusive Cooperation

To ensure the FTA doesn't become "disguised protectionism," the following are essential-

1. Mutual Recognition- India must negotiate for the EU to recognize Indian domestic standards and certifications.
2. Standard Convergence- Developing "EU-ready" domestic reporting frameworks to reduce the burden on SMEs.
3. Technical Assistance- Securing EU funding (like the proposed €500mn mitigation fund) to help Indian industries decarbonize.
4. Data Security- Establishing clear protocols for data sharing under CSDD to protect commercial confidentiality.

Conclusion

The India-EU partnership can only thrive if trade liberalization is matched by regulatory fairness. Without addressing these "green barriers," the FTA risks becoming a lopsided agreement where tariffs go down, but the cost of entry goes up.

Source- <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-economics/how-india-eu-clinched-trade-deal-10496781/lite/>

Editorial of the Day – 29.01.2026**Index****1. Mature and pragmatic – On India-EU FTA – (TH)****2. Can the right environment make animals 'smarter'? Expert Explains the larger lessons from a brush-wielding bovine – (IE)****1. Mature and pragmatic – On India-EU FTA – (TH)**

General Studies 2 – International Relation **Topic –** Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

The India-EU Free Trade Agreement (FTA) 2026**Introduction**

The conclusion of the India-EU FTA in January 2026 marks a historic shift from defensive trade protectionism to "interest-based bargaining." Covering a combined market of 2 billion people and nearly 25% of global GDP, this "mother of all deals" reflects India's maturity in negotiating as an equal with the world's most powerful rules-based economic bloc.

1. Key Trade Concessions & Liberalization

Asymmetric Advantage – EU Offer – Immediate tariff elimination on 99.5% of Indian exports.

India Offer – Tariff concessions on 97.5% of EU exports, preserving policy space for domestic industry.

Immediate Gains for India – Zero-duty access for labour-intensive sectors like textiles (down from 12%), leather, footwear, gems & jewellery, and marine products.

Industrial Inputs – Drastic cuts in Indian duties on EU machinery (up to 44% to 0%), chemicals, and pharmaceuticals will lower production costs for Indian manufacturers.

2. Sectoral Breakthroughs – Quota-Based Solutions

Instead of blanket cuts, the deal uses innovative Tariff Rate Quotas (TRQs) to balance market access with domestic protection –

Automobiles – Tariffs on EU luxury cars slashed from 110% to 10% for a quota of 250,000 units. Protects Indian mass-market producers while allowing high-tech European competition.

Wines & Spirits – Premium wine duties reduced from 150% to 20–30%. Spirits cut to 40% and Beer to 50%, shielding low-priced domestic segments.

3. Strategic Safeguards

Agriculture & Dairy – India successfully excluded sensitive sectors (dairy, cereals, poultry) to protect farmer livelihoods and rural food security.

EU Protections – The EU maintained protections on sensitive agri-lines like beef, sugar, and rice.

Intellectual Property – Balances strong protection for EU trademarks with India's right to produce generic medicines (safeguarding against patent evergreening).

4. Geoeconomic & Strategic Significance

Beyond Trade – Accompanied by parallel pacts on Mobility, Defence, and Technology, signaling a shift toward strategic interdependence.

Global Positioning – Positions India as a reliable alternative to China-centric supply chains amid rising global protectionism.

Industrial Upgrading – Exposure to strict EU standards (SPS/TBT) acts as a "push" for Indian firms to upgrade quality and technology.

Professional Mobility – Eased visa norms for Indian professionals (IT, business services) and students, addressing the EU's shrinking workforce.

5. Key Challenges & The Way Forward

The CBAM Hurdle – The EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) remains a challenge as it was kept outside the FTA's direct scope. However, any future concessions given by the EU to third countries will automatically apply to India.

Regulatory Compliance – Indian MSMEs must rapidly adopt EU environmental and labour standards to avoid non-tariff barriers.

Ratification Speed – With the threat of U.S. trade volatility, both sides must fast-track domestic approvals (27 EU nations) to ensure implementation within 2026.

Conclusion

The India-EU FTA is a mature and pragmatic roadmap that delivers deep market access without compromising core national interests. It transforms India from a passive recipient of global trade rules into a proactive architect of them.

Source – https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/mature-and-pragmatic-on-india-eu-fta/article70562156.ece#google_vignette

2. Can the right environment make animals 'smarter'? Expert Explains the larger lessons from a brush-wielding bovine – (IE)

General Studies 2 – International Relation **Topics** – Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

Ecological Intelligence – The Silent Workforce of Nature

Introduction

The ongoing crisis in the Aravalli Range highlights a fundamental flaw in modern development – the failure to recognize "Ecological Intelligence." This concept views nature not as a resource to be extracted, but as an integrated system of "silent workers"—from ancient mountains to tiny ants—that sustain human civilization.

1. The Aravalli Range – India's Ecological Shield

Geological Sentinel – One of the world's oldest fold mountain systems, predating the Himalayas.

Desertification Barrier – Acts as a physical wall preventing the expansion of the Thar Desert into the Indo-Gangetic plains.

Water Reservoir – Critical for groundwater recharge in water-stressed regions like Delhi-NCR, Haryana, and Rajasthan.

Biodiversity Hub – Serves as a vital corridor for wildlife (e.g., leopards) and native flora.

Current Threats – Rampant mining, urban encroachment, and the dilution of environmental protection norms.

2. Nature's Invisible Workforce

The stability of our environment depends on the uncompensated "labor" of non-human species –

Trees as "Ecological Republics" – Functions as a micro-ecosystem supporting fungi, insects, and birds. Regulates local climate (Carbon sequestration) and enhances rainfall infiltration.

Ants as "Ecosystem Engineers" – Aerate the soil and recycle nutrients. Crucial for seed dispersal and maintaining soil fertility.

Birds as "Ecological Indicators" – Provide pest control and pollination. Their presence or absence is a primary signal of the health of an ecosystem.

3. Interconnectedness – Science Meets Philosophy

Modern Ecology – Validates the "Food Web" and "Nutrient Cycle" as empirical proof that no species exists in isolation.

Ancient Wisdom – Aligns with Indian philosophies like Advaita Vedanta and Buddhist "Interbeing," which reject the divide between humans and nature.

Habitat Fragmentation – Infrastructure projects (roads/mines) break these connections, leading to a collapse of ecological resilience.

4. The Human Cost of Alienation

Ecological Amnesia – Modern urban life creates a "manufactured disconnection" from the land, leading us to ignore the ecological memory stored in aquifers and soil.

Reactive Governance – Nature is often only valued *after* a disaster (floods/droughts) occurs, rather than being protected as a custodian of life.

GDP vs. Ecology – Formal economics fails to account for ecosystem services, treating environmental extraction as "growth" and replenishment as "cost."

5. The Way Forward

To transition from an exploitative model to one of Ecological Stewardship, India must –

Strengthen Legal Frameworks – Grant stricter protection to "Eco-Sensitive Zones" like the Aravallis.

Value Ecosystem Services – Integrate "Green Accounting" into national economic planning.

Restore Landscapes – Focus on native reforestation and the protection of wildlife corridors.

Listen to Nature – Move toward a development model that respects ecological limits and traditional wisdom.

Conclusion

The environmental crisis is not just a technical problem but a spiritual and cognitive one. Sustainable survival depends on recognizing that humans are part of a larger ecological network. Protecting the Aravallis is not just about saving rocks and trees; it is about securing the "infrastructure of life" itself.

Source – <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-sci-tech/can-the-right-environment-make-animals-smarter-10495842/>

Editorial of the Day – 30.01.2026

Index

1. Is India prepared for the end of globalisation? (TH) –
2. US-China Commission to hold first 2026 hearing on India's Indo-Pacific role- All you need to know (IE)

1. Is India prepared for the end of globalisation? (TH)

General Studies 3- Economy

Topic- Effects of Liberalisation on the economy; Changes in

Industrial Policy.

Sub Topic- Globalisation and its impact on Indian society and economy; Bilateral & Global Groupings.

Globalisation as a Fractured Political System

1. Introduction

Globalisation was not merely an economic phenomenon but a political framework governing international relations.

Institutional Collapse- Multilateral institutions like the WTO are weakening, leaving global markets without a shared institutional anchor.

Shift to Mercantilism- Trade is increasingly viewed through the lens of power. Surpluses are seen as strength, while deficits are interpreted as strategic vulnerabilities.

Erosion of Liberal Values- The consensus on open markets and democratic norms is being replaced by transactional, power-centric bilateralism.

2. Historical Context & The Post-War Order

The current order relied on specific assumptions that are now being abandoned by the very powers that created them.

Assumed Restraint- The system relied on self-restraint by powerful states; today, unilateral actions (tariffs, sanctions) are the new norm.

Unequal Growth- Globalisation historically favoured the industrialised North through resource extraction. Post-WWII multilateralism provided a brief window of legitimacy that is now closing.

Restricted Mobility- While capital moved freely, the movement of people remained restricted, creating social tensions that eventually fuelled nationalist politics.

3. Major Shocks- China's Rise & Domestic Inequality

Two structural shifts accelerated the decline of the liberal order-

China's Disruptive Model- China integrated into the global market while maintaining state control over capital and information. Its excess capacity and trade surpluses weakened industrial prospects in developing nations like India.

Rising Inequality- Returns to capital grew faster than wages, leading to deindustrialisation in the West and growing public resentment against global integration.

4. India's Preparedness & Structural Paradox

India occupies a unique but uneasy position in this emerging order.

The Size vs. Power Gap- India is too large to be ignored but currently lacks the institutional and economic depth to decisively lead global outcomes.

Missed Demographic Window- Over the last 15 years, India has struggled to convert its demographic dividend into large-scale productive capacity, with a sharply stratified social pyramid.

Strategic Buffers- On the positive side, the Economic Survey 2025-26 highlights India's high forex reserves (covering 11 months of imports) and a diversified trade strategy (FTAs with UAE, EU, and Oman) as cushions against external shocks.

5. Way Forward- Strengthening the Internal Engine

To survive the end of globalisation, India must shift focus from external dependence to internal capability.

Enhance State Capacity- Drastic improvement is needed in health, education, and social investment to build a resilient workforce.

Strategic Domains- Focus on niches where India has a competitive edge- Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI), renewable energy, and services.

New Social Contract- Growth must be shared more equitably to ensure social cohesion, which is a prerequisite for national power in a mercantilist world.

Diversified Partnerships- Pursue "multi-alignment" (e.g., the India-EU FTA) to reduce over-reliance on any single coercive partner.

Conclusion

In a world where economic strength is increasingly tied to national capability, rhetoric cannot substitute for reform. For India to transition from an "Oasis of Stability" to a global leader, it must move beyond short-term macro-management and invest deeply in its institutions and people.

Source- <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/is-india-prepared-for-the-end-of-globalisation/article70566036.ece>

2. US-China Commission to hold first 2026 hearing on India's Indo-Pacific role- All you need to know (IE)

General Studies 2- International Relation **Topics-** India and its Neighbourhood- Relations; Bilateral, Regional and Global Groupings and Agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

Sub Topic- Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests.

Strategic Context- Shifting Global Power Structure

1. Introduction

Weakening Unipolarity- The post-Cold War era of U.S. dominance is fading, giving way to an Asian-centric world where India and China are projected to be the top two economies by 2050.

U.S. Executive Unilateralism- Frequent use of executive orders, tariffs, and sanctions has destabilized multilateral institutions like the WTO and increased global economic uncertainty.

Dollar Weaponisation- The U.S. uses its control over the SWIFT system to enforce financial coercion (e.g., against Russia and Iran), compelling nations like India and China to explore non-dollar trade settlements.

Threat to Strategic Autonomy- Sachs argues that India must resist being used in "U.S. games" (like the Quad for containment) to preserve its sovereign interests.

2. Economic Interdependence and De-risking

Record Trade Volumes- Despite political friction, bilateral trade hit a record USD 155.62 billion in 2025.

Structural Trade Deficit- India's trade deficit with China reached an all-time high of USD 116.12 billion in 2025, driven by critical imports in electronics, pharmaceuticals (APIs), and solar components.

Coexistence over Isolation- While India pursues "China+1" for manufacturing, total decoupling is deemed unfeasible. The strategy is moving toward De-risking—reducing critical dependencies while maintaining selective economic ties.

3. The Security Dimension- Border and Beyond

The LAC Impasse- The undefined Line of Actual Control (LAC) remains the primary friction point (e.g., Galwan 2020).

Colonial Legacy- Sachs describes the border dispute as a solvable "imperial legacy" (McMahon Line) that should not hold the future of two civilisational states hostage.

Crisis Management- Continued military talks (Corps Commander-level) and disengagement efforts are vital to prevent border incidents from escalating into regional instability.

4. Geopolitics and the "Divide and Rule" Strategy

Third-Party Manipulation- A stable India–China relationship is seen as a safeguard against external powers using divide and rule strategies to maintain hegemony in Asia.

Pakistan Factor- Sachs challenges the narrative of the China–Pakistan axis by noting that historical U.S. engagement with Pakistan often emboldened its military more than Chinese aid.

Strategic Balancing- India must balance its partnership with the West (for technology and security) while engaging in BRICS and SCO to influence a multipolar order.

5. Technological Sovereignty and Digital Power

Military–Industrial–Digital Complex- Modern power is increasingly defined by the fusion of AI firms, surveillance systems, and the military apparatus (e.g., SpaceX, Palantir).

Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI)- India’s success in DPI is a model for self-reliance, helping it maintain digital sovereignty against global data monopolies.

Space and AI Warfare- Cooperation or managed competition in AI and space is necessary to set global norms for autonomous weapons and data privacy.

Way Forward

Institutionalise Strategic Dialogue- Revive high-level political mechanisms (like the Special Representatives dialogue) to ensure predictability.

Border Stability as Priority- Pursue complete disengagement and restoration of peace along the LAC as a prerequisite for broader cooperation.

Strategic Autonomy in Finance- Diversify payment mechanisms and support non-dollar trade settlements through BRICS to hedge against financial sanctions.

Global South Leadership- Collaborate on climate finance, UNSC reforms, and WTO rules to amplify the voice of developing nations.

Conclusion

The future of the "Asian Century" depends on India and China moving from reactive rivalry to managed coexistence. As emerging superpowers, both nations must act as system stabilizers. By resolving bilateral irritants and resisting external manipulation, they can shape a multipolar, rules-based world order that reflects the realities of the 21st century.

Source- <https://indianexpress.com/article/world/us-china-commission-to-hold-first-2026-hearing-on-indias-indo-pacific-role-all-you-need-to-know-10503288/>

Editorial of the Day – 31.01.2026

Index

1. A job well done – On the Economic Survey 2025–26

2. India's cheapest power needs new buyers

1. A job well done – On the Economic Survey 2025–26 – (TH)

General Studies 3 – Economy Topic – Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.

SUB TOPIC – Government Budgeting (Economic Survey context).

Introduction

The Economic Survey 2025–26, presented by Chief Economic Advisor V. Anantha Nageswaran, is distinguished by its data-driven, non-sensational, and balanced approach. Moving beyond rhetoric, it serves as a credible "early-warning policy document" that prioritizes realism over populism. The document outlines a medium-term governance framework, advocating for an "entrepreneurial state" that is agile and risk-taking to navigate a volatile global landscape while consolidating domestic stability.

1. Key Themes & Policy Thrust

The "Entrepreneurial State"

Concept – The Survey introduces the paradigm of an "entrepreneurial state" that moves away from risk-aversion.

Characteristics – It calls for a state that is agile, experimental, and willing to take calculated risks.

Policy Shift – It advocates for a culture where failure is accepted as a part of the learning process, arguing that this shift is essential for accelerating growth now that the COVID-19 shock is past.

Data-Driven Realism

Approach – The assessment is grounded in hard data rather than optimistic speculation.

Objective – To provide clear-eyed analysis that informs future-oriented policymaking during a period of relative domestic stability but high global uncertainty.

2. Global Outlook & Crisis Warnings

Global Economic Crisis Probability

Risk Assessment – The Survey flags a significant 10–20% probability of a severe global economic crisis in 2026.

Severity – It warns that this potential crisis could be worse than the 2008 financial crisis.

Best-Case Scenario – Even the most optimistic global scenario envisages a deterioration in economic conditions compared to 2025.

Domestic Resilience

Contrast – Despite global gloom, the Indian economy is portrayed as fundamentally strong.

Basis – This confidence is supported by robust domestic data, though the Survey candidly acknowledges emerging vulnerabilities that need addressing.

3. Macroeconomic Analysis

Currency Dynamics (Rupee Depreciation)

Root Cause – Depreciation is attributed to global capital flows shifting towards –

1. AI-driven economies.
2. Safe-haven assets.

Fundamental Strength – The Survey asserts that currency volatility does not reflect weak Indian fundamentals.

Trade-off – While a weaker rupee benefits exporters, it increases import costs (due to India's high import dependence), creating inflationary pressure. 94

Current Status – Data reveals that India is not yet strategically indispensable in global merchandise supply chains.

Strategic Goal – The Survey pushes for "Strategic Resilience" as a stepping stone to achieving "Strategic Indispensability" in the long run.

4. Fiscal Dynamics – Centre vs. States

Centre's Performance

Fiscal Consolidation – The Central Government has significantly improved its finances, more than halving its fiscal deficit ratio over the last five years.

Goal – This creates fiscal space/flexibility to manage potential geopolitical or geoeconomic shocks.

State-Level Concerns

Revenue Deficits – Several States have slipped into revenue deficits, contrasting with the Centre's consolidation.

Populism Warning – The Survey explicitly warns against fiscal populism by States, specifically targeting unconditional cash transfers.

Political Context – This warning is particularly significant given that 2026 is a politically sensitive election year for multiple major States.

5. Emerging Non-Traditional Challenges

The Survey highlights several specific, often overlooked risks –

Food vs. Fuel – It flags risks to food security arising from aggressive Ethanol production targets.

Green Transition Costs – It questions the true economic costs of the transition to renewable energy, suggesting they may be higher than currently accounted for.

Livestock Crisis – It notes inadequate fodder availability, which is negatively impacting both agriculture and the livestock sector.

Digital Wellbeing – It raises concerns about the social and productivity impacts of "compulsive scrolling" and excessive smartphone usage.

6. The Way Forward

Bold Policy Stance – Move towards a risk-aware governance model that embraces experimentation with accountability.

Strategic Depth – Focus on building depth in manufacturing and supply chains to enhance India's global relevance and indispensability.

Fiscal Coordination – Strengthen Centre–State fiscal coordination, with a strong discouragement of short-term populist measures that threaten long-term stability.

Evidence-Based Interventions – Address the flagged non-traditional risks (digital behavior, food-energy trade-offs) using data-backed policies.

Living Document – Use the Survey not just as a one-time report but as a living guide that is continuously updated with real-time data feedback.

Conclusion

The Economic Survey 2025–26 is a credible, forward-looking roadmap rather than a political manifesto. Its core strength lies in its honest diagnosis, analytical restraint, and policy pragmatism. By balancing optimism about India's fundamentals with caution about global headwinds, it equips policymakers to navigate uncertainty while pursuing sustainable growth.

Source – <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/a-job-well-done-on-the-economic-survey-2025-26/article70570585.ece>

2. India's cheapest power needs new buyers – (IE)

General Studies 3 – Economy & Environment **Topics** – Infrastructure – Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways etc. /

Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.

SUB TOPIC – Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests. / Climate Change Mitigation (Decarbonization, CBAM).

Introduction

India's power sector is witnessing a paradigm shift from historical scarcity to a surplus of low-cost renewable energy. With annual capacity additions of approximately 40 GW—among the fastest globally—the critical bottleneck has moved from generation to demand creation and market absorption. Nearly 42 GW of auctioned renewable projects await buyer utilities, highlighting the urgent need to expand the consumer pool beyond traditional DISCOMs to sustain the clean energy transition.

1. Structural Shift in India's Power Sector

From Scarcity to Surplus

Historical Context – Historically plagued by shortages, high tariffs, and financially stressed DISCOMs despite the Electricity Act, 2003.

Current Boom – India now installs ~40 GW of renewable capacity annually, driven by supportive policy, competitive auctions, and falling technology costs.

Cost Leadership – Indian solar and wind power costs are among the lowest globally, undercutting fossil fuel generation in many nations.

Falling Prices & Price Stability

Reverse Auctions – Competitive bidding has driven solar tariffs down to ~₹3 per unit, even for projects paired with energy storage.

Long-term Certainty – 12–25 year contracts shield consumers from price volatility.

Grid Reliability – Storage-backed projects now offer near round-the-clock (RTC) supply, overcoming intermittency issues.

2. Institutional Reforms & Market Expansion

Expanding Beyond DISCOMs

New Bottleneck – The primary challenge is no longer generation, but finding buyers for awarded projects.

Open Access Framework – Allows large consumers to bypass local monopolies and buy power directly from generators by paying network charges.

Captive Procurement – Industries are increasingly investing in dedicated renewable plants for self-consumption.

Current Impact – Approximately 25% of new renewable capacity is now driven by open access and captive consumers.

Role of Utilities

DISCOM Evolution – Transitioning from mere bulk buyers to grid managers and reliability service providers, facilitating a more flexible market.

3. New Demand Sources for Clean Electricity

Industrial & Commercial Demand

Data Centers & Manufacturing – High energy-consuming, export-oriented sectors benefit from cost certainty and carbon competitiveness.

CBAM Compliance – Access to clean energy is crucial for exports to withstand the EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM).

Electrification of Industrial Heat

Current State – ~50% of industrial energy demand is for process heat, currently reliant on imported fossil fuels.

Solution – Deployment of electric heat pumps and thermal batteries to shift this demand to clean electricity.

4. Sectoral Transformation

Fertilizers – Green ammonia (via renewable electricity) is becoming cost-competitive, reducing reliance on imported natural gas.

Steel Sector – Green steel using clean power is emerging as a viable alternative to coking coal, aided by falling costs.

Transport – Electric buses and freight corridors offer flexible demand that aligns well with daytime solar generation peaks.

Distributed Solar – Rooftop solar adoption by MSMEs and households lowers electricity bills, reduces peak demand, and cuts subsidy burdens.

5. Financing & Supply Chain Resilience

Financial Innovation

Aggregated Contracts – Bundling long-term contracts for securitization through dedicated finance platforms.

Fintech Integration – Leveraging India Stack and digital platforms to lower transaction costs for smaller consumers.

Manufacturing Ecosystem

Solar Success – Policy certainty and scale have significantly reduced dependence on imported solar panels.

Battery Challenge – While currently import-dependent, a similar scaling approach supported by critical mineral partnerships is feasible for the battery ecosystem.

Conclusion

India's energy transition has evolved from a capacity-building phase to a market-deepening phase. The path forward relies less on adding generation and more on building institutions and end-use demand. By expanding clean electricity adoption across industries, transport, and households, India can absorb surplus capacity, enhance energy security, and leverage its robust domestic demand to power the journey towards a Viksit Bharat.

Source – <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/indias-cheapest-power-needs-new-buyers-10504337/>