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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/>