

Editorial of the Day – 18.02.2026

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1. India's 'Third Way' for AI governance

General Science 3- Science & Technology

Topic- India's 'Third Way' for AI governance

For nations seeking development pathways compatible with their strategic interests and institutional capacities, India's model holds real appeal

As the AI Impact Summit unfolds in New Delhi, global leaders, policymakers, and technology experts are conscious about governing artificial intelligence (AI) for promoting innovation and managing its real and unknown risks. India is positioning itself as offering a 'Third Way', an alternative AI governance model distinct from those of the world's major AI powers.

About AI Governance

AI governance is about balancing innovation with protection, ensuring AI systems improve society without undermining rights, security, or economic stability. It refers to the rules, policies, standards, and institutions that guide how artificial intelligence (AI) is developed, deployed, and monitored to ensure it benefits society while minimizing risks.

Global Governance Divide

Different regions have adopted sharply contrasting AI governance strategies-

European Union- A compliance-heavy, risk-classification regime under the AI Act, emphasizing strict regulatory oversight.

United States- A largely market-driven, innovation-first approach with sectoral guidance rather than centralized AI legislation.

China- A centralized, state-directed governance structure with strong control over data and algorithm deployment.

Each model reflects its own economic structure and political traditions. These frameworks do not easily transfer to the realities of the Global South, where digital infrastructure, institutional capacity, and development priorities differ significantly.

India's Distinct Governance Approach

Governance Framework- India has released its AI governance guidelines that integrates adoption and diffusion of AI, risk mitigation, capacity-building, international diplomacy, and public-private collaboration.

1. It works within existing legal structures such as the Information Technology Act, 2000, and related digital rules, instead of creating entirely new regulatory architecture.
2. Priority sectors include healthcare, agriculture, education, and public administration. It aligns with India's broader digital public infrastructure strategy, as seen in platforms like Aadhaar, UPI, and Digi Locker.

First-of-Its-Kind Disclosure Rules- Recently, the government amended the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules to mandate labelling of AI-generated content that harmful content takedown within a three-hour window.

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1. It marks one of the first national-level mandates globally requiring explicit AI-generated content disclosure.
2. However, enforcement presents challenges like policing global technology giants, ensuring compliance at scale, balancing regulation with democratic freedoms, and coordinating across jurisdictions.
3. Implementation risks becoming fragmented, without international cooperation.

Key Issues with India in AI Governance

Innovation Without Protection– A framework that accelerates AI adoption without protecting workers displaced by automation, mandating transparency from AI developers, protecting whistleblowers, safeguarding vulnerable communities, and promoting public awareness and digital literacy etc risks replicating the same imbalances already visible among AI superpowers.

Regulatory Gaps and Fragmentation– India has not enacted a standalone AI law. Instead, it relies on the Information Technology Act, 2000, the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, and amendments to intermediary rules. It creates ambiguity about liability, overlapping enforcement responsibilities, and unclear compliance expectations for companies.

Data Governance & Privacy Concerns– AI systems depend heavily on data. Although India passed the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, concerns remain about broad government exemptions, weak independent oversight mechanisms, and limited clarity on algorithmic profiling. Without strong privacy enforcement, AI development could increase risks of surveillance or misuse.

Worker Displacement & Social Protection– AI adoption affects IT services, customer support, administrative roles, and gig economy platforms. India lacks a comprehensive AI-linked workforce transition policy. Key gaps reskilling frameworks at national scale, social safety nets for displaced workers, and sector-specific automation impact assessments.

Infrastructure & Compute Dependence– Advanced AI development requires High-performance computing (HPC), semiconductor access, and large-scale data centres. India still relies significantly on foreign cloud providers, imported chips, external foundational models, limiting strategic autonomy and bargaining power in global AI governance.

Bias & Socio-Cultural Complexity– India's diversity creates unique AI risks like language diversity (22+ official languages), caste and social bias, and regional inequalities. AI systems trained on global datasets may not reflect Indian realities, leading to discriminatory outcomes.

Supremacy of Global North– AI investment remains heavily concentrated among a small group of private firms in the Global North. It creates dependency on proprietary systems, limited bargaining power for developing nations, contextual risks poorly understood by external developers, and barriers to local innovation ecosystems.

Limited Global Coordination Mechanisms– India advocates Global South coordination, but no formal multilateral AI safety alliance yet exists among middle powers;

1. AI standards are still largely shaped by US-EU dynamics;
2. Cross-border enforcement remains weak.

Way Forward

India's 'Third Way'– It emphasizes strategic autonomy, localized governance models, public-private partnerships, shared safety evaluation frameworks, and collaborative research networks among emerging economies.

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Inclusive AI governance needs to incorporate social protection, labour transition strategies, and accountability mechanisms, not merely innovation scaling. Without these safeguards, the 'Third Way' could become a faster route to instability rather than resilience.

AI Governance Across the Global South- The coming year will determine whether India can successfully integrate innovation, national security, economic development, and human welfare. If successful, the 'Third Way' could become a template for AI governance across the Global South.

Strategic Opportunity- The AI Impact Summit offers India a chance to shape global coordination among middle powers, distribute AI gains more equitably, build shared research and safety infrastructure, and position itself as a hub for agile, collective governance. For countries seeking development pathways aligned with their institutional capacities and strategic interests, India's model holds real appeal.

Source- <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/indias-third-way-for-ai-governance/article70647367.ece>

2. A green light that experts say ignores the evidence (FL)

General Studies 3- International Relations

Topic- A green light that experts say ignores the evidence

Great Nicobar Island Project (GNIP)- Strategic Imperative vs Ecological and Tribal Concerns

The Great Nicobar Island Project (GNIP) is one of India's most ambitious strategic infrastructure initiatives. The National Green Tribunal (NGT), Kolkata Bench, recently upheld the environmental clearance granted to the project, stating that statutory safeguards and impact assessments had been complied with. However, the project continues to generate intense debate over environmental sustainability, tribal rights, and procedural transparency.

Overview of the Project

Objective

1. Transform Great Nicobar Island into a major maritime, logistics, and strategic hub.
2. Strengthen India's presence in the Indo-Pacific region.

Core Components

International Container Transshipment Terminal (ICTT)

1. Deep-draft port to handle large mother vessels.
2. Aims to reduce dependence on foreign transshipment hubs like Colombo and Singapore.

International Airport

1. Dual-use (civilian + military).
2. Enhances rapid troop mobilization and connectivity.

Planned Township

1. Urban settlement to house workforce and service industries.
2. Supports port-led industrialization.

450 MVA Power Plant

1. Gas and solar-based hybrid facility.
2. Intended to ensure uninterrupted power supply for infrastructure.

Proximity to Strait of Malacca

1. Located near one of the busiest maritime chokepoints globally.
2. Critical for global oil and trade flows.
3. Strategic relevance in the context of Chinese maritime expansion.

Maritime Domain Awareness

1. Enhances surveillance and naval presence in the Eastern Indian Ocean.
2. Strengthens India's Indo-Pacific strategy.

Economic Advantages

1. Boosts port-led development under Sagarmala framework.
2. Potential to generate employment, tourism, and logistics growth.

Environmental Concerns

Large-Scale Deforestation

1. Approximately 130 sq. km. of forest area to be cleared.
2. Nearly 9 lakh trees expected to be felled.
3. Great Nicobar is part of a biodiversity-rich, ecologically sensitive zone.

Impact on Wildlife

1. Habitat of the Leatherback Turtle (largest sea turtle species).
2. Threat to nesting grounds due to port construction.

Coral Reef Damage

1. Dredging activities may destroy coral reefs.
2. Coral ecosystems support marine biodiversity and coastal protection.

Ecological Fragility

1. Island ecosystems are inherently vulnerable.
2. Risk of irreversible biodiversity loss.

"Nauru Warning" Analogy

1. Historical example of ecological devastation due to extractive development.
2. Highlights risk of unsustainable island exploitation.

Human and Tribal Concerns

Indigenous Communities

1. Inhabited by **Shompen (PVTG)** and Nicobarese tribes.
2. Concerns regarding displacement and cultural erosion.

Forest Rights Act (2006)

1. Requires prior informed consent of Gram Sabha for diversion of forest land.
2. Legal obligation for community participation.

Allegations of Coercion– Reports of pressure on tribal representatives to sign consent documents.

Informed Consent Dilemma

1. Shompen tribe lives in relative isolation.
2. Language and communication barriers raise doubts about meaningful consent.

Institutional and Procedural Critiques

Transparency Issues

1. Critics allege heavy reliance on government data.

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2. Limited independent environmental scrutiny.

Strategic Exemption Concerns– Some project details reportedly withheld citing national security.

Role of NGT

1. NGT upheld environmental clearances.
2. Critics argue insufficient independent reassessment.

Constitutional and Legal Dimensions

Article 21 – Right to Life– Includes right to clean environment (as per Supreme Court jurisprudence).

Environmental Protection Act, 1986– Mandates environmental impact assessments.

Forest Conservation Act, 1980– Governs diversion of forest land for non-forest purposes.

Forest Rights Act, 2006– Protects rights of Scheduled Tribes and forest dwellers.

Development vs Sustainability– The Core Dilemma

Strategic Imperative

1. Strengthening maritime security.
2. Enhancing trade competitiveness.
3. Reducing reliance on foreign ports.

Environmental and Social Costs

1. Irreversible ecological damage.
2. Threat to tribal autonomy.
3. Precedent for development in ecologically sensitive zones.

Way Forward

Independent Scientific Review

1. Third-party ecological assessments.
2. Continuous environmental monitoring.

Strengthen Tribal Safeguards

1. Ensure free, prior, and informed consent.
2. Transparent grievance redressal mechanisms.

Adaptive Environmental Planning

1. Phased development with ecological buffers.
2. Coral relocation and biodiversity offset measures.

Balance Security with Sustainability– Integrate environmental security into national security discourse.

Conclusion

The Great Nicobar Island Project represents a strategic leap in India's Indo-Pacific posture, but it simultaneously raises profound environmental and tribal rights concerns. The long-term success of the project will depend not only on infrastructure development but also on maintaining ecological integrity, respecting indigenous rights, and ensuring transparent governance.

Source– <https://frontline.thehindu.com/environment/great-nicobar-project-ngt-clearance-environmental-concerns-india/article70648421.ece>