

P L RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

UPSC



YEARLY COMPILATION

2025 – 2026

MAINS CONTENT (QUESTIONS WITH ANSWER)

FEBRUARY (PART –7)

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2. Corridor to future- High-speed rail, freight, one for rare earths (IE)

1. Credible and creditable- On Union Budget 2026-27 (TH)

General Studies 3- Economy

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

Sub Topic- Inclusive Growth and issues arising from it.

Introduction

The Union Budget 2026 represents a distinct shift in strategy, moving away from "Big Bang" tax-centric reforms towards a credible, diffused, and multi-sectoral approach. Amidst significant geopolitical and geo-economic uncertainty, the budget prioritizes stability and execution over disruptive policy shocks. It focuses on targeted interventions in manufacturing, MSME support, and a sustained capital expenditure push to bolster medium-term growth while maintaining fiscal prudence.

Overall Approach- Stability Over Disruption

Shift from Previous Trends- Unlike Budget 2025, which focused heavily on income-tax slab and rate cuts, Budget 2026 avoids headline-grabbing "Big Bang" announcements.

Strategic Rationale- It adopts a diffused, multi-sectoral strategy designed to sustain growth in a volatile global environment.

Risk Mitigation- The approach is tailored to avoid disruptive shocks, ensuring policy continuity and stability during uncertain times.

Manufacturing & Strategic Sectors

Seven Strategic Areas- The budget targets support for seven key manufacturing pillars- Biopharma, Semiconductors, Electronics, Rare Earths, Chemicals, Capital Goods, and Textiles.

Semiconductors & Electronics-

1. India Semiconductor Mission 2.0- Launched to build on previous successes.
2. Electronics Component Manufacturing Scheme- Received higher allocation to enhance global competitiveness.

Biopharma Push- Biopharma SHAKTI Scheme- Allocated ₹10,000 crore over five years to position India as a global biopharma manufacturing hub.

Labour-Intensive Sectors- Specific focus on sectors like Textiles and Leather to generate employment.

Support for MSMEs and Exports

Champion MSMEs- A push to create "Champion MSMEs" through a combination of equity, liquidity, and professional support.

Economic Significance- MSMEs are critical, contributing 48.6% of India's exports.

Trade Resilience- Domestic support is prioritized because potential Free Trade Agreements (e.g., EU FTA) may not immediately offset losses from rising global protectionism (e.g., U.S. tariffs).

Tariff Considerations-

1. Pharma Exemption- Indian pharmaceuticals notably remain exempt from U.S. 50% tariffs.
2. Urgency- Sectors vulnerable to tariffs need faster policy support.
3. Execution Lesson- The budget stresses time-bound execution for textile initiatives, citing past delays in the National Export Promotion Mission.

Services Sector & Employment

Education-Employment Linkage- A proposal for a high-powered 'education to employment and enterprise' standing committee to bridge the skills gap.

Healthcare & Tourism- Emphasis on healthcare and medical tourism, capitalizing on India's emerging strengths in these areas.

Capital Expenditure & Infrastructure

Capex-Led Growth- The government continues its heavy lifting on investment due to persistently weak private investment sentiment.

Record Allocation- Capital expenditure is raised to ₹12.2 lakh crore, approximately 4.4% of GDP—the highest in a decade.

Key Projects- Includes funding for Dedicated Freight Corridors, new Skill Training Institutes, and a Coastal Cargo Promotion Scheme.

Regional & Election-Specific Measures

Targeted Announcements- The budget opts for smaller, region-specific projects rather than large, unconditional packages.

Key Initiatives-

1. **Rare Earth Corridors-** Planned for **Odisha, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu.**
2. **Kerala-** A dedicated **Coconut Promotion Scheme.**
3. **West Bengal-** Development of an **East Coast Industrial Corridor.**
4. **Odisha-** Announcement of a **New National Waterway.**

Fiscal Management & Tax Policy

Fiscal Deficit- Targeted at 4.3% of GDP for 2026–27, a slight improvement from 2025–26, signalling fiscal consolidation.

Direct Taxes-

1. Status Quo- No major direct tax cuts for individuals or corporates to preserve fiscal stability.
2. Simplification- Focus remains on procedural simplification rather than rate cuts.

Indirect Taxes- Relaxations provided to boost marine, leather, and textile exports and support the energy transition.

Revenue Projections-

1. Corporate Tax- Projected to grow nearly 14%.
2. Income Tax- Modest growth of 1.9%, reflecting the impact of earlier rate cuts.
3. GST- Gross GST revenue projected to fall 13.5%, due to rate rationalization and the end of the Compensation Cess.

Conclusion

Budget 2026 is characterized as a credible and creditable exercise in pragmatism. While it may disappoint those seeking populist tax reliefs, it offers a balanced roadmap that prioritizes stability, execution, and resilience. By combining a record capex push with targeted support for manufacturing and MSMEs, it seeks to navigate global uncertainties while laying the groundwork for sustained medium-term growth.

Way Forward-

1. Execution- Ensure time-bound implementation of sectoral schemes (especially Textiles & MSMEs).
2. Flexibility- Maintain fiscal flexibility to respond if global uncertainties intensify.
3. Reforms- Accelerate services sector reforms, particularly in education-employment linkages.
4. Diversification- Strengthen export diversification to mitigate external tariff shocks.
5. Monitoring- Improve execution capacity to prevent delays seen in previous missions.

Source- <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/credible-and-creditable-on-union-budget-2026-27/article70578790.ece>

2. Corridor to future- High-speed rail, freight, one for rare earths (IE)

General Studies 3- Economy & Environment

Topics- Infrastructure- Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways etc.

Sub Topic- Railways (High-Speed Rail, Dedicated Freight Corridors).

Introduction

The Union Budget 2026 has unveiled a transformative infrastructure agenda anchored by three critical corridor types- seven High-Speed Rail (HSR) lines, a new East-West Dedicated Freight Corridor, and strategic Rare Earth Corridors. These initiatives are designed as "growth connectors" to integrate major economic hubs, enhance logistics efficiency, and secure India's strategic mineral independence. By linking transport modernization with industrial resource development, the government aims to catalyse sustainable growth and regional balance.

High-Speed Rail (HSR) Corridors- The Growth Connectors

Definition & Scope-

1. High-Speed Rail- Refers to passenger trains operating at speeds above 250 km/h, mirroring the efficiency seen in the *Shinkansen* (Japan) and China's HSR network.
2. Objective- To significantly reduce travel time between key metropolises and foster regional economic integration.

Seven Proposed Corridors- The network focuses on the high-density economic zones of Western, Southern, and Northern India-

1. Mumbai – Pune
2. Pune – Hyderabad
3. Hyderabad – Bengaluru
4. Hyderabad – Chennai
5. Chennai – Bengaluru
6. Delhi – Varanasi
7. Varanasi – Siliguri

Economic Impact-

1. Multiplier Effect- Accelerates urbanization, boosts real estate and tourism, and facilitates service-sector expansion.
2. Cluster Development- Transforms connected cities into integrated mega-economic clusters.
3. Institutional Learning- Leverages technological and project management insights from the ongoing Mumbai-Ahmedabad Bullet Train project (slated for full completion by 2029).

Dedicated Freight Corridors (DFC)- Enhancing Logistics

Strategic Need- India's logistics cost stands at 13–14% of GDP, significantly higher than global benchmarks (8–10%). Reducing this cost is crucial for making Indian exports competitive.

New East-West Corridor-

1. Route- Connects Dankuni (West Bengal) to Surat (Gujarat).
2. Function- Links the mineral-rich eastern regions with the industrial and export hubs of the west, streamlining the movement of raw materials and finished goods.

Operational Benefits-

1. Decongestion- Separates heavy freight traffic from passenger lines, enhancing safety and punctuality for passenger trains.
2. Multimodal Integration- Complements PM Gati Shakti and the National Logistics Policy by enabling seamless connectivity between road, rail, and ports.

Rare Earth Corridors- Strategic Mineral Security

Strategic Importance- Rare earth elements (REEs) are the backbone of modern technology, essential for electronics, EVs, renewable energy, defense systems, and semiconductors.

Geopolitics- Reducing import dependence (especially from China) is vital for Strategic Autonomy.

The "Corridor" Concept-

1. **Locations-** Focused on mineral-rich states- Odisha, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu.
2. **Goal-** To move beyond mere extraction to a complete value chain development—including processing, research, and manufacturing.
3. **Alignment-** Directly supports Make in India and Atmanirbhar Bharat by securing critical raw materials for domestic high-tech industries.

Waterways & Multimodal Connectivity

New National Waterways- Announcement of 20 new national waterways to better connect mineral belts with industrial centres and ports.

Economic & Environmental Logic-

1. **Cost Efficiency-** Inland water transport is significantly cheaper than rail or road for bulk cargo (coal, minerals, cement).
2. **Sustainability-** It is more energy-efficient and has a lower carbon footprint.

Last-Mile Synergy- Integration with rail and road networks ensures a seamless supply chain, removing bottlenecks at transfer points.

Sustainable & Balanced Regional Development

Regional Equity- The focus on Eastern (Odisha, WB) and Southern India helps bridge regional development disparities. Linking "lagging regions" with established "growth centres" promotes inclusive growth.

Green Mobility- Shifting traffic to HSR and waterways reduces overall carbon emissions, aligning with India's climate change commitments (Panchamrit).

Urban Planning- Encourages Smart Growth and planned urbanization along corridors, helping to decongest existing mega-cities.

Employment- Generates massive employment opportunities during the construction phase and sustains long-term jobs through industrial expansion.

Conclusion

The proposed corridors represent a strategic shift towards integrated, future-ready infrastructure. They are not just transport lines but economic arteries designed to support India's ambition of becoming a \$5 trillion economy. However, realizing this vision will hinge on coordinated planning, effective land acquisition reforms, and robust private sector participation.

Way Forward-

1. **Execution-** Fast-track land acquisition and environmental clearances.
2. **Funding-** innovative financing models (e.g., asset monetization, green bonds) to fund these capital-intensive projects.
3. **Technology-** Ensure technology transfer for HSR and rare earth processing to build long-term domestic capabilities.

Source- <https://indianexpress.com/article/business/union-budget-2026-27-corridor-to-future-high-speed-rail-freight-one-for-rare-earths-10508120/lite/>

Editorial of the Day – 03.02.2026

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1. A full stop- On the top court, the right to menstrual health and hygiene (TH)

2. 'Would like infra projects to come up in all sectors, involve more private finance'

MoF Expenditure Secretary Vumlunmang Vualnam (IE)

1. A full stop- On the top court, the right to menstrual health and hygiene (TH)

General Studies 2- Polity

Topic- Fundamental Rights

Sub Topic- Significant provisions (Article 21), Rights issues.

Introduction

The Supreme Court of India, in a landmark judgment, has expanded the ambit of Article 21 (Right to Life) to include Menstrual Health and Hygiene, terming it an integral part of human dignity and bodily autonomy. This ruling marks a paradigm shift from a welfare-based approach to a rights-based governance model, directly addressing "menstrual poverty" and its adverse impact on girls' education. The Court has issued stringent directives to States and Union Territories to ensure school sanitation and hold authorities accountable for non-compliance.

Key Constitutional Interpretations (The Judgment)

Expansion of Article 21- The Court declared that the Right to Life and Personal Liberty inherently includes the right to menstrual health and hygiene. Menstruation is recognized not just as a biological process but as a matter of dignity, autonomy, and equality.

Rights-Based Approach- The judgment moves beyond viewing menstrual aid as "charity" or "welfare."

Bodily Autonomy- The Court ruled that true autonomy cannot be exercised without access to-

1. Functional and private toilets.
2. Clean water.
3. Affordable menstrual products.
4. Hygienic disposal systems.

Defining "Menstrual Poverty"- The Court explicitly used the term "Menstrual Poverty" to describe the lack of access to these basic facilities.

1. **Impact on Education-** It noted that this poverty restricts girls' Right to Education and violates their Right to Equality (Article 14) compared to male students and economically privileged peers.
2. **State Responsibility-** The State is legally bound to eliminate the stigma, stereotyping, and humiliation often faced by menstruating girls.

Directives Issued to States & UTs

Mandatory Infrastructure- All States and Union Territories must ensure functional, gender-segregated toilets in every school (Government and Private). Facilities must include water, sanitation, and disposal mechanisms.

Strict Accountability & Punitive Measures-

1. **Government Schools-** The State Government will be held directly accountable for any lapses or failures in providing these facilities.
2. **Private Schools-** Non-compliance can lead to severe penalties, including derecognition of the school.

Ground Reality & Structural Gaps

Data Insights (NFHS-5)- While there is improvement (77.3% of women aged 15–24 use hygienic methods), nearly one-fourth (25%) still lack access. This highlights a deep gendered inequity in health infrastructure.

Policy Gaps

1. **Swachh Bharat Abhiyan**- While guidelines exist, implementation has been uneven and episodic.
2. **Role of NGOs**- non-governmental organizations have filled critical gaps, but their efforts are **fragmented** and insufficient to tackle the scale of the problem or dismantle entrenched social stigma.

Way Forward (Systemic Action)

Institutionalization- Move from project-based interventions to making menstrual hygiene a core public health and education priority.

Budgetary Support- Ensure dedicated funds for-

1. Free/Affordable Menstrual products.
2. Sanitation infrastructure maintenance.
3. Waste management systems.

Curriculum Integration- Integrate menstrual health education into school curricula to normalize conversations and reduce stigma for both boys and girls.

Inter-Ministerial Coordination- Foster collaboration between the Ministries of Health, Education, Jal Shakti (Sanitation), and Women & Child Development.

Monitoring Mechanism- Strengthen monitoring systems to ensure continuous compliance by both public and private schools.

Conclusion

The Supreme Court's judgment is a historic intervention that transforms menstrual health from a "women's issue" to a fundamental human rights issue. By mandating state accountability and linking menstruation to the constitutional guarantees of dignity and education, the verdict aims to ensure that "a period can end a sentence, not a girl's education."

Source- https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/a-full-stop-on-the-right-to-menstrual-health-and-hygiene/article70583236.ece#google_vignette

2. 'Would like infra projects to come up in all sectors, involve more private finance'- MoF Expenditure Secretary Vumlung Vualnam (IE)

General Studies 3- Economy & Environment

Topics- Infrastructure- Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways etc. & Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.

Sub Topic- Ports & Shipping (Shipbuilding Mission, Maritime Development Fund).

Introduction

In a strategic move to diversify India's infrastructure portfolio beyond roads and railways, the Government of India has unveiled a massive ₹69,000 crore Shipbuilding Mission and Maritime Development Fund. Announced in the backdrop of the Union Budget 2026, this initiative aims to reduce India's heavy reliance on foreign shipping, cut logistics costs, and catalyze private sector participation through Public-Private Partnerships (PPP). The strategy reflects a shift from pure budgetary funding to a "partnership-driven development" model, emphasizing logistics efficiency and self-reliance (Atmanirbhar Bharat).

Strategic Shift in Infrastructure Spending

Diversification Goal- While roads and railways have historically dominated capital expenditure (Capex), the government is now pivoting towards shipping, coastal logistics, power, and rail station redevelopment.

Financing Model Transformation– Moving away from pure budgetary support to private finance and PPP models. Shift from traditional EPC (Engineering, Procurement, Construction) contracts to risk-sharing models like HAM (Hybrid Annuity Model) and BOT (Build-Operate-Transfer).

Rationale– PPP models incentivize long-term maintenance and better construction quality, preventing premature asset deterioration.

Shipbuilding Mission & Maritime Development Fund

Core Issue– Currently, only 5% of India's EXIM (Export-Import) cargo is carried by Indian-owned ships, leading to massive foreign exchange outflows in freight and leasing costs.

₹69,000 Crore Mission

Objective– To bolster domestic shipbuilding capacity for large vessels, coastal ships, and auxiliary maritime assets.

Strategic Impact– Reduces dependence on foreign fleets and strengthens national maritime security.

Maritime Development Fund (MDF)

1. **Function**– Designed to provide long-term finance and risk mitigation for private players entering the capital-intensive maritime sector.
2. **Goal**– To create a conducive financial ecosystem that encourages private investment in shipping.

Logistics Efficiency– expanding domestic shipping is projected to substantially lower India's logistics cost, which currently stands at 13–14% of GDP.

Coastal Shipping & Multimodal Logistics

Cost & Green Efficiency– Coastal shipping is identified as a fuel-efficient and low-cost alternative to road and rail for transporting bulk goods.

Environmental Impact– Supports India's climate commitments by offering a lower carbon footprint compared to land transport.

Integration– Pilot projects are underway to link rail–road–port connectivity, enhancing last-mile efficiency and multimodal integration.

'Make in India' Boost– Indigenous shipbuilding will generate skilled employment and foster technological capabilities, complementing the Atmanirbhar Bharat vision.

Infrastructure Capex– Current Profile & Private Role

Roads & Railways Dominance– These sectors receive the bulk of Capex due to mature project pipelines and the capacity to absorb funds (e.g., constructing ~10,000 km of highways annually).

PPP Success Stories

1. **Highways**– The Hybrid Annuity Model (HAM) has effectively mobilized private capital, with renewed interest in BOT projects.
2. **Railways**– Redevelopment of stations (e.g., Bhopal Railway Station) showcases how private participation can enhance service quality and asset monetization.

Land Monetisation– Railways plan to unlock value by redeveloping prime land near major stations (e.g., New Delhi) to ensure financial viability.

Power Sector Dynamics

Reduced Budgetary Reliance– The power sector no longer features in the top five Capex recipients because CPSUs (Central Public Sector Undertakings) now fund projects through internal resources.

Autonomy– Maharatna and Navratna CPSUs utilize their delegated financial powers to invest without direct budget support.

Strategic Exceptions– The government continues to fund specific strategic projects, such as large hydroelectric projects in Arunachal Pradesh.

High-Speed Rail & Future Financing

Cost Challenges– Projects like the Mumbai–Ahmedabad High-Speed Rail are capital-intensive due to elevated corridors and advanced technology.

Indigenization Path- Costs are expected to fall with the development of indigenous coaches (up to 280 kmph) and signaling systems.

Future Funding- Future corridors will rely on innovative financing packages, including multilateral funding and PPP elements, justified by long-term gains in urbanization and productivity.

Fiscal Federalism (16th Finance Commission)

Vertical Devolution- The Commission has retained the 41% tax devolution share to states, ensuring fiscal stability.

Horizontal Reforms-

1. **New Criterion-** Inclusion of "GDP contribution" as a metric to reward state efficiency and economic performance.
2. **Balancing Act-** Aims to balance redistributive justice (equity) with incentives for growth (efficiency).

Resource Pool- States are encouraged to view these recommendations not as zero-sum losses but as expanding opportunities within a growing national revenue pool.

Conclusion

The announcement of the Shipbuilding Mission marks a pivotal evolution in India's infrastructure strategy—from state-led expansion to partnership-driven development. By activating the Maritime Development Fund and leveraging PPP frameworks, the government aims to solve the twin challenges of high logistics costs and external dependency. This diversified approach, supported by fiscal federalism and indigenous manufacturing, sets the stage for a resilient, \$5 trillion economy.

Source- <https://indianexpress.com/article/business/vumlunmang-vualnam-expenditure-secretary-ministry-finance-projects-sectors-involve-private-finance-10510176/>

Editorial of the Day – 04.02.2026

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1. AI's next investment cycle belongs to applications (TH)

2. Delhi HC issues notice to govt- What rules govern frozen embryo donation, why they have been challenged (IE)

1. AI's next investment cycle belongs to applications (TH)

General Studies 3- Science & Technology

Topic- Developments and their applications and effects in everyday life (Artificial Intelligence).

Sub Topic- AI Commercialization & Startups.

Introduction

The AI industry is undergoing a pivotal shift from an initial phase of "infrastructure hype" (building massive models and hardware) to a mature phase of application-led profitability. Similar to the internet era, where value shifted from bandwidth to websites/apps, the next investment cycle in AI is focused on real revenues, enterprise adoption, and sustainable business models. The core narrative has moved from "experimental performance" to "measurable financial returns."

The Strategic Shift- Infrastructure to Applications

The Profitability Challenge-

Performance vs. Profit- The industry's challenge has shifted from proving AI works to proving it can be profitable.

Infrastructure Saturation- Massive spending on GPUs and data centres (\$320 billion in 2025) has not guaranteed sustainable returns.

Foundation Model Economics- Companies building foundation models face thin margins due to high inference costs and fierce competition.

Example- Despite \$13 billion in annualized revenue, OpenAI recorded a \$5 billion loss in 2024, highlighting the unsustainability of a model reliant on venture capital.

Rise of Applications-

1. Spending Shift- AI applications now account for the majority of generative AI spending, reaching \$19 billion in 2025.
2. Market Penetration- Within three years of ChatGPT's launch, AI apps captured over 6% of the global software market.

Where Real Value Is Emerging

Departmental AI & Coding Tools-

1. Coding Dominance- AI coding tools contributed \$4 billion to the \$7.3 billion departmental AI market in 2025.
2. Adoption Rates- ~50% of developers use these tools daily, rising to 65% in top-performing firms.
3. Value Proposition- Investors now Favor "task-oriented AI" (doing specific jobs) over generic "conversational AI."

Vertical-Specific Solutions-

1. The strongest long-term potential lies in specialized solutions for healthcare, law, finance, and manufacturing.
2. Success comes from being deeply embedded in workflows rather than acting as standalone interfaces.

M&A Activity

1. Meta's Acquisition- The \$2 billion acquisition of Manus (which reached \$125 million revenue in 9 months) underscores the demand for proven, revenue-generating applications.
2. Private Equity Surge- PE deals in AI apps grew by 65% (Q3 2025), with strategic M&A deal values rising 242% year-on-year.

Revenue Concentration

"Winner Takes Most"- Over 10 AI products now earn >\$1 billion in Annual Recurring Revenue (ARR), and ~50 products generate >\$100 million.

Metrics Matter- Investors have returned to core metrics- revenue, retention, growth, and profitability, moving away from speculative tech bets.

Market Dynamics- Applications Driving Infrastructure

Demand Pull- Applications are now the primary drivers of demand for models and infrastructure.

Shifting Leadership- Anthropic has captured 40% of enterprise LLM spending, largely due to its dominance in coding applications (54% market share). OpenAI's enterprise share has declined despite its early lead.

Margin Improvement- Generative AI reached a 34% contribution margin in 2025 (its first profitable year). Margins are projected to rise to 67% by 2028 as efficiency improves, with profits flowing to end-to-end solution providers.

Policy and Regulatory Challenges

Competition Concerns- Governments must monitor vertically integrated giants (model providers building their own apps) to prevent them from squeezing out smaller developers. "Acqui-hires" pose a risk to innovation and workforce stability.

Legal Frameworks-

1. Copyright & Data- Disputes over training data and intellectual property are central legal concerns.
2. Privacy- Frameworks must adapt to "AI Agents" that handle sensitive data autonomously.

Regulatory Balance- Over-regulation at the application layer could stifle the very innovation that is driving the industry's economic value.

Conclusion

The AI industry is entering a decisive "monetization phase." The era of funding "raw capacity" is ending; the future belongs to scalable, practical applications that solve real-world problems and generate external revenue. Just as the internet was monetized through applications like e-commerce and social media rather than fibre-optic cables, AI's long-term value lies in useful, workflow-embedded software.

Source- <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/ais-next-investment-cycle-belongs-to-applications/article70588552.ece>

2. Delhi HC issues notice to govt- What rules govern frozen embryo donation, why they have been challenged (IE)

General Studies 2- Polity

Topics- Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

Sub Topic- Reproductive Rights, Health Policy, Judicial Activism, Bio-ethical concerns in medical technology.

Introduction

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

The Delhi High Court has recently brought the spotlight onto India's reproductive laws by issuing a notice on a Public Interest Litigation (PIL). This PIL challenges specific provisions of the Assisted Reproductive Technology (Regulation) Act, 2021, which currently prohibits the donation of surplus frozen embryos for reproductive use. The petitioners argue that mandating the destruction of viable embryos, even when both the donor and recipient couples consent to donation, is arbitrary and unconstitutional. This case opens a critical debate on the intersection of bioethics, reproductive autonomy, and state regulation.

Key Details of the PIL & Issue

The Challenge- The PIL questions the statutory mandate that requires the destruction of surplus frozen embryos instead of allowing them to be donated to other infertile couples.

Legal Conflict- While the ART Act, 2021 explicitly permits sperm and oocyte (egg) donation, it inexplicably bars the donation of embryos for reproductive purposes.

Public Health Scale- With infertility affecting an estimated 27–30 million couples in India, access to Assisted Reproductive Technology (ART) and In-Vitro Fertilization (IVF) is a significant public health necessity.

Constitutional Basis- The plea invokes Articles 14 (Right to Equality) and 21 (Right to Life and Personal Liberty), alleging that the prohibition is arbitrary and violates the "decisional autonomy" of couples.

Assisted Reproductive Technology (ART)- Concept & Context

Definition- ART encompasses medical procedures used to address infertility, including IVF (In-Vitro Fertilization), ICSI (Intracytoplasmic Sperm Injection), and gamete donation.

India's Growth Story- India has become a global hub for ART due to-

1. Rising infertility rates.
2. Delayed marriages and lifestyle diseases.
3. Growth of medical tourism (affordable, high-quality care).

Regulatory Vacuum- Historically, the absence of laws led to the exploitation of surrogates/donors and the mushrooming of unregulated clinics, necessitating the 2021 Act.

Global Best Practices- Countries like the UK, Australia, and parts of the European Union allow embryo donation, governed by strict ethical frameworks that prioritize informed consent.

The ART Act, 2021- Restrictive Provisions

Clinic Regulation- Mandates the registration of all ART clinics and gamete banks to ensure standardization, accountability, and safety.

Permitted Donations- The Act allows altruistic donation of sperm and oocytes. It even permits "double donor IVF," where a child is conceived using both a donor sperm and a donor egg (meaning neither intending parent has a genetic link).

Storage Rules- Surplus embryos can be cryopreserved (frozen) for a maximum of 10 years.

The Prohibition- After the 10-year period (or if the couple no longer needs them), the embryos must be destroyed or donated for research. Transferring these frozen embryos to another infertile couple for reproductive use is strictly banned, even with consent.

The Medical Perspective- Frozen Embryos

Surplus Generation- To maximize success rates, IVF cycles typically generate multiple embryos. Since only one or two are implanted, "surplus" embryos remain.

Biological Viability- Frozen embryos, upon thawing, are considered biologically equivalent to fresh embryos and are successfully used in pregnancies worldwide.

Cost & Access- Full IVF cycles are expensive and physically demanding. Embryo Donation offers a significantly cheaper and less invasive alternative for infertile couples who cannot produce their own gametes.

The Disconnect- Current Indian law treats these biologically viable embryos as "non-transferable" waste, contradicting their medical potential.

Constitutional Challenges (The Legal Argument)

Article 14 (Right to Equality)-

1. **Arbitrary Classification-** The plea argues that allowing "fresh" donor embryos (created via separate sperm and egg donation) while banning "frozen" embryo donation creates an unreasonable classification.
2. **Double Standard-** If genetic non-linearity (raising a child not genetically yours) is legal in "double donor IVF," why is it illegal when using a frozen embryo?

Article 21 (Personal Liberty)

Decisional Autonomy- The right to make reproductive choices—including how to dispose of one's biological material (embryos) or how to become a parent—is part of the fundamental right to privacy and dignity.

Judicial Review- The Court is tasked with determining if this differentiation by the State is "constitutionally reasonable" or merely a relic of conservative policymaking.

Ethical & Social Dimensions

Destruction vs. Life Potential- Mandating the destruction of viable embryos raises ethical questions about wasting potential life that could help another family.

Infertility & Equity-

1. **Widening Options-** Donation could provide a lifeline for women unable to produce viable eggs or couples with severe male factor infertility.
2. **Class Divide-** Wealthier couples can bypass these laws by seeking treatment abroad, while poorer couples are left without options, deepening social inequality.

Consent Framework- The petitioners emphasize that the process should be based on voluntary, altruistic, and informed consent from both the donor and recipient, mitigating fears of commercialization.

7. State Regulation vs. Individual Autonomy

State's Rationale- The ban likely stems from a desire to prevent-

1. **Commercialization-** Buying and selling of embryos (though the plea argues for *donation*, not sale).
2. **Legal Complications-** Disputes over parentage or future claims by biological parents.

Paternalism Concerns- Critics argue that the State is being "over-paternalistic," restricting personal freedom and dignity under the guise of protection.

The Balancing Act- The judiciary must balance the State's interest in preventing unethical practices with the individual's liberty to make reproductive decisions.

Role of Courts- As seen historically, courts often step in to update laws when statutory frameworks lag behind technological advancements and changing social realities.

Conclusion

The debate over frozen embryo donation illustrates the tension between technological possibility and regulatory caution. The current blanket ban appears to be legally inconsistent and ethically wasteful. A nuanced policy shift—moving from prohibition to a strictly regulated, consent-based donation framework—could uphold reproductive rights while maintaining ethical safeguards. As the Delhi High Court examines the matter, the outcome could redefine the boundaries of reproductive autonomy and medical law in India.

Source- <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-law/delhi-hc-notice-rules-frozen-embryo-donation-10510446/>

Editorial of the Day – 05.02.2026

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1. Has the 16th Finance Commission sidelined the States and prioritised the Centre's needs? (TH)

2. For India-Pakistan, peace is not weakness, dialogue is not defeat

1. Has the 16th Finance Commission sidelined the States and prioritised the Centre's needs? (TH)

General Studies 2- Polity

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

SUB TOPIC- Issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure (Devolution of powers and finances up to local levels).

Introduction

The Sixteenth Finance Commission (2024–29) has been constituted by the President of India to define the fiscal architecture of the nation for the next five years. It is tasked with recommending the sharing of central taxes, determining grants-in-aid, and suggesting measures to enhance the financial stability of States. This commission is particularly significant as it operates in the context of emerging global and domestic challenges such as climate change, shifting population dynamics, and the need for long-term fiscal sustainability.

Constitutional Framework & Nature

Constitutional Mandate- Established under Article 280 of the Indian Constitution.

Authority- It is a Quasi-Judicial and Constitutional body.

Appointing Authority- Constituted by the President of India.

Frequency- Appointed every five years (or earlier if considered necessary by the President).

Nature of Recommendations- Advisory in nature (not binding). However, due to their constitutional sanctity, they are generally accepted by the Union Government.

Primary Goal- To ensure the equitable distribution of financial resources between the Union and the States, acting as a key pillar of Fiscal Federalism.

Composition and Appointment

The Commission is a multi-member body appointed by the President, consisting of-

Chairperson- Head of the Commission.

Four Members- Selected based on expertise in specific fields-

1. Public Finance
2. Economics
3. Law
4. Public Administration

Tenure- Normally five years, as specified in the presidential order.

Core Functions & Mandate

The Commission acts as the balancing wheel of the Indian fiscal system through four distinct functions-

Vertical Devolution- Recommending the distribution of the net proceeds of taxes between the Centre and the States.

Horizontal Devolution- Determining the principles for distributing the share of taxes among the respective States.

Grants-in-Aid- Governing the principles for grants-in-aid to States out of the Consolidated Fund of India (**Article 275**).

Local Government Support- Suggesting measures to augment the Consolidated Fund of a State to supplement the resources of Panchayats and Municipalities based on State Finance Commission recommendations.

Devolution Criteria (The Formula)

The Commission employs specific criteria to ensure fairness in **Horizontal Devolution-**

Income Distance

1. Purpose- To address regional inequalities.
2. Logic- States with lower per capita income compared to the state with the highest income receive a higher share.

Population

1. Purpose- To reflect the expenditure needs of the state.
2. Logic- Higher population implies higher demand for public services.

Area

1. Purpose- Accounts for administrative costs.
2. Logic- Larger states have higher costs of delivering services across vast territories.

Forest and Ecology-

1. Purpose- Compensates States for ecological conservation.
2. Logic- Recognizes the opportunity cost of maintaining forest cover (which restricts development) for the national good.

Demographic Performance-

1. Purpose- Rewards population control measures.
2. Logic- Incentivizes states that have successfully lowered fertility rates.

Fiscal Discipline-

1. Purpose- Incentivizes responsible financial management.
2. Logic- Rewards states that manage their deficits and revenue generation efficiently

Grants-in-Aid Mechanisms

Beyond tax sharing, the Commission recommends specific grants to cover gaps-

Revenue Deficit Grants- Targeted at states that still face a deficit in their revenue account even after-tax devolution.

Local Body Grants- Directed towards strengthening the third tier of government (Panchayats and Municipalities).

Sector-Specific Grants- Funds tied to critical sectors to ensure minimum standards of service-

1. Health
2. Education
3. Disaster Management
4. Infrastructure

Emerging Trends & Focus Areas

The 16th Finance Commission is evolving to address modern realities-

Performance-Based Incentives- A shift from entitlement-based transfers to outcome-based rewards.

Climate Change & Environment- Explicit focus on sustainable development and climate resilience in funding criteria.

Demographic Transition- Balancing the needs of states with growing populations against those with aging populations.

Defence & Security- Increasing consideration for non-lapsable funds for defence and internal security modernization.

Fiscal Sustainability- Emphasis on debt consolidation and adhering to fiscal deficit targets.

Significance

Regional Balance- It promotes balanced regional development by transferring resources from richer to poorer regions.

Macroeconomic Stability– Ensures that the division of resources does not compromise the fiscal health of the Centre or States.

Conflict Resolution– Acts as a stabilizing force in Centre-State relations by providing an objective formula for resource sharing.

Way Forward- Strengthening Fiscal Federalism

To remain effective, the 16th Finance Commission must adopt the following strategies–

Enhance Predictability– Ensure stability in tax devolution to allow States to plan long-term projects. Reduce reliance on ad-hoc transfers.

Update Devolution Criteria– Regularly revise criteria (like using the latest Census data appropriately) to reflect changing socio-economic realities while balancing equity with efficiency.

Build State Capacity– Support States in improving their own Tax Effort and Public Financial Management (PFM). Encourage the adoption of Outcome-Based Budgeting.

Empower Local Governments– Ensure direct and timely transfers to Panchayats and Municipalities. Link these grants to visible service delivery outcomes.

Address Emerging Challenges– Mainstream concerns like urbanization, aging populations, and climate change into the core fiscal transfer formula.

Consultative Approach– Promote wider and more transparent consultation with States before finalizing recommendations to uphold the spirit of Cooperative Federalism.

Conclusion

The Finance Commission remains the cornerstone of India's fiscal architecture, tasked with the delicate balancing act of aligning national priorities with State autonomy. As India progresses towards a \$5 trillion economy, the 16th Finance Commission's ability to adapt its framework to emerging challenges—specifically climate change and demographic shifts—will be crucial for sustaining inclusive growth and maintaining federal harmony.

Source– <https://www.thehindu.com/data/has-the-16th-finance-commission-sidelined-the-states-and-prioritised-the-centres-needs/article70592338.ece>

2. For India-Pakistan, peace is not weakness, dialogue is not defeat

General Studies 2– Polity

TOPICS– India and its neighbourhood- relations.

SUB 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.

Introduction

The trajectory of India-Pakistan relations has recently resurfaced in diplomatic discourse, centering on a critical debate– Can calibrated dialogue coexist with firm security measures to break the cycle of perpetual hostility? While relations remain largely frozen due to the "trust deficit" and cross-border terrorism, there is a growing realization that complete disengagement in a nuclearized region carries high risks of miscalculation. The current discourse advocates for a shift from high-stakes summit diplomacy to an incremental, issue-based engagement strategy.

Historical Trajectory– A Legacy of Mistrust

The relationship has been defined by a cycle of hope followed by betrayal, creating deep-seated strategic mistrust.

Post-Independence Rivalry– Since the traumatic Partition of 1947, relations have been punctuated by four major wars (1947, 1965, 1971, 1999) and the enduring Kashmir dispute.

Pattern of Disruption– Historical peace initiatives have consistently been derailed by terror events–

1. The Lahore Declaration (1999) was followed immediately by the Kargil Conflict.
2. The Agra Summit (2001) and subsequent composite dialogues were undermined by the 2001 Parliament attack and the 26/11 Mumbai attacks.

The Core Obstacle– India maintains a rigid stance that terrorism is the central issue, and dialogue is futile without credible, verifiable action against Pakistan-based terror groups.

Security Concerns & India's Strategic Position

India's policy has evolved from "diplomatic protest" to "active deterrence," driven by a Doctrine of Accountability.

Security Assurances Precede Talks- Terror attacks on strategic installations like Pathankot (2016) and Pulwama (2019) solidified the view that security guarantees are a prerequisite for engagement.

Legitimacy Concerns- India fears that unconditional dialogue without accountability risks legitimizing hostile actions by the Pakistani deep state.

Shift to Deterrence- Operations like the Surgical Strikes (2016) and Balakot Airstrikes (2019) signalled a paradigm shift- India is willing to use punitive force short of full-scale war.

Limits of Hard Power- While deterrence is essential for security, military posturing alone cannot resolve long-term instability or prevent accidental escalation in a volatile environment

The Risks of "No Dialogue" in a Nuclearized Region

While silence is often seen as a diplomatic tool, total disengagement creates its own set of dangerous vulnerabilities.

Communication Vacuum- The absence of formal diplomatic channels increases the risk of misinterpreting moves, potentially leading to unintended military escalation.

Hyper-Nationalism & Rhetoric- In the absence of official dialogue, social media-driven rhetoric and domestic political pressures can hijack the narrative, escalating tensions rapidly.

Regional Volatility- South Asia lacks robust crisis-management mechanisms. Without a hotline or backchannel, even limited border incidents can spiral out of control.

Strategic Stasis- Silence is not neutrality; it is stagnation. It allows positions to harden and hostilities to fester rather than resolve.

The Case for Incremental & Layered Engagement

The emerging consensus suggests moving away from "Summit-Centric" diplomacy (which is high-profile and fragile) to "Layered Engagement" (which is low-profile and resilient).

People-to-People Contacts- Encouraging cultural exchanges, sports, academic collaboration, and medical visas helps humanize the "other" and counter state-sponsored stereotypes.

Low-Risk Engagement

1. Religious Tourism- Facilitating pilgrimages (e.g., Kartarpur Corridor).
2. Student/Artistic Exchanges- These pose minimal security risks but build immense social capital.

Expanding the Peace Constituency- Such engagement strengthens the hands of moderate voices within Pakistan who favour stability over the military-mullah complex's hostility.

Framework for Conditional & Calibrated Dialogue

The way forward is not "unconditional friendship" but a "conditional working relationship."

Engagement ≠ Endorsement- Talking to Pakistan does not imply approval of its policies; it is a strategic investment in conflict prevention.

Clear Benchmarks- India can set measurable conditions for progress, such as-

1. Verifiable action against proscribed terror groups (e.g., LeT, JeM).
2. Curbing anti-India hate rhetoric.

Reciprocity- The approach should be transactional. Limited Pakistani compliance should be met with proportional Indian responses (e.g., starting Track-II talks or limited sporting ties).

Flexible Diplomacy- Moving from a binary "All or Nothing" approach allows for flexibility without compromising on core principles of territorial integrity and security.

Role of Regional & Issue-Based Multilateralism

Given the bilateral deadlock, alternative platforms offer a "neutral ground" for engagement.

SAARC Limitations- Bilateral hostility has effectively paralyzed the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), rendering it ineffective.

Humanitarian & Technical Cooperation- Engagement can restart in non-political, shared vulnerability areas-

1. Climate Change & Disaster Relief- Both nations face similar climate threats.
2. Pandemic Response- Health cooperation.
3. Indus Waters Treaty- Utilizing existing mechanisms for water-sharing discussions.

Logic- Cooperation in these functional areas builds trust without touching the "third rail" of political disputes.

Conclusion

India's diplomatic challenge lies in balancing uncompromising security concerns with pragmatic engagement. Permanent Disengagement risks conflict escalation through miscalculation. Unconditional Dialogue risks moral hazard by rewarding bad behaviour.

The Middle Path- A calibrated approach—firm on terrorism, flexible on people-to-people contact, and incremental in confidence-building—offers the most realistic path forward. Dialogue, when structured carefully, is not a concession of defeat but a strategic necessity for regional stability.

Source- <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/for-india-pakistan-peace-is-not-weakness-dialogue-is-not-defeat-10514220/>

Editorial of the Day – 06.02.2026

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1. More, and less- On Budget 2026 and health-care spending (TH)

2. In India's first-ever Disaster Victim Identification guidelines, teeth hold the key (IE)

1. More, and less- On Budget 2026 and health-care spending (TH)

General Studies 2- Governance & Social Justice

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

Sub Topic- Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

Introduction

The Union Budget 2026-27 presents a mixed bag for India's health sector. While it introduces forward-looking initiatives like Biopharma SHAKTI to boost R&D and manufacturing, the overall allocation remains modest. Despite a nominal increase in absolute numbers, the budget draws criticism for missing the National Health Policy (NHP) 2017 target of increasing public health expenditure to 2.5% of GDP by 2025. The focus has shifted towards tertiary care, research, and workforce development, even as concerns persist regarding the declining central share in primary health missions.

Overall Financial Allocation & Trends

Total Allocation- ₹1.05 lakh crore allocated for the health sector.

Year-on-Year Growth- This represents a 10% increase over the Revised Estimates (RE) of the previous year.

Share of Total Budget- Health spending accounts for only 1.9% of total government expenditure.

Share of GDP- The allocation stands at approximately 0.26% of GDP, significantly lower than the global average and domestic targets.

Key Initiatives & Schemes

Biopharma SHAKTI (Strategic Investment)

Launch- A flagship scheme launched with an outlay of ₹10,000 crore over five years.

Objective- To position India as a global hub for biologics and biosimilars manufacturing.

R&D Focus- Aims to address long-standing gaps in health research and development capacity, moving beyond generic drug manufacturing.

Clinical Trials- Plans to establish 1,000 accredited clinical trial sites nationwide to accelerate drug discovery and testing.

Institutional Expansion & Modernization

NIPERs- Three new National Institutes of Pharmaceutical Education and Research (NIPERs) will be set up, and seven existing units will be modernized.

Mental Health Infrastructure- A second campus for NIMHANS (National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences) is planned in North India. Upgradation of two existing institutions into national mental health institutes.

Human Resources for Health (Capacity Building)

The budget acknowledges the demographic shift and the need for specialized care-

Allied Health Professionals- A target to train 1 lakh allied health professionals over the next five years to support doctors and nurses.

Elderly Care- Training for 1.5 lakh elderly care workers announced.

Significance- This is a timely intervention as India transitions towards a "grey nation" (aging population) due to falling fertility rates, requiring robust geriatric care.

Affordability & Relief Measures

Specific fiscal measures were introduced to reduce the out-of-pocket expenditure burden on patients-

Customs Duty Exemptions- 17 cancer drugs and specific treatments for rare diseases have been exempted from customs duties.

Tax Relief on Remittances- The Tax Collected at Source (TCS) on remittances for medical treatment and education abroad has been reduced from 5% to 2%.

Impact- These measures are expected to significantly lower the cost of life-saving treatments for critical illnesses.

Critical Analysis & Concerns

Despite the positive steps in R&D, structural issues remain unaddressed-

Missed NHP Target- The government has failed to meet the National Health Policy 2017 commitment to raise public health spending to 2.5% of GDP by 2025. Current spending is roughly one-tenth of this target.

National Health Mission (NHM) Cuts- Reduced allocation for the NHM is a major concern, as it serves as the backbone of primary healthcare in rural India.

Contradiction- Funding was cut despite strong utilization rates by states in the previous fiscal.

Declining Central Role- There is a trend of declining Central share in health spending, shifting the burden to States. These risks creating uneven health outcomes, where richer states have better healthcare than poorer states.

Equity Issues- The focus on high-end biopharma and tertiary institutions may overshadow the urgent need for strengthening primary healthcare centres (PHCs) and sub-centres.

Conclusion

The Budget 2026-27 signals a strategic pivot towards health security, research, and specialized workforce creation, aligning with India's pharmaceutical ambitions. However, the foundational goal of Universal Health Coverage (UHC) faces risks due to inadequate aggregate spending. Without a substantial increase in public investment to bridge the gap towards the 2.5% GDP target, the twin goals of affordability and equity for the common citizen may remain elusive. The path forward requires balancing high-tech R&D with robust funding for primary care missions.

Source- https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/more-and-less-on-budget-2026-and-health-care-spending/article70596060.ece#google_vignette

2. In India's first-ever Disaster Victim Identification guidelines, teeth hold the key (IE)

General Studies 3- Disaster Management

Topics- Disaster and Disaster Management.

Sub Topic- Institutional Framework, Preparedness, and Response Mechanisms.

Introduction

The National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) has released India's first-ever Disaster Victim Identification (DVI) Guidelines and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). This landmark development aims to standardize the scientific identification and dignified handover of victims in mass fatality incidents. By adopting global best practices, India seeks to move beyond ad-hoc identification methods to a systematic, forensic-driven approach, ensuring legal certainty and psychological closure for grieving families.

Key Details & Significance

First National Framework- These are the first official guidelines establishing a uniform protocol for DVI across India.

Global Standards- The guidelines adopt Interpol's DVI standards, recognizing Dental records, DNA, and Fingerprints as the primary scientific identifiers.

New Integrations- For the first time, Forensic Odontology (teeth analysis) and Forensic Archaeology are formally integrated into India's disaster response mechanism.

Strategic Proposal- A recommendation has been made for a National Dental Data Registry to expedite future identifications.

Understanding Disaster Victim Identification (DVI)

Definition- The scientific process of identifying human remains following mass fatality incidents (e.g., earthquakes, floods, air crashes, industrial disasters).

Importance-

Humanitarian- Ensures the dignity of the deceased and provides closure to families.

Legal- Resolves issues related to inheritance, insurance claims, and criminal liability.

Administrative- Prevents misidentification and legal disputes.

The Four-Stage DVI Process (NDMA Guidelines)

The guidelines outline a systematic four-step workflow to ensure accuracy and chain of custody-

Stage 1- Recovery of Remains- Systematic retrieval at the disaster site. Tagging, documentation, and preservation to prevent the "commingling" (mixing) of body parts.

Stage 2- Post-Mortem Data Collection (PM)- Detailed examination of the remains. Collection of fingerprints, dental profiling, DNA sampling, and recording physical marks (scars, tattoos).

Stage 3- Ante-Mortem Data Collection (AM)- Collection of "before death" data from families and authorities. Includes medical/dental history, photographs, personal belongings, and DNA samples from relatives.

Stage 4- Reconciliation & Handover- Matching AM and PM data scientifically. Formal confirmation of identity by a board of experts. Dignified release of remains to the next of kin.

Role of Forensic Odontology (Why Teeth Matter)

High Survivability- Teeth are the hardest substance in the human body; they can withstand extreme heat, trauma, and decomposition where fingerprints and facial features are destroyed.

Unique Identifier- Dental patterns are unique to individuals.

Proven Success- Used extensively in the 2004 Tsunami, 9/11 attacks, and various aviation disasters.

Case Study- In the Air India Crash (Ahmedabad), forensic odontology was crucial in identifying over 250 victims from charred remains.

Strategic Proposals & Emerging Tools

National Dental Data Registry

Purpose- To create a centralized database of dental records.

Benefit- Allows for instant matching of ante-mortem records during mass disasters, significantly reducing identification time.

Challenges- Requires addressing data privacy concerns and standardizing dental reporting formats across clinics.

Forensic Archaeology

Definition- Application of archaeological methods to locate, exhume, and analyse buried or scattered remains.

Utility- Critical for landslides, earthquakes, and forest recoveries where remains are hidden or buried.

Current Application- Already being used in North East India (Arunachal, Manipur, Tripura) to recover WWII soldier remains.

Gaps & Challenges in Current Framework

Institutional Coordination- Lack of a dedicated DVI Incident Commander often leads to chaotic and fragmented responses at ground zero.

Skilled Workforce Shortage- Severe scarcity of trained Forensic Anthropologists, Odontologists, and DNA experts. Existing labs are often overburdened.

Operational Flaws- Inconsistent tagging of bodies. Weak Chain of Custody (tracking evidence handling). Poor documentation leading to misidentification.

Climate Change Factor- Increasing frequency of extreme weather events (floods, heatwaves) accelerates decomposition, making identification harder and time-sensitive.

Alignment with Disaster Governance

Sendai Framework– The guidelines align with the global Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, emphasizing "Build Back Better" and institutional resilience.

Dignity-Centric Approach– Shifts the paradigm from just "rescue and relief" to the "ethical handling" of the dead.

Technology Integration– Encourages the use of Virtual Autopsy (non-invasive), GIS Mapping for body location, and Biometric Tools.

Conclusion

The release of India's first DVI guidelines is a critical step towards humane, scientific, and accountable disaster management. It addresses a long-standing gap in India's disaster response architecture. However, the roadmap to success lies in–

1. Infrastructure Investment– Upgrading forensic labs and storage facilities.
2. Capacity Building– Training specialized personnel in forensic odontology and anthropology.
3. Data Integration– establishing the National Dental Data Registry.

As climate-induced disasters become more frequent, robust DVI capabilities are not just a technical necessity but a moral imperative to uphold human dignity and public trust.

Source– <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-sci-tech/india-first-disaster-victim-identification-guidelines-10515916/>



Editorial of the Day – 07.02.2026

Index

1. Cycles of revolt- On Pakistan and the Baloch rebels (TH)

2. Oil and beyond- With Russia, India has to balance old ties, new realities (IE)

1. Cycles of revolt- On Pakistan and the Baloch rebels (TH)

General Studies 3- Internal Security

Topic- Security challenges and their management in border areas.

Sub Topic- Linkages of organized crime with terrorism; Role of external state and non-state actors in creating challenges to internal security.

Introduction

Baluchistan, Pakistan's largest and most resource-rich province, is currently witnessing a severe intensification of its long-standing insurgency. The region has grabbed international headlines due to a series of coordinated militant attacks by separatist groups and heavy-handed military reprisals by the Pakistani state. This "Cycle of Revolt" is driven by a complex mix of historical grievances, economic exclusion from multi-billion-dollar projects like the CPEC, and allegations of severe human rights violations, posing a significant challenge to regional stability and strategic projects like the Gwadar port.

Geographic and Strategic Profile

Baluchistan is the strategic pivot of Pakistan's geography, offering connectivity to the Middle East and Central Asia.

Geography

Size- Largest province, covering ~44% of Pakistan's land area (~347,190 sq km).

Borders- Shares critical borders with Iran (West) and Afghanistan (Northwest), and has a long coastline along the Arabian Sea (South).

Topography- Diverse landscape featuring the Sulaiman and Kirthar mountains, Chagai hills (site of nuclear tests), and the arid Kharan Desert.

Climate- Arid to semi-arid with extreme temperature variations (hot summers, cold highland winters).

Resources- Rich in natural capital including Coal, Copper, Gold (Reko Diq mine), Chromite, and Natural Gas.

Strategic Assets

- Gwadar Port- A deep-sea port that is the crown jewel of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).
- Rivers- Dasht, Hingol, and Zhob (mostly seasonal).

The Current Crisis- Escalation of Violence

The province has seen a shift from low-level insurgency to high-intensity, coordinated warfare.

Recent Attacks (Jan 31)- The Baluchistan Liberation Army (BLA) launched coordinated strikes, resulting in the deaths of over 30 civilians and 18 security personnel.

Military Reprisal- The Pakistani military responded with large-scale operations, reportedly killing 150 Baloch fighters. However, these reactive measures have historically failed to secure long-term peace.

Tactical Shift

- Consolidation- Rebel groups, including the BLA and the Balochistan Liberation Front (BLF), have formed an umbrella organization called Baloch Raaji Aajoi Sangar (BRAS) to execute unified operations.
- Persistence- Despite operations following incidents like the Jaffar Express hijacking (March 2025), the insurgency remains resilient.

Drivers of the Insurgency

The unrest is fuelled by a combination of internal suppression and regional instability.

State Coercion- The Pakistani state's prolonged reliance on brute force rather than political engagement has hardened resistance.

The 'Taliban' Effect- The security situation along the tribal borderlands deteriorated significantly after the Taliban takeover in Kabul.

Operational Void- Baloch rebels and the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) are exploiting the chaotic security environment to launch hit-and-retreat attacks.

Economic Grievances & Strategic Context

A sense of "relative deprivation" is central to the conflict; locals feel they are owners of a rich land but live in poverty.

The CPEC Dilemma- Baluchistan hosts the flagship \$60 billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Locals perceive CPEC as an exploitative project where jobs and resources go to outsiders (primarily from Punjab or China) while they face checkpoints and displacement.

Resource Exploitation- Disputes exist over the extraction of minerals (Gold, Copper) and proposed deals with foreign firms (including American companies). Lack of Transparency- There is a severe lack of transparency in how revenues from these projects are shared with the local population.

Human Rights & State Response

The state's counter-insurgency strategy has drawn international criticism.

"Kill and Dump" Policy- Crackdowns have led to widespread allegations of enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings, and arbitrary detentions of activists and students.

External Blame Game- Islamabad frequently blames India for fomenting unrest to deflect from its own governance failures, often without providing verifiable evidence.

Accountability Deficit- There is a near-total lack of internal accountability for military excesses in the province.

Historical Patterns

Recurring Conflict- Since accession in 1948, Baluchistan has witnessed five major rebellions.

Failed Strategy- The state's response has consistently been military-centric, which achieves only temporary lulls in violence before the next, more intense cycle of revolt begins.

Way Forward- The Path to Peace

To break the cycle, a paradigm shifts from "Security-centric" to "People-centric" is required.

Political Reconciliation- Prioritize dialogue with Baloch nationalist groups over military elimination.

Economic Inclusion- Ensure transparent development where local communities are primary beneficiaries of CPEC and mineral projects. Address the feeling of economic exclusion by guaranteeing a fair share of royalties.

Rule of Law- End the practice of enforced disappearances. Monitor and audit security operations to prevent human rights abuses.

Democratic Engagement- Encourage local participation in decision-making to reduce political alienation.

Conclusion

The turmoil in Baluchistan is a stark reminder that military action alone cannot extinguish an insurgency rooted in genuine political and economic grievances. Sustainable peace requires Pakistan to dismantle its coercive apparatus and adopt a strategy of inclusion, transparency, and accountability. Without a political solution that respects the rights of the Baloch people, the province risks remaining a zone of perpetual conflict, threatening the stability of the entire region.

Source- <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/cycles-of-revolt-on-pakistan-and-the-baloch-rebels/article70600138.ece>

2. Oil and beyond- With Russia, India has to balance old ties, new realities (IE)

General Studies 2- International Relation

Topics- Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests.

Sub Topic- India's Foreign Policy – Strategic Autonomy and Balancing Power Blocs.

Introduction

The delicate balance between India's Energy Security and Global Geopolitics has come into sharp focus following recent US claims linking tariff reductions to a potential halt in India's Russian oil imports. While India has significantly benefited from discounted Russian crude since the Ukraine conflict, evolving geopolitical pressures and sanctions are reshaping its energy basket. The Indian government maintains that its policy is guided by "energy security and diversification" rather than political pressure, highlighting its commitment to Strategic Autonomy.

The Shift in India's Energy Basket

Pre-Conflict Status- Before the Ukraine war, Russian oil accounted for less than 2% of India's total crude imports due to high logistics costs.

Peak Dependence (2025)- Driven by deep discounts, Russia's share surged to 35–40% of India's oil imports at its peak.

Current Status (Jan 2026)- Russia remains the largest supplier, accounting for ~22% of imports, though volumes are declining.

Economic Buffer- Cheap Russian oil played a crucial role in-

- Managing domestic inflation.
- Reducing the fiscal deficit.
- Keeping fuel prices stable during global volatility.

Recent Decline- Sanctions & Market Trends

The decline in imports is driven more by operational constraints than a shift in policy.

Sanctions Impact- US sanctions on major Russian entities like Rosneft and Lukoil have complicated payments and shipping, causing imports to drop from 2.09 million barrels per day (bpd) in June 2025 to ~1.16 million bpd in January 2026.

Locked-in Contracts- Despite pressure, immediate cessation is impossible as Indian refiners have booked cargoes through March–April 2026.

Future Projections- Analysts predict a "calibrated reduction" rather than a total halt, with imports likely stabilizing around 500,000 bpd (approx. 10% of total imports).

Structural Dependence- Nayara Energy, which processes 400,000 bpd and is partly owned by Rosneft, remains structurally dependent on Russian crude.

Challenges in Replacing Russian Oil

Replacing Russian crude is not just a geopolitical decision but a technical and economic challenge.

Crude Compatibility- Russian/West Asian Oil- Mostly Medium-Sour crude, which Indian refineries are designed to process. US Oil- Mostly Light-Sweet crude, which yields different by-products and may not optimize Indian refinery margins.

Logistical Costs- Shipping oil from the US to India takes much longer and costs double compared to routes from the Persian Gulf or Russia.

Supply Constraints

- Venezuela- While its crude is suitable, production is capped at ~1 million bpd with high US domestic demand.
- West Asia- Reliance on traditional suppliers (Iraq, Saudi Arabia) risks concentration risk and reduced bargaining power.

Strategic Autonomy & Geopolitical Balancing

India's stance is a textbook example of Realpolitik.

Sovereign Decision Making- India resists external coercion, maintaining that energy purchases are sovereign economic choices essential for a country importing 85% of its oil needs.

Balancing Act

- a. With the US- India manages relations to avoid secondary sanctions while negotiating on tariffs.
- b. With Russia- Maintaining energy ties preserves a long-standing defence partnership and prevents Russia from drifting entirely into China's orbit.

MEA's Stance- The Ministry of External Affairs emphasizes "Diversification without Dependence," rejecting alignment-driven exclusion of any specific country.

Way Forward- A Multi-Pronged Strategy

Calibrated Reduction- India is likely to pursue a gradual, market-driven reduction in Russian imports rather than an abrupt political halt.

Diversification- Expanding long-term contracts with diverse suppliers (e.g., Brazil, Guyana, Africa) to mitigate supply shocks.

Infrastructure Upgrade- Increasing Refinery Flexibility to process a wider range of crude types (including US light sweet).

Strategic Reserves- enhancing Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPR) to buffer against geopolitical volatility.

Green Transition- Accelerating the shift to Renewable Energy to reduce long-term dependence on fossil fuel imports.

Conclusion

India's energy strategy is a pragmatic exercise in survival and sovereignty. While geopolitical currents are forcing a reduction in Russian oil imports, India's approach ensures this transition is market-driven rather than politically coerced. By prioritizing affordability and reliability, India continues to uphold its strategic autonomy, proving that in a multipolar world, national interest supersedes alliance politics.

Source- <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-global/oil-and-beyond-with-russia-india-has-to-balance-old-ties-new-realities-10516168/>

Editorial of the Day – 09.02.2026**Index****1. Messaging power- on a healthy digital marketplace (TH)****2. Does banning access to social media for minors under 16 really protect them? (IE)****1. Messaging power- on a healthy digital marketplace (TH)****General Studies 2- Governance**

Topic- Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

Sub Topic- Important aspects of governance, transparency, and accountability; E-governance-applications, models, successes, limitations, and potential.

Introduction

The Supreme Court of India has recently intensified its scrutiny of Meta Platforms LLC and WhatsApp regarding their controversial 2021 privacy policy update. This update mandated data sharing between WhatsApp and its parent company, Meta (Facebook/Instagram), presenting users with a "take-it-or-leave-it" ultimatum. The case, arising from an appeal against a ₹213.14 crore penalty imposed by the Competition Commission of India (CCI), highlights critical issues regarding market dominance, network effects, and the urgent need for a dedicated Digital Competition Law in India.

Key Details

Judicial Scrutiny- The Supreme Court questioned the fairness of the 2021 policy that forced users to share data with Meta platforms to continue using the service.

The Penalty- The core of the dispute is the ₹213.14 crore fine levied by the CCI for abuse of dominant position, which Meta is currently appealing.

Market Reality- The Court acknowledged WhatsApp's near-universal presence in India, noting that the app has become indispensable for personal, social, and business communications.

Core Conflict- The tension lies between a private corporation's right to monetize its platform and the users' right to privacy and informed choice within a monopolistic market.

Supreme Court's Observations

The Court made several critical observations regarding WhatsApp's leverage over Indian consumers-

Inescapable Utility- It noted that functioning in modern India—whether for coordinating groups, running small businesses, or maintaining social ties—is "nearly impossible" without WhatsApp.

Network Effects- The platform's power is derived from its strong network effect; the service is valuable primarily because "everyone else is on it," creating a barrier to exit for users.

Coercive Consent- The Court questioned the validity of consent when the alternative is effectively social and economic exclusion.

Background of the Legal Dispute

2021 Policy Update- WhatsApp introduced a policy update that allowed cross-sharing of user metadata (location, device info, etc.) with Facebook and Instagram to facilitate advertising and business messaging.

The Ultimatum- Unlike previous updates, users were not given an option to opt-out. They had to accept the terms or stop using the app.

Regulatory Backlash- This aggressive stance triggered opposition from civil society, the Indian government, and the CCI, leading to the antitrust penalty for abusing dominant market position.

WhatsApp's Role & Contributions

Despite the controversy, the analysis acknowledges WhatsApp's transformative role in India-
Democratization of Communication- Backed by Meta's infrastructure, WhatsApp provided free messaging and calling, replacing the expensive SMS and voice call models of telecom operators (pre-2016).

Accessibility- It lowered entry barriers, requiring only an internet connection and a phone number.

- a. Privacy Expectations- The adoption of end-to-end encryption was a significant step for user privacy, especially in a country with a history of extensive state surveillance.
- b. Right to Revenue- The analysis clarifies that there is no dispute over WhatsApp's fundamental right to earn revenue; the dispute is over the *method* (forced data harvesting).

Concerns over Monetization & Data Use

Deep Integration- WhatsApp is deeply embedded in the socio-economic fabric of India. Any shift to an aggressive advertising-driven data model warrants strict regulatory scrutiny.

Lack of Viable Substitutes- While competitors like Signal, Telegram, and Arattai exist, they lack the "universal user base" of WhatsApp. The utility of a messaging app depends on who else uses it, making migration difficult for individuals.

Global Precedence- Competition regulators worldwide have increasingly opposed platforms that impose non-negotiable data-sharing terms on locked-in users.

Limitations of Remedial Measures

Inadequacy of "Opt-Out"- Simply allowing users to "opt-out" of data sharing is viewed as insufficient at WhatsApp's scale.

Default Option Bias- Behavioural economics suggests that most users will stick to default settings due to inertia or lack of technical understanding. Therefore, "consent" obtained through default opt-ins is often illusory.

Structural Power- Individual remedies fail to address the structural power imbalance between a global tech giant and an individual user.

Need for Stronger Digital Competition Law

The case serves as a grim reminder of the legislative gap in India's digital governance-

Legislative Lag- A Draft Digital Competition Law was released in 2024, but there has been little progress in enacting it.

Current Necessity- With India approaching one billion internet users, relying on outdated competition laws is insufficient.

Ex-Ante Regulation- Unlike traditional laws that punish after the harm is done (ex-post), digital markets often require ex-ante regulations (rules set beforehand) to prevent gatekeepers from abusing their dominance.

Conclusion

WhatsApp's unparalleled network effect has granted it immense influence over India's digital communication landscape, rendering the concept of user consent largely illusory. While the platform has legitimate rights to monetization, it cannot come at the expense of consumer privacy and fair competition. The Supreme Court's intervention underscores the urgent necessity for the Digital Competition Law to transition from a draft to a statute, ensuring a digital ecosystem that balances corporate innovation with public accountability.

Source- https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/messaging-power-on-a-healthy-digital-marketplace/article70607729.ece#google_vignette

2. Does banning access to social media for minors under 16 really protect them? (IE)

General Studies 1- Indian Society

Topics- Social empowerment, communalism, regionalism & secularism.

Sub Topic- Effects of Globalization on Indian society (Impact of technology on youth and children).

A social media ban will not save our children

Introduction

The debate on regulating children's access to social media has gained momentum globally and in India, triggered by growing evidence of a mental health crisis among adolescents and Australia's landmark decision to ban social media for those under 16. With incidents like the tragic case in Ghaziabad highlighting the extreme psychological risks of online addiction, India faces an urgent policy imperative to balance digital access with the safety and mental well-being of its demographic dividend.

Key Details & Context

Trigger Event- A distressing incident in Ghaziabad involving minors underscored the severe psychological risks associated with excessive online gaming and social media usage.

Global Precedent- Australia has become the first nation to enact a ban on social media for children under 16, shifting the legal responsibility of age verification onto tech companies rather than parents.

The Core Problem- Research indicates that social media algorithms are designed for addictive engagement, directly contributing to rising anxiety, loneliness, and suicidal tendencies in children.

India's urgency- With rapidly increasing smartphone penetration among adolescents, India stands at a critical policy juncture.

Children's Mental Health and Digital Exposure

Rising Psychological Distress- Global studies link the mass adoption of smartphones over the last decade to a sharp spike in adolescent anxiety, depression, self-harm, and suicidal ideation.

The "Loneliness Paradox"- Despite being "hyper-connected" digitally, young people report higher levels of loneliness. Virtual interactions are displacing critical real-world friendships and family engagement.

Indian Scenario- Surveys reveal a surge in stress and behavioural disorders among Indian adolescents, particularly in urban centres. This is directly correlated with excessive screen time and online dependence.

Severe Consequences- Unresolved conflicts over digital addiction can escalate into severe crises, as seen in recent tragic news reports.

Neuroscience of Adolescence- Why Are They Vulnerable?

Developing Brain Structure- Adolescence is a critical window for brain development, especially the prefrontal cortex (responsible for impulse control and decision-making). This immaturity makes children biologically less capable of resisting addictive stimuli.

Reward Pathway Activation- Social media engagement triggers dopamine-driven reward circuits. The neurological response is similar to that triggered by substances like alcohol, tobacco, and gambling, fostering compulsive behaviour.

Peer Comparison Effect- Adolescents are biologically wired to seek peer approval. Algorithm-driven metrics (likes, shares) and curated "perfect" images weaponize this trait, damaging self-esteem and body image.

Scientific Consensus- Just as societies impose age limits on driving or drinking due to maturity levels, neurological vulnerability justifies age limits on algorithmic social media.

The Role of Social Media Algorithms

Profit Over Protection- Platforms utilize algorithms specifically engineered to maximize user engagement (time on device) to drive ad revenue, often disregarding user well-being.

Amplification of Harm- Algorithms frequently push extreme, sensational, or appearance-focused content to keep users hooked. This intensifies social comparison, anxiety, and dissatisfaction among young users.

Corporate Knowledge- Internal documents and investigations suggest tech giants are aware of these harms but continue their practices to sustain profits.

Tobacco Industry Parallels- Tech firms are using the "Tobacco Playbook"- questioning scientific evidence of harm and shifting the blame onto users and parents ("individual responsibility").

Global Policy Responses

Australia's Model

- a. Ban for under-16s- Strict prohibition with mandates for platforms to verify age.
- b. Corporate Liability- Parents can sue firms for violations, shifting the burden from the family to the corporation.

International Momentum- Nations like the US, UK, Japan, and South Korea are debating or implementing stricter regulations citing worsening youth mental health.

Failure of Self-Regulation- Current age limits (usually 13+) are "weakly enforced." Estimates suggest nearly 40% of children aged 8-12 is already on social media, proving that voluntary compliance by tech firms has failed.

India's Case for Early Action

Demographic Advantage- According to ASER 2024, only about one-third of rural adolescents (below 16) currently own smartphones. This offers a unique window for preventive regulation before addiction becomes ubiquitous.

Protecting the Youth Dividend- India's economic future relies on a healthy, productive workforce. Widespread digital addiction threatens to compromise the potential of this demographic dividend.

Constitutional Obligations

- a. **Article 15(3)-** Allows the State to make special provisions for women and children.
- b. **Article 39(f)-** Directs the State to ensure children are given opportunities to develop in a healthy manner and protected against exploitation.
- c. **Article 21-** The Right to Life includes the right to mental and physical health.

Conclusion

India must transition from passive observation to active intervention by adopting a child-centric digital safety framework. This should include age-based restrictions, mandatory age verification mechanisms, algorithmic accountability, and robust digital literacy programs for parents and schools. Protecting children from the predatory nature of social media algorithms is not a violation of their rights but a fulfilment of the State's constitutional duty to safeguard their dignity, mental health, and future potential. Immediate action is essential to ensure technology serves as an enabler, not a disruptor, of India's future generation.

Source- <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/a-social-media-ban-will-not-save-our-children/article70608158.ece>

Editorial of the Day – 10.02.2026

Index

1. Stifling ideas- On Ghooskhor Pandat and FIR (TH)

2. Kashmir defies nature- Tulips bloom in December for first time, months ahead of spring (IE)

1. Stifling ideas- On Ghooskhor Pandat and FIR (TH)

General Studies 2- Governance

Topic- Indian Constitution—Historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments, significant provisions and basic structure.

SUB TOPIC- Fundamental Rights (Article 19), Separation of Powers, and Issues and Challenges Pertaining to the federal structure (Executive vs. Judiciary in regulating speech).

Introduction

The recent directive by the Uttar Pradesh government to file an FIR against the makers of the film Ghooskhor Pandat has reignited the debate on the fragility of artistic freedom in India. This incident highlights the growing conflict between executive power and the constitutional protection of free speech, raising concerns about the "heckler's veto" where the threat of law and order is used to silence creative expression without judicial scrutiny.

Key Details of the Controversy

Executive Action- Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath ordered the filing of an FIR against the film's makers specifically over its title, Ghooskhor Pandat.

Rationale for Action- The state alleged that the title was derogatory, likely to hurt religious or caste sentiments, and could disrupt social harmony.

Immediate Consequence- Following the threat of criminal action, the producer withdrew promotional material, demonstrating how executive pressure can force compliance before any legal verdict.

Shift in Narrative- A matter that fundamentally belongs to the realm of artistic expression was swiftly converted into a law-and-order issue by the state machinery.

Constitutional Provisions & Legal Standards

Protection under Article 19(1)(a)- The Constitution protects freedom of speech and expression, extending this right even to speech that may be unpopular, offensive, or unwelcome to powerful groups.

Limits under Article 19(2)- Restrictions on this right must be reasonable, specific, and proportionate. They cannot be arbitrary executive decisions.

Judicial Distinction- Indian courts have consistently distinguished between speech that is merely "offensive" and speech that actually incites violence or public disorder. Only the latter typically justifies criminal sanction.

From Expression to Policing- The chilling Effect

Bypassing Judicial Scrutiny- The executive threat of using criminal law (FIR) effectively bypasses the judicial process, signalling intolerance toward dissenting or controversial expression.

Coercive Warning- The FIR serves less as a legal remedy and more as a coercive warning to other artists, creating a "chilling effect" where creators self-censor to avoid harassment.

Loss of Democratic Response- When art is silenced by the state, society loses the opportunity for democratic responses such as debate, satire, or boycott, weakening the "marketplace of ideas."

Pattern of State Restrictions on Art

Recurring Censorship- The visual arts sector has increasingly faced executive censorship often without prior judicial findings.

Notable Examples

1. The Kerala Story (2023) – faced bans in certain states.

2. India- The Modi Question – faced removal/blocking.
3. Other films like Kaum De Heere, India's Daughter, and Padmaavat have historically faced similar executive hurdles.

Subjectivity of "Hurt Sentiments"– In a diverse society like India, claims of "hurt sentiments" are subjective and limitless. Relying on them as a basis for criminal prosecution makes the law arbitrary.

Proper Constitutional Approach & Role of the State

Burden of Proof– The state bears the burden to examine speech carefully. If unlawfulness is alleged, the remedy should be judicial review, not executive fiat.

Least Restrictive Measure– Authorities must adopt the least restrictive measure available to address concerns, recording reasons for their actions rather than issuing blanket bans or threats.

Balancing Duty– It is the duty of the Chief Minister and the state to maintain public order *while* protecting free expression. Curtailing speech simply to preserve order (or to appease those threatening disorder) undermines the constitutional balance between authority and liberty.

Conclusion

The Ghooskhor Pandat episode underscores a worrying trend of criminalising dissenting expression. By invoking executive coercion instead of seeking judicial remedy, the state undermines the protective umbrella of Article 19(1)(a). Upholding constitutional proportionality and allowing courts to be the arbiter of speech standards is essential to preserve the democratic fabric of the nation.

Source– <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/stifling-ideas-on-ghooskhor-pandat-and-fir/article70611331.ece>

2. Kashmir defies nature– Tulips bloom in December for first time, months ahead of spring (IE)

General Studies 3– Economy

Topics– Major crops cropping patterns in various parts of the country, different types of irrigation and irrigation systems storage, transport and marketing of agricultural produce and issues and related constraints; e-technology in the aid of farmers.

Sub Topic– Horticulture and Floriculture (Sunrise Sectors), Agricultural Marketing, Supply Chain Management, and Application of Biotechnology/Science in Agriculture.

Introduction

In a significant scientific breakthrough, researchers at the Sher-e-Kashmir University of Agricultural Sciences and Technology (SKUAST) have successfully achieved the winter blooming of tulips in Kashmir. By inducing flowering in December—nearly four months ahead of the natural season—this innovation promises to revolutionize the region's floriculture economy. It represents a strategic alignment of agricultural science with market demand and tourism, potentially transforming Kashmir into a year-round floral hub.

Scientific Innovation– The Technology Behind the Bloom

Technique Used– The breakthrough was achieved through "Bulb Programming" and "Forcing Techniques."

Bulb Programming– This involves precise control of temperature, light exposure, and planting schedules to regulate the plant's internal biological clock and growth stages.

Forcing Method– This manipulates environmental and chemical factors to induce flowering outside the natural seasonal cycle, a standard practice in advanced floriculture nations like the Netherlands but a first for Kashmir's specific agro-climatic conditions.

Success Rate– In experimental trials, approximately 3,000 out of 4,000 bulbs bloomed successfully in December.

Market Timing– This technology allows growers to target high-demand global holidays such as Christmas, New Year, and Valentine's Day, which fall during Kashmir's traditional non-flowering winter months.

Floriculture as a Sunrise Sector

High-Value Agriculture- Floriculture is identified as a high-income, export-oriented segment of horticulture. Moving away from cereal-centric farming to high-value ornamentals aligns with the national goal of Doubling Farmers' Income.

Employment Generation- The sector offers potential for year-round employment, particularly benefiting women and small marginal farmers who can cultivate high-value crops on small landholdings.

Inclusive Development- By integrating agriculture with the service sector (tourism), it fosters inclusive rural development and diversifies the regional economic base.

Strategic Boost to Floral Tourism

Extending the Tourist Season- traditionally, Kashmir's tulip season is restricted to a brief window in late March to April. Winter blooms can extend the tourism calendar into the lean winter months, reducing the seasonal concentration of tourist footfall.

Economic Multiplier- Last year, Srinagar's Indira Gandhi Memorial Tulip Garden recorded nearly 8 lakh visitors, demonstrating the massive economic potential of floral tourism. Off-season flowering stabilizes incomes for local businesses (hotels, transport, handicrafts) that usually suffer during the winter slump.

Replicable Success- This follows earlier successes with autumn chrysanthemum blooms, proving that scientific interventions can successfully diversify floral attractions year-round.

Addressing Import Dependence & Bulb Propagation

Current Challenge- Kashmir currently relies heavily on importing tulip bulbs from the Netherlands. This dependence increases input costs for farmers and leads to a significant outflow of foreign exchange.

Import Substitution (Atmanirbhar Bharat)

1. Centre of Excellence- SKUAST has established a dedicated Centre of Excellence for tulips at Sagam (South Kashmir) with technical support from the Dutch Embassy.
2. Propagation Success- Domestic bulb propagation has seen early success, with bulb numbers increasing from 1 lakh to 3-4 lakh within a single year.

Strategic Goal- Achieving self-reliance in bulb production will lower costs for local farmers and eventually position India as a bulb exporter rather than an importer.

Role of Institutions and Way Forward

Lab-to-Land Transfer- The SKUAST initiative highlights the critical role of agricultural universities in driving applied innovation. The next step is effective extension services to transfer this technology from the "experimental garden" to the "farmer's field."

Commercialization- Large-scale adoption requires the entry of agri-entrepreneurs and startups to commercialize the technology and set up controlled-environment infrastructure (polyhouses/greenhouses).

Skill Development- Training farmers in the nuances of "forcing techniques" and climate-controlled agriculture is crucial for widespread impact.

Model for Hill States- This model of integrating high-tech floriculture with tourism can be replicated in other hill states like Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand to create similar horti-tourism clusters.

Conclusion

The winter blooming of tulips in Kashmir is more than just a botanical achievement; it is a successful convergence of science, commerce, and tourism. By scaling up domestic bulb propagation and encouraging private investment in agri-tech, Kashmir can reduce its import dependence and secure its position as a global leader in floral tourism. This initiative serves as a blueprint for how climate-smart, market-aligned agriculture can revitalize regional economies.

Source- <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/kashmir-tulip-winter-bloom-skuast-floral-tourism-10523369/#~~~text=A%20breakthrough%20in%20tulip%20production,push%20to%20Kashmir's%20floral%20tourism>.

Editorial of the Day – 11.02.2026

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1. Speaker to stay away from Lok Sabha proceedings till Opposition's petition against him is disposed of (TH)
2. SC seeks Centre's report on action taken on its SC/ST sub-classification verdict (IE)

1. Speaker to stay away from Lok Sabha proceedings till Opposition's petition against him is disposed of (TH)

General Studies 2– Polity

Topic– Parliament and State Legislatures—Structure, Functioning, Conduct of Business, Powers & Privileges and Issues Arising out of these.

Sub Topic– Constitutional Authorities; Separation of Powers; Appointment to various Constitutional posts, powers, functions, and responsibilities.

The Speaker of the Lok Sabha– Role, Powers, and Constitutional Significance

Introduction

The Speaker of the Lok Sabha is one of the highest constitutional offices in India's parliamentary democracy, often described as the "conscience keeper" of the House. Recently, Om Birla has been in the news for setting a high ethical precedent by deciding to stay away from presiding over Lok Sabha proceedings until a removal notice moved by the Opposition against him is disposed of. This move highlights the deep moral and constitutional obligations attached to the chair.

Key Context & Constitutional Authority

Moral High Ground– Om Birla's decision to recuse himself during the pendency of a removal notice underscores the principle that justice must not only be done but must also be *seen* to be done. It reinforces the ethical requirement of the Speaker to be above suspicion.

Constitutional Mandate (Articles 93–110)– The Speaker is not merely a presiding officer but a Constitutional Authority mandated to ensure the smooth functioning of the House.

- a. Article 93– Establishes the office of the Speaker and Deputy Speaker.
- b. Conduct of Business– The Speaker is the ultimate interpreter of the rules within the House.

Pivotal Powers– The Speaker holds significant powers that influence the federal balance, including–

- a. Certification of Money Bills– Deciding whether a Bill is a Money Bill (Article 110), which limits the Rajya Sabha's role.
- b. Anti-Defection Law– Acting as the tribunal under the Tenth Schedule to decide on disqualification cases.

Constitutional Linkages & Institutional Role

Bridge Between Constitution and Practice– The Speaker operationalizes the Constitution on a daily basis, ensuring that the theoretical framework of Articles 93–110 is applied meaningfully to parliamentary debates and procedures.

Legislature–Executive Interface– The Speaker acts as a buffer, regulating government business to ensure the Executive does not overwhelm the Legislature. Crucially, while the Speaker facilitates government business, they do not formally belong to the Executive, maintaining the Separation of Powers.

Legislature–Judiciary Interface

Tension Areas– The Speaker's decisions on Money Bills and Anti-Defection cases are frequent flashpoints for judicial review.

Issue- These decisions test the balance between Parliamentary Sovereignty (the right of the House to regulate its own procedure) and Constitutional Supremacy (judicial review of unconstitutional acts).
Judicial Deference- Generally, Courts respect the Speaker's authority to maintain legislative autonomy. However, arbitrary decisions invite judicial scrutiny, reinforcing that the Speaker is subject to the Constitution.

Centre-State and Federal Implications

Impact on Federal Balance- The Speaker's power to certify a bill as a Money Bill is critical. A Money Bill bypasses the Rajya Sabha (Council of States), which represents the states' interests.
Significance- Incorrect certification can undermine the federal structure by denying the states a voice in crucial legislation.
Guardian of States' Voice- By ensuring impartiality, a strong Speaker protects the voices of Opposition and regional parties, thereby indirectly safeguarding the interests of the States they represent.

Party System and Democratic Norms

The Paradox of the Office- The Speaker is elected on a party ticket but is expected to function as a non-partisan umpire.
Ideal- Rising above party politics to link political ethics with institutional trust.
Opposition Rights- Impartial conduct is vital for the survival of democracy. It ensures the Opposition has a fair chance to hold the government accountable. Partisan bias, conversely, erodes democratic legitimacy and weakens the House.

Governance and Accountability

Enhancing Policy Quality- The Speaker has the power to refer Bills to Parliamentary Standing Committees.
Impact- This connects law-making with expert scrutiny, ensuring bills are not rushed through without due diligence.
Check on Executive Dominance- By empowering committees and allowing ample time for debate, the Speaker limits the dominance of the Executive, ensuring the government remains accountable to the people's representatives.

Public Trust and Stability

Symbol of Neutrality- The Speaker's neutrality is directly linked to citizen confidence. If the public perceives the Speaker as biased, faith in the parliamentary process diminishes.
Arena of Democracy- An impartial Speaker ensures Parliament remains a vibrant "Arena of Democracy" where diverse views are debated, rather than becoming a mere rubber stamp for the government.

Conclusion

The Speaker of the Lok Sabha serves as the linchpin of India's parliamentary democracy. By stepping aside on moral grounds, Speaker Om Birla has reinforced the sanctity of the Chair. The office demands a delicate balance of impartiality, constitutional adherence, and ethical conduct. Upholding these norms is not just a procedural necessity but a prerequisite for maintaining public trust and the credibility of the Indian legislative framework.

Source- https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/speaker-to-stay-away-from-lok-sabha-proceedings-till-oppositions-petition-against-him-is-disposed-of/article70616168.ece#google_vignette

2. SC seeks Centre's report on action taken on its SC/ST sub-classification verdict (IE)

General Studies 2- Indian Constitution

Topics- Historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments, significant provisions, and basic structure.

Sub Topic- Reservation Policy; Role of Judiciary (Judicial Review/Activism); Centre-State Relations (Federalism regarding Reservation lists); Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services.

SC/ST Sub-Classification & Creamy Layer- Judicial Evolution and Implementation

Introduction

The Supreme Court has recently directed the Union Government to submit an Action Taken Report (ATR) regarding the implementation of its landmark August 1, 2024 Constitution Bench judgment. This historic verdict permitted the sub-classification of Scheduled Castes (SCs) to ensure equitable distribution of benefits and extended the "creamy layer" principle to SCs and STs, marking a significant shift in India's affirmative action jurisprudence.

Key Details of the Development

Judicial Intervention- A 7-judge Constitution Bench delivered the verdict on August 1, 2024.

Core Decision- The Court allowed states to sub-classify SCs to prioritize the most backward among them.

Overruling Precedent- The judgment explicitly overruled the 2004 E.V. Chinnaiah vs State of Andhra Pradesh verdict, which treated SCs as a homogenous class.

Creamy Layer Extension- The Court supported the application of the "creamy layer" exclusion to SCs and STs to ensure substantive equality, a concept previously restricted to OBCs.

Current Status- The Court is now monitoring compliance by seeking an ATR from the Centre.

Constitutional Framework of SC/ST Reservation

Enabling Provisions (Articles 15(4) & 16(4))- Empower the State to create special provisions/reservation in education and public employment for socially and educationally backward classes and SC/STs.

Identification (Articles 341 & 342)

- The President notifies the list of Scheduled Castes/Tribes.
- Only Parliament can modify (include/exclude) entries in this list.
- Significance- This ensures uniform identification across the nation.

Substantive Equality (Article 14)- Reservation is interpreted not just as formal equality, but as a tool to correct historical injustice and structural discrimination.

Protective Discrimination- Affirmative action is a core feature of the Constitution, rooted in the vision of social justice.

Evolution of Judicial Position

Case Law	Key Ruling
E.V. Chinnaiah (2004)	Held that SCs form a homogeneous group. Ruled that sub-classification by states amounted to tampering with the Presidential List (Article 341) and was unconstitutional.
Davinder Singh Case (2024)	A 7-judge Bench overruled Chinnaiah. Held that sub-classification is constitutionally permissible to ensure equitable distribution of benefits.
Majority View (6-1)	Observed that empirical evidence proves inequality <i>within</i> SC communities. Treating them as a single block defeats the goal of equality.
Dissent (Justice Bela Trivedi)	Maintained that SCs are a homogeneous class and sub-classification violates the sanctity of Article 341.

Concept of Sub-Classification within SCs

Rationale- Data indicates that certain sub-castes within the SC category have "cornered" a disproportionate share of reservation benefits, leaving the most marginalized behind.

Equitable Distribution- The aim is to ensure that the "weakest of the weak" receive fair access to opportunities.

Federal Autonomy- The judgment empowers States to design targeted welfare policies based on local empirical evidence, strengthening federalism.

Constitutional Validity- The Court clarified that sub-classification is not tampering with the Presidential List; it is merely reorganizing the distribution of benefits *among* those already on the list.

Extension of Creamy Layer Principle to SC/ST

Origin- The concept originated in the Indra Sawhney (1992) judgment, applicable only to Other Backward Classes (OBCs).

2024 Judicial Endorsement- Justice B.R. Gavai (concurring opinion) emphasized evolving a policy to identify the creamy layer among SCs/STs.

Objective- To prevent affluent/advanced members of the community from monopolizing benefits meant for the upliftment of the backward.

The Debate- This is sensitive because SC/ST reservations were historically linked to untouchability and social discrimination, not economic status. Introducing economic criteria (creamy layer) changes this fundamental premise.

Contemporary Significance

Implementation Challenge- The SC seeking an ATR indicates active judicial monitoring to ensuring the verdict translates into policy.

Political Implications- Sub-classification is likely to reshape caste-based political mobilization, creating new dynamics between dominant and marginalized SC sub-groups.

Data-Driven Governance- The judgment mandates that any sub-classification must be based on empirical evidence, aligning policy with constitutional morality rather than political whim.

Balancing Act- The ruling attempts to harmonize the broad goal of social justice with the specific need for fairness within beneficiary groups.

Way Forward

Socio-Economic Data- The Centre and States must undertake rigorous, caste-wise socio-economic studies to objectively identify intra-group disparities.

Legislative Framework- Parliament or States need to frame transparent guidelines to operationalize sub-classification to avoid future litigation or constitutional ambiguity.

Balanced Criteria- For the creamy layer, criteria must account for social backwardness (stigma) alongside economic indicators, ensuring the core rationale of SC/ST reservation isn't undermined.

Coordination- Timely submission of ATRs and coordination between the Judiciary and Executive is vital for compliance.

Social Harmony- The government must engage in public communication to prevent social tensions and misinterpretation of the policy changes.

Conclusion

The Supreme Court's 2024 verdict represents a paradigm shift in India's approach to social justice. By acknowledging heterogeneity within Scheduled Castes and endorsing the creamy layer principle, the Court has prioritized "substantive equality" over "formal equality." However, the success of this reform depends on careful implementation that balances constitutional mandates with social cohesion, ensuring the promise of equality reaches the most marginalized within the marginalized.

Source- <https://indianexpress.com/article/legal-news/sc-seeks-centres-report-on-action-taken-on-its-sc-st-sub-classification-verdict-10525491/>

Editorial of the Day – 12.02.2026

Index

1. The CPI base revision exercise measures a slice of life (TH)

2. SpaceX to prioritise building self-growing city on moon, Musk says (IE)

1. The CPI base revision exercise measures a slice of life (TH)

General Studies 3– Economy

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

Sub Topic– Inflation and Monetary Policy; Inclusive growth and issues arising from it.

Introduction

The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) has initiated the revision of the Consumer Price Index (CPI) base year from 2012 to 2024. This exercise is designed to transition from an outdated consumption basket to one that reflects the contemporary spending habits of a digital, urbanizing, and service-oriented India. As the primary tool for the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) monetary policy, an accurate CPI is vital for maintaining price stability and protecting the purchasing power of citizens.

The Core Purpose of CPI

Definition– CPI tracks the change in prices of a specific "basket" of goods and services consumed by households.

Real-World Impact– It measures the actual cost of living, covering essentials like food, fuel, rent, and clothing.

Policy Anchor– It serves as the nominal anchor for the RBI's inflation-targeting framework ($4\% \pm 2\%$), directly influencing repo rate decisions.

Socio-Economic Linkage– CPI data is used to calculate Dearness Allowance (DA) for government employees and adjust social security benefits, ensuring incomes keep pace with inflation.

Drivers for the 2024 Base Revision

The 12-year gap since the last revision (2012) created a "representation gap." The 2024 revision addresses

Rapid Urbanization– A larger share of the population now lives in cities with different spending priorities compared to rural areas.

The Digital Shift– The explosion of e-commerce, digital payments, and app-based services (gig economy) was non-existent or minimal in 2012.

Rise of the Services Sector– Increased spending on telecommunications, internet, healthcare, and private education.

Consumption Diversification– As incomes rise (Engel's Law), the proportion of income spent on basic food decreases while spending on "lifestyle" or discretionary items increases.

Key Methodological Upgrades

Updated Consumption Basket & Weights

Data Source– The revision is grounded in the Household Consumption Expenditure Survey (HCES) 2023–24.

Weightage Realignment

1. Higher Weight– Assigned to services, electronics, and modern amenities.
2. Lower Weight– Assigned to traditional goods that now occupy a smaller share of the average household budget.

Lifestyle Focus– Inclusion of modern lifestyle expenditures to reflect rising aspirations.

Modernized Data Collection

Digital Integration- For the first time, CPI will systematically track online prices for sectors like air travel and telecommunications.

Technology-Driven- Transitioning to computer-assisted price collection to eliminate manual errors and allow for real-time data verification.

Administrative Data- Leveraging official records for regulated prices like rail fares, postal charges, and the Public Distribution System (PDS).

Institutional Rigor and Global Alignment

International Standards- The new series aligns with global statistical best practices, making India's inflation data comparable with G20 peers.

Expert Oversight- MoSPI has collaborated with economists, domain experts, and field offices to ensure the transition is methodologically sound.

Transparency- The process involves wide-ranging consultations to ensure the data is perceived as credible by both domestic markets and international investors.

Significance of the Exercise

Responsive Policy- Accurate inflation data allows the RBI to avoid "policy errors" (e.g., raising rates based on outdated food weights when the actual inflationary pressure lies elsewhere).

Poverty Measurement- Updated consumption data helps in more accurately defining poverty lines and identifying beneficiaries for social schemes.

Economic Stability- By capturing "a slice of life" as it is lived today, the government can better manage the macro-economy while protecting the micro-interests of the common man.

Conclusion

The shift to the 2024 base year is more than a technical update; it is a structural necessity. By integrating digital spending, service-sector growth, and modernized collection tools, India is ensuring that its economic "thermometer" remains sensitive to the actual heat felt by its billion-plus consumers.

Source- <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/the-cpi-base-revision-exercise-measures-a-slice-of-life/article70620362.ece>

2. SpaceX to prioritise building self-growing city on moon, Musk says (IE)

General Studies 3- Science & Technology

Topics- Awareness in the fields of IT, Space, Computers, Robotics, AI; Achievements of Indians in science & technology; Indigenization of technology.

Sub Topic- Commercialization of space; Space governance (Outer Space Treaty); Environmental impact of data centres; Geopolitics of the "New Space Race."

The Vision- Lunar AI Factory & Mass Driver

The Proposal- An integrated facility on the Moon to manufacture satellites specialized for AI computing.

The Mass Driver- An electromagnetic catapult designed to fling payloads into orbit without traditional chemical rockets, exploiting the Moon's low gravity (1.62 m/s^2) and lack of atmosphere to reduce launch costs to near-zero.

xAI-SpaceX Merger- A strategic vertical integration combining launch capability (SpaceX) with advanced large language models (xAI) to create "orbital data centers."

Drivers of Space-Based AI Infrastructure

The Energy Crisis- Terrestrial AI data centers consume roughly 1.5% of global electricity. Training next-gen models (like GPT-6 or Grok-3) requires multi-gigawatt power, straining Earth's grids.

Thermodynamic Advantage- In space, satellites can harness uninterrupted solar energy (100% duty cycle in certain orbits) and utilize the vacuum of space for passive cooling, eliminating the massive water and power footprint of Earth-bound cooling systems.

Scaling Compute- Moving "compute-heavy" tasks to space allows for scaling toward a Kardashev Type II civilization (harnessing the total energy output of a star).

Shift in the Global Space Economy

Privatization- Exploration has shifted from state-led (ISRO, NASA) to private-dominant (SpaceX, Blue Origin), where profit-driven innovation accelerates deployment.

The \$1 Trillion Frontier- The space economy is projected to cross \$1 trillion by 2040, moving from simple communication (Starlink) to off-world manufacturing and edge computing.

Reusable Rockets- Tech like the Falcon 9 and Starship has already reduced the cost of reaching Low Earth Orbit (LEO), making lunar logistics economically viable.

India's Strategic Position

Regulatory Evolution- The Indian Space Policy 2023 and the creation of IN-SPACe have opened the doors for Indian startups (e.g., Skyroot, Agnikul) to mirror the private-led model.

Cost-Effective Heritage- ISRO's success with Chandrayaan-3 proves India's capability in lunar precision. However, India must pivot from "exploration" to "industrialization" to remain competitive.

Sovereign AI- To avoid dependence on foreign private constellations, India may need its own space-based "Sovereign AI" infrastructure.

Legal, Ethical, and Geopolitical Challenges

The Treaty Gap- The Outer Space Treaty (1967) prohibits "national appropriation" but is silent on private ownership of lunar resources. This creates a "gray area" for lunar factories.

The Artemis Accords- While promoting resource utilization, they lack universal consensus (notably contested by China and Russia), leading to a bifurcated lunar legal regime.

Orbital Congestion- Launching "millions of tons" of AI satellites annually increases the risk of Kessler Syndrome (cascading satellite collisions) and space debris.

Digital Inequality- A "Moon-based AI" could create a massive technological divide, where a few corporations control the world's primary "intelligence" resources.

Way Forward

Global Governance- Updating the UN Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS) frameworks to regulate private lunar manufacturing and space-based data sovereignty.

Sustainable Space Practices- Developing international norms for "De-orbiting" AI satellites and managing the environmental impact of massive lunar excavations.

Public-Private Partnerships (PPP)- Governments should act as "anchor customers" for private space-AI firms while maintaining strict security and ethical oversight.

Source- <https://indianexpress.com/article/technology/science/spacex-to-prioritise-building-self-growing-city-on-moon-musk-says-10521680/>

Editorial of the Day – 13.02.2026

Index

1. Why has J&K shelved the Dal Lake restoration plan? (TH)

2. The empty chair crisis- Why no-confidence motion against Om Birla exposes deeper constitutional and political issues (IE)

1. Why has J&K shelved the Dal Lake restoration plan? (TH)

General Studies 3- Economy

Topic- Conservation, Environmental Pollution and Degradation, Environmental Impact Assessment

Sub Topic- Sustainable Development and Community-based Conservation Models.

Introduction

The Jammu and Kashmir government recently announced the shelving of the 2009 relocation-based Dal Lake restoration plan (initially valued at ₹416.72 crore). In its place, the administration has adopted an in-situ conservation approach. This pivot recognizes the lake dwellers not as encroachers, but as an integral part of the lake's socio-ecological fabric, marking a departure from nearly two decades of failed relocation attempts.

The Failure of the 2009 Relocation Plan

The original plan, approved under the Manmohan Singh government, focused heavily on "clearing" the lake to save it.

Targets vs. Achievement- Aimed to relocate 9,000 families; however, 17 years later, only 1,808 families (roughly 20%) were rehabilitated.

The "Rakh-e-Arth" Issue- Dwellers were moved to a colony in Bemina which was low-lying and flood-prone.

Financial Drain- Huge portions of the budget were consumed by land filling at the relocation site rather than actual lake conservation.

Outcome- The government admitted the plan failed to produce "tangible outcomes," achieving only 27% of its conservation goals.

Ecological Threats to Dal Lake

As per a 2022 SKUAST survey, the "Jewel in the Crown" of Kashmir faces a multi-pronged ecological crisis-

Anthropogenic Pressure- Uncontrolled effluent discharge and population density.

Water Quality- Sharp decline due to untreated sewage from point (pipes) and non-point (runoff) sources.

Physical Changes- Shrinking Lake area, encroachment, and land-use changes in the catchment.

Biological Stress- Nutrient enrichment (Eutrophication) leading to excessive weed growth and altered biodiversity.

Hydrological Blockage- Blocked internal channels and reduced inflows have stagnated water circulation.

The New Paradigm- In-Situ Conservation

The High-Level Committee (2022) proposed a "stay-and-protect" model. The J&K Lake Conservation and Management Authority (LCMA) is now drafting a policy based on these pillars-

Human-Centric Ecology

Recognizes residents as stakeholders and a permanent part of the ecosystem. Focuses on upgrading the living conditions of 58 identified hamlets within the lake rather than uprooting them.

Technical Interventions (IIT Roorkee DPR)

A new Detailed Project Report (DPR) costing ₹212.38 crore over five years focuses on-

Sewerage Management- Installing modular Sewage Treatment Plants (STPs) in internal hamlets.

Hydrological Revival- Dredging interior channels and reviving water circulation to prevent stagnation.

Catchment Treatment- Addressing the root cause by treating inflows before they reach the lake.

Comparison of Approaches

Feature	2009 Plan (Old)	2026 Plan (New)
Philosophy	Relocation-based (Exclusionary)	In-situ (Inclusionary)
Primary Goal	Shifting 9,000 families	Treating sewage & water circulation
Resident Status	Encroachers to be moved	Integral part of the ecosystem
Key Agency	Central/State Govt (2009)	LCMA & IIT Roorkee (Technical Lead)
Financial Focus	Land filling & Compensation	STPs, Dredging & Integrated Management

Source- <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/jammu-and-kashmir/why-has-jk-shelved-the-dal-lake-restoration-plan-explained/article70623948.ece>

2. The empty chair crisis- Why no-confidence motion against Om Birla exposes deeper constitutional and political issues (IE)

General Studies 2- Governance & Constitution

Topics- Parliament and State Legislatures—Structure, Functioning, Conduct of Business, Powers & Privileges and Issues Arising out of these.

Sub Topic- Role of the Speaker, Constitutional Accountability, and the Decline of Parliamentary Productivity.

Introduction

The Indian Parliament is currently witnessing a "Crisis of Trust," highlighted by a notice of no-confidence against the Speaker signed by 118 Opposition MPs. This breakdown of consensus over the Motion of Thanks and the use of unpublished materials indicates a departure from the "deliberative democracy" envisioned by the Constituent Assembly, moving toward a state of chronic institutional paralysis.

Constitutional Foundations of Parliamentary Democracy

The legitimacy of the Indian State rests on the functional health of its legislature-

Legislative Supremacy (Articles 79-122)- Parliament is the ultimate representative body for law-making and public will.

Executive Accountability (Article 75)- The Council of Ministers is collectively responsible to the Lok Sabha. This accountability is hollow without robust debate and questioning.

Institutional Opposition- While the Constitution doesn't explicitly name "The Opposition," the Leader of Opposition Act (1977) recognizes it as a vital check on executive overreach.

Deliberation vs. Majoritarianism- The founders intended Parliament to be a forum for reasoned discussion, where dissent is not just tolerated but seen as essential for policy refinement.

Manifestations of the Modern Trust Breakdown

The crisis is visible through several unprecedented developments

Targeting the Chair- A no-confidence motion against the Speaker is a rare and serious move, as the Speaker is the "linchpin" of the House's neutrality.

Tactical Disruptions– Frequent adjournments and protests in the "Well of the House" have replaced substantive debate, drastically reducing legislative productivity.

Politicization of Proceedings– Contentious debates on security concerns and conduct within the House have turned into personal allegations rather than policy critiques.

Rhetorical Escalation– Shifting from "Opponents" to "Enemies," where the political other is viewed as an existential threat to the nation or the Constitution.

The Office of the Speaker– Neutrality vs. Perception

Under Article 93, the Speaker must embody impartial authority–

Dual Role– The Speaker is a party member but must act as the Guardian of Privileges and an unbiased adjudicator of the Tenth Schedule (Anti-defection).

The "Moral Authority" Gap– Historically, Speakers used informal "behind-the-scenes" consultations to break deadlocks. A perceived bias erodes this moral capital, making house management impossible.

Transparency– The legitimacy of the House depends on the Speaker being *seen* to be fair to both the Treasury and Opposition benches.

Historical Context– Disruptions Then and Now

Disruptions are not a 21st-century invention, but their nature has changed

Coalition Era (1989–2014)– Disruptions were common due to thin majorities and regional pressures.

The 2011 Lokpal Episode– A low point where a Bill was torn in the Rajya Sabha, yet dialogue eventually resumed.

Presidential Warnings– In 2016, President Pranab Mukherjee famously urged MPs– *"For God's sake, do your job,"* highlighting a long-standing decline in standards.

The Difference– Current disruptions are characterized by a total collapse of communication channels between the government and the opposition.

The "Opponent, Not Enemy" Philosophy

The essence of the Westminster system is an "Adversarial but Cooperative" model

Sushma Swaraj's Legacy– Her 2014 farewell speech serves as a reminder that political actors are rivals in ideas, not enemies in a war.

Constructive Dissent– The Opposition's role is to critique to improve, not to obstruct to destroy.

Civility– The personalization of politics risks turning the temple of democracy into a theatre of antagonism.

Consequences of Parliamentary Dysfunction

A "silent" or "shouting" Parliament has real-world costs–

Reduced Scrutiny– Laws passed in haste lack the "filter" of debate, leading to legal flaws and public protests.

Bypassing Committees– Parliamentary Committees—once "mini-parliaments" for bipartisan consensus—are increasingly sidelined by polarization.

Institutional Erosion– Normalizing disruption as a political tool sets a dangerous precedent for future generations.

Public Disillusionment– If Parliament ceases to solve problems, citizens lose faith in representative democracy itself.

Conclusion

Restoring trust requires a multi-pronged approach– reviving informal dialogue, ensuring the Speaker's visible neutrality, and strengthening the Committee system. As articulated by leaders like Sushma Swaraj, the dignity of the House can only be preserved if both sides agree that while their paths differ, their destination—the national interest—is the same.

Source– <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/the-empty-chair-crisis-why-no-confidence-motion-against-om-birla-exposes-deeper-constitutional-and-political-issues-10527202/>

Editorial of the Day – 14.02.2026

Index

1. The labour codes redefine wages, empower the worker (TH)

2. India preferred BNP in Bangladesh, and it won. What's next now? (ET)

1. The labour codes redefine wages, empower the worker (TH)

General Studies 3- Economy

Topic- Labour Relations

The labour codes redefine wages, empower the worker. There will be an expansion of worker benefits, his financial inclusion, and an enhancement of his long-term social security.

The implementation of India's labour codes marks a decisive shift towards greater financial inclusion of the workforce by embedding social security, income protection, and long-term financial safeguards into the employment relationship.

Key Features of India's New Labour Codes

Uniform Definition of Wages- A standardised definition of 'wage' ensures that basic pay constitutes at least 50% of total remuneration. It impacts higher contributions to Provident Fund (PF), pension, and gratuity, leading to stronger long-term financial security.

Universal Minimum Wage- Introduction of a national floor wage, below which no state can fix minimum wages. It aims to reduce wage disparities and protect low-income workers.

Timely Payment & Limited Deductions- Mandates timely payment of wages and restricts arbitrary deductions, and enhances income stability and prevents exploitation.

Simplified Dispute Resolution- Creates faster mechanisms for resolving industrial disputes through tribunals and conciliation.

Recognition of Trade Unions- Provides criteria for recognition of negotiating unions in establishments.

Fixed-Term Employment Formalisation- Legally recognises fixed-term employment, ensuring equal benefits (including gratuity after one year) at par with permanent workers.

Layoff & Retrenchment Threshold Changes- Increases the employee threshold for prior government approval for layoffs and retrenchments (from 100 to 300 workers).

Expanded Social Security Coverage- For the first time, gig workers, platform workers, and unorganised workers are formally recognised.

Provident Fund & Pension Expansion- Extends coverage to more establishments and worker categories.

Gratuity for Fixed-Term Workers- Eligibility after one year of service, strengthening income protection.

Benefit Portability- Enables portability of benefits across states and employment, crucial for migrant labour.

Improved Workplace Safety Standards- Consolidates multiple safety laws into one framework applicable across sectors.

Working Hours & Leave Provisions- Standardises working conditions and leave entitlements.

Protection for Migrant Workers- Mandates better registration systems and access to welfare schemes.

Structural Features & Macroeconomic Implications

Consolidation of 29 Laws into 4 Codes- Reduces fragmentation and simplifies compliance for employers while improving clarity for workers.

Digital Compliance & Transparency- Encourages online registration, electronic record-keeping, and unified licensing.

Financial Inclusion Focus- By strengthening wage definitions and expanding social security, the codes enhance long-term savings, retirement security, insurance access, and income stability.

Higher Consumption- Workers' income typically circulates within the domestic economy.

Improved Savings Behaviour- Stronger PF and gratuity accumulation builds long-term financial assets.

Greater Financial System Participation- Formal wage structures encourage banking and institutional engagement.

Key Challenges in Implementing India's New Labour Codes

Delayed Implementation & State-Level Readiness- Although Parliament passed the four codes in 2019–2020, they require states to frame rules before full enforcement. Labour is a concurrent subject under India's Constitution, meaning both the Centre and states legislate on it.

Implementation Capacity & Enforcement Gaps- The shift from inspector-based regimes to an 'Inspector-cum-Facilitator' model aims to reduce harassment and promote compliance. Other concerns include limited staffing in labour departments, digital infrastructure gaps, and weak monitoring mechanisms.

Social Security Financing for Gig & Informal Workers- Under the Code on Social Security, 2020, gig and platform workers are formally recognised.

Industry Concerns Over Cost Implications- The revised wage definition under the Code on Wages, 2019 requires basic wages to constitute at least 50% of total remuneration.

Trade Union Opposition & Political Resistance- Under the Industrial Relations Code, 2020–

1. The threshold for prior government approval for layoffs increased.
2. Stricter conditions for strikes introduced.
3. Trade unions argue these provisions dilute collective bargaining power.

Informal Sector Integration Complexity- India's workforce is predominantly informal. Formalising such a vast and diverse labour force poses structural challenges like lack of documentation, migrant mobility, limited financial literacy, and employer resistance in small enterprises.

Awareness & Financial Literacy Gaps- Many workers are unaware of their rights regarding provident Fund (retirement savings scheme), gratuity (exit benefit after service), insurance and welfare schemes. Without targeted awareness campaigns, benefits may remain underutilised.

Risk of Compliance Burden on MSMEs- Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) may struggle with digital compliance requirements, record-keeping obligations, and cost of higher social security contributions.

Key Suggestions for Effective Implementation of India's Labour Codes

Ensure Timely and Uniform State Implementation- Since labour is a concurrent subject, states need to frame their rules before the codes become fully operational. Key suggestions include–

1. Set clear timelines for state rule notification;
2. Encourage inter-state coordination for uniformity;
3. Develop model rules to minimise variation;

Strengthen Administrative and Digital Capacity- The shift to digital compliance and the Inspector-cum-Facilitator model requires robust infrastructure. Key suggestions include–

1. Upgrade labour department staffing and training;

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2. Invest in unified digital portals for registration and reporting;
3. Use data analytics for risk-based inspections;

Create a Sustainable Financing Framework for Gig Workers- The inclusion of gig and platform workers is transformative, but financing mechanisms must be clear and viable. Key suggestions include-

1. Define transparent contribution formulas for aggregators;
2. Introduce co-contribution models (government, platform and worker together);
3. Establish a central social security fund for gig workers;

Balance Worker Welfare with Industry Competitiveness- The revised wage definition under the Code on Wages, 2019 increases social security contributions. Key suggestions include-

1. Provide transitional compliance periods for MSMEs;
2. Offer tax incentives for higher social security compliance;
3. Encourage phased restructuring of salary components;

Enhance Worker Awareness and Financial Literacy- Legal entitlement does not guarantee effective access. Key suggestions include-

1. Conduct nationwide awareness campaigns;
2. Simplify communication of PF, pension, and gratuity benefits;
3. Integrate labour rights education into skilling programs;

Build Trust Through Social Dialogue- Opposition from trade unions highlights the need for participatory governance. Key suggestions include-

1. Institutionalise tripartite consultations (government, employer and worker);
2. Publish transparent implementation reports;
3. Set up grievance redressal mechanisms;

Focus on Informal Sector Integration- India's workforce is predominantly informal, making formalisation a structural challenge. Key suggestions include-

1. Simplify registration procedures for small enterprises;
2. Use Aadhaar-linked digital identification systems for portability;
3. Provide onboarding incentives for informal businesses;

Monitor and Evaluate Impact Periodically- Reform needs to be evidence-based and adaptive. Key suggestions include-

1. Establish periodic impact assessments;
2. Collect real-time data on wage compliance and social security coverage;
3. Allow mid-course corrections where necessary;

Conclusion

India's labour codes should be understood not merely as regulatory reform, but as a structural intervention aimed at financial inclusion. The codes promote income security, financial dignity, and a more equitable distribution of economic value by reforming wage definitions, extending gratuity to fixed-term workers, expanding social security to gig and informal workers, ensuring minimum wages and timely payments.

Source- <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/the-labour-codes-redefine-wages-empower-the-worker/article70629559.ece>

2. India preferred BNP in Bangladesh, and it won. What's next now? (ET)

General Studies 3– International Relations

Recent Political Upheaval– From Protests to Elections

Mass Protests and Collapse of Hasina's Government

In 2024, mass protests erupted nationwide, initially over public sector job quota reforms but rapidly expanding into broader anti-government demonstrations against alleged authoritarianism, human rights abuses, and governance failures. These protests led to the resignation and flight of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina from Bangladesh on 5 August 2024.

The uprising—often referred to as the July Revolution—marked the end of Hasina's 15-year rule and triggered a constitutional crisis, as Bangladesh's legal framework lacked provisions for the formation of an interim government following the prime minister's departure.

Formation of Interim Government

In the ensuing power vacuum, an interim government was formed on 8 August 2024 under Muhammad Yunus, the Nobel laureate and economist proposed by protest leaders and political stakeholders to restore stability, oversee reforms, and prepare for credible elections.

2026 General Elections and BNP Victory

General elections were held on 12 February 2026, the first since the 2024 uprising. The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), led by Tarique Rahman, secured a two-thirds parliamentary majority, marking a historic electoral shift.

In these elections–

1. BNP won a commanding majority of seats.
2. Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami emerged as the second-largest party with significant parliamentary presence.
3. The Awami League was barred from contesting, its registration suspended during the interim period.

Swearing-In and Parliamentary Dynamics

Tarique Rahman was sworn in as Prime Minister shortly after the election, leading a cabinet that combined BNP leaders and technocrats. Some allied parties, including Jamaat-e-Islami and the National Citizen Party, boycotted parts of the swearing-in ceremony over procedural disagreements linked to proposed constitutional reforms.

Structural and Policy Implications of the Transition

Transformation of Political Spectrum

The 2026 elections effectively ended the long-standing "*Battle of the Begums*"—the rivalry between BNP's Khaleda Zia and Awami League's Sheikh Hasina—ushering in a new leadership era under Rahman. The rise of Jamaat-e-Islami with substantial seats signals an increased role for conservative and religious political forces in Bangladesh's legislature and policy discourse.

Constitutional and Institutional Reform Pressure

Following the uprising, the "July Charter" (a major political declaration emerging in October 2025 during the interim period) advocated for deep reforms including–

1. Curtailing overarching executive powers to prevent authoritarian concentration.
2. Institutionalising a neutral interim system for elections to ensure credibility.

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3. Establishing an upper chamber (second house) to strengthen checks and balances (akin to India's Rajya Sabha).
4. These demands reflect widespread calls for structural change to promote democratic governance and mitigate executive dominance.

Challenges in Implementation

Early post-election dynamics show that the process of constitutional and reform implementation faces logistical and procedural hurdles, such as the inability to fully constitute the proposed Constitutional Reform Council due to procedural complications.

Broader Domestic and Social Challenges

Reconciliation and Political Polarisation

Reintegrating the Awami League and other excluded political actors into mainstream politics remains a critical test for long-term stability. Addressing the grievances of supporters of the previous regime and mending fractures in the political ecosystem are essential to prevent recurring instability.

Restoration of Civil Liberties

Restoring civil liberties, ensuring the release of political prisoners, and protecting freedom of expression and assembly are key benchmarks for democratic credibility moving forward.

Institutional Autonomy

Autonomy of key institutions—such as the army, judiciary, and Election Commission—will be crucial to rebuilding public confidence in state neutrality and fairness.

India–Bangladesh Relations in the New Context

Diplomatic Recalibration

Historically, the BNP has had more cautious relations with India, while the Awami League maintained closer bilateral ties. Despite that history, India was among the first countries to congratulate Tarique Rahman on his election victory and expressed diplomatic goodwill, including high-level interactions following important personal events in Rahman's life.

Strategic Considerations for New Delhi

India's foreign policy calculus in Dhaka faces several imperatives—

1. Avoid overtly aligning with a single party or leader to maintain balanced relations across Bangladesh's political spectrum.
2. Strengthen people-to-people linkages through cultural, educational, trade, and developmental cooperation rather than purely state-to-state engagements.
3. Continue diplomatic engagement with the new government while safeguarding the security and well-being of Indian minorities and diplomatic missions.

Conclusion

Bangladesh's political landscape has undergone a dramatic upheaval since 2024, moving from prolonged one-party dominance under Sheikh Hasina to a paradigm shaped by mass mobilization, constitutional debate, and electoral turnover. The rise of the BNP under Tarique Rahman and the enhanced role of conservative parties highlight shifting political currents.

Key challenges ahead include implementing institutional reforms outlined in the July Charter, nurturing political reconciliation, and consolidating democratic institutions that can withstand polarization. For regional actors like India, navigating this transition demands balanced diplomacy and an emphasis on institution-centric engagement over partisan preferences.

Source- <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/international/world-news/tarique-rahman-bangladesh-election-result-india-impact-new-delhi-backed-bnp-in-bangladesh-and-it-won-whats-next-now/articleshow/128299227.cms?from=mdr>



Editorial of the Day – 16.02.2026**Index****1. The UAE-India Corridor Is Sparking a Growth Story (TH)****2. Bridging A Divide with an 'Indian Scientific Service' (TH)****1. The UAE-India Corridor Is Sparking a Growth Story (TH)****General Studies 3- International Relations**

Topic- The UAE-India Corridor Is Driving Growth, Technology, And Strategic Global Expansion

India-UAE Economic Corridor- From CEPA to Strategic Geo-Economic Convergence

The India-UAE relationship has evolved from a traditional energy-trade linkage into a multidimensional strategic partnership integrating trade, investment, technology, energy security, and geopolitics. The signing of the India-UAE Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) in 2022 marked an inflection point, accelerating economic integration and institutionalizing long-term cooperation.

Trade Expansion- Scale, Diversification, and Structural Shift**Early Achievement of \$100 Billion Target**

1. Bilateral trade crossed \$100 billion five years ahead of the 2030 target, demonstrating the catalytic role of CEPA.
2. Both nations have now revised their ambition upward to \$200 billion by 2032, signalling confidence in sustained trade momentum.
3. The achievement reflects a transition from hydrocarbons-led trade to a diversified and value-added trade basket.

Rise of Non-Oil Trade

Non-oil trade increased by approximately 20% year-on-year, reaching \$65 billion.

Key sectors driving growth-

1. Agriculture and processed food
2. Gems and jewellery
3. Textiles and apparel
4. Engineering goods and machinery
5. Chemicals and pharmaceuticals

This diversification reduces vulnerability to oil price volatility and enhances supply chain resilience.

CEPA's Tariff Architecture

1. Eliminated or reduced tariffs on nearly 90% of tariff lines.
2. Facilitated preferential market access for Indian MSMEs and labour-intensive sectors.
3. Strengthened customs cooperation and regulatory harmonization.

Diaspora and Connectivity- The Human and Logistical Backbone**Indian Diaspora as Strategic Asset**

Approximately 5 million Indians reside in the UAE, constituting its largest expatriate community.

The diaspora acts as-

1. A bridge for trade and investment
2. A source of remittances
3. A facilitator of cultural diplomacy

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Remittance inflows contribute significantly to India's external stability and consumption base.

Air and Physical Connectivity

Around 1,200 weekly flights, making the India-UAE corridor one of the busiest globally.

High-frequency connectivity supports-

1. Business travel
2. Tourism
3. High-value cargo trade
4. Financial sector integration

The "Two-Way Street" of Investment- Capital Interdependence

Investment Flows Overview

1. UAE investments in India since 2000- \$22+ billion.
2. Indian investments in UAE- \$16+ billion.
3. This reciprocity reflects mutual economic trust and strategic convergence.

A. Indian Investments in the UAE

Energy and Low-Carbon Transition- Reliance Industries- \$2 billion investment in Abu Dhabi for low-carbon chemicals expansion. Demonstrates integration of India's industrial champions into Gulf energy transition ecosystems.

Electric Mobility- Ashok Leyland shifted electric bus manufacturing to Dubai, leveraging logistics efficiency and regulatory support. Indicates UAE's positioning as a global EV export hub.

Renewable Energy Infrastructure- Larsen & Toubro (L&T) constructing large-scale solar-plus-storage projects in Abu Dhabi. Supports UAE's net-zero ambitions while expanding India's EPC footprint.

B. UAE Investments in India

Ports and Logistics- DP World committed \$5 billion toward ports and logistics parks. Enhances India's maritime infrastructure and global value chain integration.

Banking and Financial Sector- Emirates NBD acquired a majority stake in RBL Bank. Strengthens financial sector capitalisation and cross-border banking integration.

Energy Security- ADNOC signed long-term LPG supply agreements with Indian PSUs like Indian Oil and HPCL. Reinforces India's energy security while ensuring stable demand for UAE hydrocarbons.

Sovereign Wealth Funds- ADIA established operations in GIFT City, deepening financial market integration. Mubadala invested \$4 billion in healthcare and renewable energy sectors. Reflects strategic long-term capital placement rather than short-term portfolio flows.

Strategic Policy Architecture- Institutional Foundations

CEPA (2022)

1. Trade facilitation, tariff reduction, services liberalization.
2. Anchors economic cooperation beyond hydrocarbons.

Bilateral Investment Treaty (2024)

1. Strengthens investor protection.
2. Enhances dispute resolution mechanisms.
3. Improves predictability for long-term capital deployment.

Strategic Defence Partnership

1. Expands cooperation in maritime security, counter-terrorism, and defense production.
2. Ensures geopolitical stability for sustained economic engagement.

Bharat Mart Initiative

A wholesale distribution hub in the UAE to serve as a gateway for Indian exports to–

1. Africa
2. West Asia
3. Eurasia

Enhances India's re-export competitiveness and reduces logistical barriers.

Artificial Intelligence Collaboration

1. AI emerging as the next growth frontier in the corridor.
2. India hosting the AI Impact Summit (February 16–20, 2026), the first global AI summit in the Global South.
3. UAE, having appointed the world's first Minister of State for AI in 2017, brings advanced AI governance and infrastructure capabilities.
4. Potential areas of collaboration
 - a. AI in logistics and ports
 - b. Smart cities
 - c. FinTech and digital banking
 - d. Energy optimization and carbon management

Geo-Economic and Strategic Implications

Shift from Energy Dependence to Strategic Partnership

1. Earlier phase– Oil-driven transactional engagement.
2. Current phase– Institutionalized, diversified, capital-intensive strategic partnership.

Integration into Global Value Chains

1. Logistics, ports, and financial integration strengthen India's export competitiveness.
2. UAE serves as a gateway economy linking India to Africa and Europe.

Support for Viksit Bharat 2047

1. Capital inflows enhance infrastructure and manufacturing capacity.
2. Technology transfer accelerates digital and green transitions.
3. Supply chain diversification strengthens economic resilience.

Broader Delhi Declaration Vision

Expands India–Arab cooperation across–

1. Energy transition
2. Technology
3. Maritime security
4. Investment corridors

Conclusion

The India–UAE Economic Corridor represents a transformation from conventional bilateral trade to a strategic geo-economic architecture. CEPA institutionalized trade liberalization; reciprocal investments created capital interdependence; diaspora and connectivity built human integration; and emerging domains like AI and renewable energy are redefining the partnership.

The corridor is no longer merely about hydrocarbons—it is about value chains, capital flows, technological convergence, and strategic stability. In this sense, the India–UAE partnership is evolving

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into a model of South-South economic cooperation aligned with India's long-term developmental objective of Viksit Bharat 2047.

Source- <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/the-uae-india-corridor-is-sparking-a-growth-story/article70635903.ece>

2. Bridging A Divide with an 'Indian Scientific Service' (TH)

General Studies 2- Science & Development

Topic- A Dedicated Scientific Cadre Is Needed to Strengthen Governance as Science, Technology and Environmental Challenges Become Central

Proposal for an Indian Scientific Service (ISS)- Institutionalising Science in Governance

The proposal to establish a dedicated Indian Scientific Service (ISS) seeks to structurally embed scientific expertise within the higher echelons of public administration. It aims to transition India's governance architecture from a predominantly generalist administrative model toward a hybrid framework combining managerial coordination with domain-specific technical authority.

Historical Context- From Steel Frame to Knowledge State

Post-1947 Administrative Continuity

1. India retained the colonial-era civil services after Independence to preserve unity, continuity, and stability.
2. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel characterised the services as the "steel frame", underscoring their role in nation-building and integration.
3. The Indian Administrative Service (IAS) evolved as a versatile, generalist leadership cadre.

Suitability of the Generalist Model

In early decades, governance challenges centred on-

1. Land reforms
2. Institutional consolidation
3. Development planning
4. Public order and welfare administration

Officers rotated across departments, promoting coordination and administrative coherence.

Structural Shift in Governance Complexity

Contemporary governance is characterised by-

1. Climate modelling and carbon markets
2. Artificial Intelligence regulation and algorithmic governance
3. Cybersecurity and digital sovereignty
4. Biotechnology and genomic surveillance
5. Pandemic preparedness and epidemiological forecasting

These domains demand advanced technical literacy, interdisciplinary systems thinking, and long-term risk modelling—competencies not inherently cultivated within traditional generalist training.

The Governance Paradox- Science Without Authority

Institutional Constraint

1. Government scientists in institutions such as DRDO, ISRO, CSIR labs, and regulatory bodies operate under standard civil service rules.
2. Despite subject-matter expertise, they frequently lack policy-level decision-making authority.
3. Technical recommendations may be overridden by administrative hierarchies.

Bureaucratic systems emphasise-

1. Procedural compliance
2. File-based decision-making
3. Hierarchical deference

Scientific practice prioritises-

1. Hypothesis testing
2. Evidence-based dissent
3. Peer scrutiny
4. Iterative learning

This divergence can suppress innovation and discourage critical evaluation of policy assumptions.

Advisory Marginalisation

1. In many ministries, scientific advisory roles remain consultative rather than determinative.
2. Advice is non-binding and subject to administrative discretion.
3. Risk assessments are often subordinated to short-term political or fiscal considerations.

Reactive Versus Anticipatory Governance

Reactive Deployment of Science

Scientific expertise is frequently mobilised post-crisis, such as-

1. Environmental disasters
2. Air pollution emergencies
3. Public health outbreaks
4. Cyberattacks

This reactive posture increases economic and social costs.

Need for Anticipatory Governance

Embedding scientists at the policy design stage would enable-

1. Early risk identification
2. Long-term modelling of climate and demographic transitions
3. Evidence-informed regulation of emerging technologies
4. Strategic foresight in biosecurity and digital governance

An institutionalised scientific cadre would support preventive, risk-informed policymaking rather than episodic crisis management.

Proposed Indian Scientific Service (ISS)- Structural Design

Creation of a New All-India Service

1. ISS would function alongside IAS, IPS, and IFS.
2. Cadre officers would be deployed across Union ministries, state governments, regulatory agencies, and strategic institutions.

Specialised Recruitment Model

Selection through evaluation of-

1. Peer-reviewed publications
2. Research impact
3. Domain expertise
4. Technological leadership

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Recruitment could occur at multiple career stages, including lateral entry. Emphasis on meritocratic scientific credentials rather than generalist competitive examination alone.

Defined Functional Role

ISS officers would provide–

1. Technical feasibility assessments
2. Regulatory impact analysis
3. Long-term risk forecasting
4. Scientific validation of public projects

Administrators would continue handling coordination, finance, and interdepartmental alignment. This creates a complementary governance architecture, not a replacement of the generalist model.

Global Best Practices

Institutionalised Scientific Services

Countries with structured scientific integration include

1. United States – Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP), Chief Science Advisors, federal scientific cadres.
2. United Kingdom – Government Office for Science and departmental Chief Scientific Advisers.
3. France, Germany, Japan – Formalised research-policy linkages within ministries.

Scientific Integrity Frameworks

The United States implements Scientific Integrity Policies that–

1. Protect researchers from political interference
2. Mandate transparency in documenting scientific advice
3. Safeguard publication autonomy

These frameworks ensure credibility, independence, and public trust in scientific governance.

Potential Advantages of an ISS

Enhanced Policy Quality– Integration of quantitative modelling, AI tools, and scenario analysis into governance. Reduced reliance on ad hoc committees.

Improved Regulatory Capacity– Stronger oversight of biotechnology, fintech, climate markets, and digital platforms.

Strengthened National Security– Scientific expertise in cybersecurity, quantum technologies, and defence innovation.

Long-Term Strategic Planning

Alignment with India's goals in–

1. Net-zero transition
2. Semiconductor manufacturing
3. Space economy expansion
4. Bioeconomy development

Implementation Challenges

Inter-Service Coordination– Avoiding bureaucratic turf conflicts between generalists and specialists.

Career Progression Structure– Designing promotion pathways comparable in prestige and authority to IAS positions.

Federal Adaptation– Harmonising Union and State-level deployment.

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Ensuring Independence– Safeguarding scientific advice from political capture while maintaining democratic accountability.

Strategic Rationale in the Indian Context

As India transitions toward

1. A \$5 trillion economy and beyond
2. A digitally integrated governance ecosystem
3. Climate-resilient infrastructure
4. AI-enabled public service delivery

Governance must evolve from administrative command to knowledge-based statecraft.

The ISS proposal aligns with–

1. Atmanirbhar Bharat in high-technology sectors
2. Viksit Bharat 2047 vision
3. Strengthening India's role in global science diplomacy

Conclusion

The establishment of an Indian Scientific Service represents a shift from episodic consultation to institutionalised scientific governance. It acknowledges that 21st-century statecraft is increasingly technical, data-intensive, and risk-sensitive.

Rather than relying solely on generalist administrators supported by ad hoc advisory committees, India requires durable institutional reform that embeds scientific authority within decision-making structures. A well-designed ISS could create a hybrid governance model—where administrative coordination and scientific rigour operate in tandem—ensuring resilient, anticipatory, and evidence-based policymaking in an era of technological transformation.

Source- <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/bridging-a-divide-with-an-indian-scientific-service/article70635864.ece>

Editorial of the Day – 17.02.2026**Index****1. India's federalism is in need of a structural reset (TH)****2. India At the Ai Crossroads- Cooperation Vs Technological Sovereignty (ET)****1. India's federalism is in need of a structural reset (TH)****General Studies 2- Indian Polity****Topic- Federalism**

There is a need for balanced federalism in the form of autonomous States, an efficient Union, and accountable governance. Recently, a high-level committee on Union-State relations, submitted its first report to the Government of Tamil Nadu that deals with powers and responsibilities shared between the Union and the States.

About India's Federalism

Federalism is a system of government in which power is constitutionally divided between a central authority (Union) and regional governments (States). A federal system gives both levels independent authority within their own spheres, unlike a unitary system (where all power flows from the centre). Neither level is legally subordinate to the other within those assigned domains.

India's Unique Federal Design

Constitutional Design- The Constitution (1950), influenced by the Government of India Act, 1935, created a strong Union List, a residuary power vested in Parliament, Emergency provisions (Articles 352, 356, 360), and a single Constitution and single citizenship. Indian federalism was shaped by Partition, princely state integration, and fears of fragmentation, unlike classical federations (e.g., the US).

1. India is often described as a 'Union of States', a phrase deliberately used in the Constitution to reflect unity with diversity.
2. India's federalism is often called 'quasi-federal' or 'federal with a unitary bias', as the Constitution of India gives the Union stronger authority in certain areas, especially during emergencies.
3. Union law prevails (with limited exceptions) if there is a conflict in Concurrent List subjects. It reflects both-

The need for national unity, and recognition of regional diversity.

Core Foundational Principles of Indian Federalism

Constitutional Supremacy- India does not operate on parliamentary supremacy (like the UK).

The Constitution is supreme, i.e. both the Union and States derive their authority from it, and no government, either Union or State, can act beyond constitutional limits.

Division of Legislative, Executive & Financial Powers- Federalism is not just about law-making. It also involves Legislative powers (law making), Executive powers, and financial powers. Revenue sharing is done through the Finance Commission, GST Council, and Centrally Sponsored Schemes.

Cooperative Federalism- India's model is not meant to be competitive or adversarial. The ideal vision is cooperative federalism, meaning-

1. The Union and States work together.
2. Policies are discussed collaboratively.
3. Institutions like the Inter-State Council and GST Council encourage consultation.

More recently, the phrase 'competitive federalism' has emerged, meaning States compete in performance (investment, ease of doing business, governance reforms).

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Unity with Diversity- India is linguistically, culturally, and economically diverse. Federalism accommodates different languages, development models, and governance experiments.

For example- Tamil Nadu pioneered the noon meal scheme; Kerala achieved strong public health outcomes; Maharashtra experimented with employment guarantee schemes.

Asymmetrical Federalism- India does not treat all States identically. Some States historically enjoyed special provisions like Sixth Schedule areas for tribal regions in Northeast India.

Judicial Safeguards- Federalism as Basic Structure

S.R. Bommai vs Union of India (1994)- The Supreme Court held that Federalism is part of the Basic Structure of the Constitution.

1. States are not 'mere appendages' of the Centre, and they are supreme within their constitutional sphere.
2. The term 'Basic Structure' means that even Parliament cannot amend the Constitution in a way that destroys federalism.
3. Article 356 (President's Rule) is subject to judicial review.

Commissions on Centre-State Relations

Rajamannar Committee (1971)- Established by Tamil Nadu, it argued for greater State autonomy and clearer limits on Union encroachment.

Sarkaria Commission (1983-1988)- Recommended cooperative federalism, restraint in using Article 356, and consultation with States.

Punchhi Commission (2007-2010)- Called for redefining the Governor's role and strengthening intergovernmental mechanisms.

Concerns & Issues Around India's Federalism

Centralisation of Legislative Powers- Parliament increasingly legislates on subjects where States also have authority.

1. Provisions such as Articles 249 and 250 allow Parliament to legislate on State subjects under certain conditions, raising concerns about gradual erosion of State spheres.
2. It reduces meaningful State autonomy when uniform national laws override local policy choices.

Misuse and Legacy of Article 356- Article 356 (President's Rule) was frequently invoked for political reasons before S.R. Bommai (1994). The Supreme Court restricted arbitrary use, making proclamations judicially reviewable.

Role of Governors- Major concerns include delays or refusal of assent to State Bills, discretionary powers in government formation, and reporting under Article 356.

Fiscal Federalism Imbalances

Vertical Imbalance- States bear substantial expenditure responsibilities (health, education, agriculture), yet major taxation powers are concentrated at the Union level.

Conditional Transfers- Centrally Sponsored Schemes (CSS) under Article 282 allow the Union to impose policy templates through tied grants.

Finance Commission Dynamics- The broader concern is that fiscal dependence weakens substantive autonomy.

GST and Shared Sovereignty- The introduction of the GST (2017) restructured fiscal federalism. Concerns include loss of independent taxation space for States, GST compensation disputes, voting structure within the GST Council, and increasing central coordination over tax rates. It lies between uniform market integration and fiscal autonomy.

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Executive Federalism & Institutional Drift– Intergovernmental bodies such as NITI Aayog, GST Council, and Inter-State Council have reshaped federal practice. The decision-making increasingly occurs through executive forums rather than legislative federalism, reducing transparency and formal accountability.

Asymmetric Federalism Under Strain– India accommodates asymmetry (e.g., special provisions for certain States). However, reorganisation of states, alteration of special status arrangements, and uniform policy drives have raised questions about how asymmetry is protected within a centralising framework.

Political Centralisation– Strong single-party dominance at the Union level, particularly when the same party governs multiple States, can create ‘high command’ culture, reduced bargaining autonomy, and policy uniformity pressures. Conversely, coalition eras historically strengthened negotiated federalism.

Way Forward– Strengthening India’s Federalism

Limit Overreach in the Concurrent List– Parliament should exercise restraint in legislating on Concurrent subjects unless national uniformity is indispensable. Revitalising Article 263 institutions can institutionalise structured dialogue rather than ad hoc negotiation.

Reform the Role of Governors– Establish transparent criteria for appointment; fix timelines for assent to State Bills; and codify discretionary powers more clearly. Commissions (Sarkaria, Punchhi) have recommended insulating the office from partisan influence. Implementing these reforms would reduce recurring Centre – State conflicts.

Revisit Article 282 Practices– Clarify limits on discretionary grants to prevent fiscal centralisation. Need to ensure predictable, transparent, and rule-based devolution criteria.

Recalibrate GST Governance– The improvements are needed for greater deliberative transparency, timely compensation mechanisms, mechanisms for limited State rate flexibility in defined sectors. It would balance market integration with fiscal autonomy.

Institutionalise Cooperative & Competitive Federalism– India’s federal future lies in combining Cooperative federalism (shared decision-making), and Competitive federalism (policy innovation and benchmarking). Encouraging States to experiment, while sharing best practices horizontally, strengthens overall governance capacity.

Source– <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/indias-federalism-is-in-need-of-a-structural-reset/article70639834.ece>

2. India At the Ai Crossroads– Cooperation Vs Technological Sovereignty (ET)

General Studies 3– Science & Technology

Topic– AI Summit 2026– Investment signals, policy convergence, and India’s expanding AI ambition

As India hosts a major AI Summit in New Delhi, it stands at a strategic inflection point. The central dilemma is whether to position itself primarily as a champion of global AI cooperation or to prioritise technological sovereignty in an increasingly competitive geopolitical environment. This tension mirrors the calibrated balance between collaboration and strategic autonomy pursued by Homi J. Bhabha during India’s formative nuclear years.

The AI moment is not merely technological—it is civilisational, economic, military, and geopolitical.

The Paradox of Ai– Universal Public Good Vs Strategic Asset

AI as a Global Public Good – The Normative Narrative

1. Global forums such as the G7, G20, OECD, and UN frame AI as a universal public good requiring cooperative governance.

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2. Emphasis is placed on ethical AI, safety standards, algorithmic transparency, and inclusive access.
3. AI is compared to air, water, or climate stability—transnational by nature and requiring shared stewardship.
4. Developing countries argue for equitable access to compute, datasets, and model capabilities to avoid digital colonialism.

Backstage Reality – Strategic Rivalry

Major powers, particularly the US and China, are locked in intense competition over-

1. Advanced semiconductor manufacturing
2. Access to cutting-edge GPUs and compute clusters
3. AI talent and research dominance
4. Foundational model supremacy

Export controls, investment screening, and supply-chain decoupling signal that AI is treated as a strategic commodity, not a shared global utility. The CHIPS and Science Act in the US and China's semiconductor self-reliance push illustrate techno-nationalism.

AI as Strategic Power

AI is dual-use- it drives productivity and economic transformation while also enhancing-

1. Autonomous weapons systems
2. Cyber operations
3. Intelligence and surveillance
4. Military decision-support systems

Control over AI ecosystems determines-

1. Economic competitiveness
2. Defence superiority
3. Narrative dominance in global governance

States are therefore reluctant to share core algorithms, training data, and compute infrastructure.

Rise of Techno-Nationalism

AI has become an instrument of geopolitical leverage.

Technological superiority increasingly translates into-

1. Supply-chain coercive capacity
2. Standards-setting power
3. Economic dependency networks

The global order is shifting from globalisation to securitised interdependence.

Historical Parallel- Lessons from The Nuclear Era (1955 And beyond)

The current AI rivalry resembles the nuclear arms race of the mid-20th century.

Nuclear vs AI Rivalry

1. In 1955, the United States and the Soviet Union dominated nuclear technology.
2. Nuclear capability determined geopolitical hierarchy and strategic autonomy.
3. Today, AI—like nuclear technology then—is a system-defining technology shaping global power structures.

Homi J. Bhabha's Strategic Insight

At the 1955 Geneva Conference on the Peaceful Uses of Atomic Energy, Bhabha argued-

1. Developing nations must not remain passive recipients.
2. Access to strategic technology is essential for development and energy security.

He recognised a core principle-

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Rule-making authority flows from technological capability.

Without indigenous capability-

1. A country cannot influence governance frameworks.
2. It becomes dependent on technology suppliers.
3. It risks strategic vulnerability.

Power Precedes Influence

Bhabha understood that

1. Moral arguments alone do not secure technological access.
2. Influence in global governance emerges from demonstrated capability.
3. Domestic scientific strength is the foundation of external bargaining power.

This principle is directly applicable to AI governance today.

The “Bridge Builder” Strategy- Partnerships for Capability

External Collaboration with Strategic Intent

Bhabha

1. Engaged scientists from the US, UK, and Canada.
2. Leveraged the “Atoms for Peace” moment.
3. Used partnerships to accelerate indigenous capability rather than create permanent dependence.

This is instructive for AI.

India’s Current AI Ecosystem

1. Deep integration with Silicon Valley.
2. Strong R&D clusters in Bengaluru and Hyderabad.
3. A vibrant start-up ecosystem.
4. Leadership in digital public infrastructure (DPI) such as UPI and Aadhaar.

However

1. Compute capacity is limited relative to global leaders.
2. India lacks cutting-edge semiconductor fabrication.
3. Foundational model development remains nascent compared to US and China.

Partnership-Led Internal Growth

India must

1. Secure access to advanced chips through strategic partnerships.
2. Invest in sovereign compute clusters.
3. Build national foundational models tailored to Indian languages and governance contexts.
4. Expand public-private research consortia.

Partnerships should be used to accelerate domestic capacity, not substitute for it.

THE “LOST DECADES” WARNING

Post-1960s Slowdown in Nuclear Momentum

1. After the deaths of Nehru and Bhabha, policy momentum fragmented.
2. International isolation following nuclear tests slowed collaboration.
3. India’s early advantage diminished over time.

Competitors Scaling Rapidly

1. China and South Korea, late entrants in nuclear technology, scaled aggressively.
2. They transitioned into exporters and global suppliers.
3. Strategic clarity and sustained investment drove long-term gains.

Risk of Repetition in AI

Emerging economies such as Vietnam and Indonesia are rapidly digitising.

Policy indecision, regulatory overreach, or underinvestment could –

1. Stall AI innovation.
2. Lead to talent flight.
3. Create dependency on foreign platforms.

AI is a first-mover advantage domain. Delays compound exponentially.

Way Forward- A Strategic Framework For India

Build Tangible National Assets

Prioritise

1. Sovereign high-performance computing infrastructure.
2. Semiconductor design and gradual manufacturing capability.
3. National AI research labs.
4. Public datasets governed under secure frameworks.
5. Massive skilling programmes in AI, data science, and chip design.

Capability must be measurable and scalable.

Move from Moralism to Rule-Shaping

1. Participate actively in drafting AI safety norms.
2. Lead Global South coalitions on equitable access.
3. Advocate open standards while protecting core technologies.
4. Influence ISO, ITU, and OECD technical committees.

Norm entrepreneurship must be backed by technological credibility.

Strategic Realism in Partnerships

Deepen cooperation with the US and like-minded democracies.

Leverage US–China rivalry for –

1. Access to advanced compute
2. Joint R&D programmes
3. Semiconductor ecosystem participation

Preserve strategic autonomy by avoiding overdependence on any single bloc.

Capability First, Leadership Later

Aspirations to lead the Global South in AI governance will be credible only if India –

1. Develops world-class foundational models.
2. Demonstrates scalable AI use cases in agriculture, health, education, and governance.

Just as Unified Payments Interface enhanced India's global standing, AI-enabled digital public goods can become exportable models.

Strategic Synthesis- Cooperative Autonomy

India does not face a binary choice between cooperation and sovereignty.

The optimal strategy is calibrated cooperative autonomy

1. Open to partnerships.
2. Protective of core strategic assets.
3. Assertive in governance forums.
4. Relentless in domestic capacity-building.

This mirrors Bhabha's nuclear doctrine –

1. Engage globally.
2. Build internally.
3. Shape rules from a position of strength.

Conclusion

India's AI strategy must transcend rhetorical leadership and focus on structural capability. The AI summit in Delhi symbolises ambition—but ambition without infrastructure risks hollow influence.

The lesson from the nuclear era is clear—

Technological sovereignty and global cooperation are not opposites. They are complementary—provided cooperation is used to build national strength.

In the AI century, credibility will not come from speeches about ethical AI alone. It will come from sovereign compute, indigenous models, skilled human capital, and the strategic discipline to convert partnerships into power.

Source- <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/ai/ai-insights/ai-summit-2026-investment-signals-policy-convergence-and-indias-expanding-ai-ambition/articleshow/128496462.cms?from=mdr>



Editorial of the Day – 18.02.2026

Index

1. India's 'Third Way' for AI governance (TH)

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

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.

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

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>

Editorial of the Day – 19.02.2026**Index****1. Kashmir revival- On the path of tourism (TH)****2. As NGT clears Great Nicobar project, a look at its strategic importance and ecological fallout (IE)****1. Kashmir revival- On the path of tourism (TH)****General Studies 3- Internal Security**

Topic- Linkages between development and spread of extremism; Role of external state and non-state actors in creating challenges to internal security.

Sub Topic- Government budgeting; Tourism as a tool for peacebuilding; Disaster and risk management.

Introduction

The Kashmir Valley is undergoing a strategic "Tourism Revival" following the April 2025 Pahalgam attack, which briefly crippled the region's hospitality sector. Through a combination of phased reopening of sites and the Union Budget 2026–27 allocations, the government is shifting toward a model that integrates national security with ecological sustainability and community-led governance.

1. Context- The April 2025 Pahalgam Attack & Aftermath

The attack served as a critical stress test for the region's tourism infrastructure and policy.

Immediate Impact- Total closure of 48 government-approved tourist sites to ensure visitor safety.

Phased Recovery- Recognizing that tourism relies on predictability, authorities initiated a phased reopening. By **February 16, 2026**, 14 key sites were restored to public access.

Core Lesson- Tourism resilience in conflict zones depends on the state's ability to provide a clear, transparent criteria for site closures and reopenings.

2. Tourism and Risk Perception

Security in Kashmir is as much about perception as it is about physical safety.

Visitor Differentiation- Analysis shows that tourists distinguish between "general conflict" and "targeted risks."

Policy Requirements- To maintain high footfalls, the government must ensure-

1. Transparency- Clear communication regarding safety protocols.
2. Reliability- Consistent permit systems and emergency response mechanisms.
3. Governance- Reducing administrative disruptions to incentivize local business growth.

3. Union Budget 2026–27- The Strategic Push

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's budget introduced a two-pronged strategy for the region-

A. Institutional Capacity Building

1. Strengthening the administrative machinery to manage high-volume tourism.
2. Training local stakeholders in hospitality, digital literacy, and emergency medical support.

B. Sustainable Trail Development

Ecological Focus- Transitioning toward mountain trails to reduce the environmental footprint on fragile Himalayan ecosystems.

Management Systems- Implementing formal ticketing, permit systems, and the deployment of rangers.

Diversification- Moving beyond traditional "hotspots" (like Gulmarg/Pahalgam) to niche heritage and trekking sites to prevent "over-tourism."

4. The "Third Prong"- Shared Environmental Governance

A novel approach proposed to bridge the gap between the militarized nature of the region and civilian life.

Trust Building- Using environmental protection as a neutral ground for cooperation between the state and local communities.

Civilian Participation– Moving away from purely military-led security to a model where locals have a stake in regional stability.

5. Community Participation & Paid Civic Roles

The revival model suggests moving beyond "volunteerism" toward formalized local employment

Paid Roles– Establishing positions for trail maintenance, waste management, fire monitoring, and wildlife conflict mitigation.

Economic Ownership– Drawing from the "Forest Protection Committee" model to give locals a financial incentive to protect tourist assets.

Counter-Insurgency Link– When local families derive direct income from tourism, they are statistically more likely to oppose disruptive elements or terrorism.

6. Long-Term Economic and Social Impacts

National Integration– Tourism reduces the "psychological distance" and isolation between Kashmir and the rest of India.

Social Stability– Provides youth with skilling and employment, steering them away from radicalization.

Infrastructure Spillover– Improvements in roads, electricity, and communication for tourists directly benefit the local quality of life.

Negotiating Power– A thriving civilian-led economy increases the local population's leverage and reduces resentment toward governance structures.

Conclusion

The revival of Kashmir's tourism is not merely an economic goal but a strategic imperative. By balancing security with "Strategic Sustainability," the government aims to create an inclusive model where the local community acts as the primary guardian of peace. The success of the 2026–27 budget initiatives will depend on whether the state can successfully transition from a "security-first" approach to a "community-governance-first" approach.

Source– <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/kashmir-revival-on-the-path-of-tourism/article70648291.ece>

2. As NGT clears Great Nicobar project, a look at its strategic importance and ecological fallout (IE)

General Studies 3– Environment

Topics– Environmental pollution and degradation; Developments in Science and Technology.

Sub Topic– Infrastructure (Ports, Airports), Investment Models, and Security Challenges in Border Areas.

Introduction

The National Green Tribunal (NGT) recently cleared the ₹81,000-crore Great Nicobar Integrated Island Development Project. While the project is championed as a cornerstone of India's maritime strategy and economic sovereignty in the Indo-Pacific, it has sparked intense debate over the irreversible ecological costs to one of the world's most pristine biosphere reserves and the survival of isolated indigenous tribes.

1. Project Overview & Core Components

The project is being implemented by the Andaman and Nicobar Islands Integrated Development Corporation (ANIIDCO). It aims to transform the island into a multi-sectoral hub.

Integrated Township– Spread over ~149 sq. km.

International Container Transshipment Terminal (ICTT)– A 7.66 sq. km port at Galathea Bay.

International Airport– A dual-use (civil and military) facility covering 8.45 sq. km.

Energy Infrastructure– A gas and solar-based power plant to sustain the new population and industries.

Scale– Diversion of 130 sq. km of forest land and the felling of approximately one million trees.

2. Strategic and Geopolitical Significance

The project is driven by "National Security" interests, which the NGT cited as a primary reason for its clearance.

Chokepoint Proximity– Located near the Malacca Strait, a global maritime artery handling ~94,000 ships annually and 30% of global trade.

Logistics Sovereignty– The ICTT aims to capture transshipment traffic currently handled by foreign ports like Colombo, Singapore, and Port Klang, keeping revenue and data within India.

Indo-Pacific "Net Security Provider"– Enhances the Andaman & Nicobar Command (ANC)—India's only tri-service command—facilitating better maritime domain awareness and surveillance.

Act East Policy– Serves as a bridge for India's diplomatic and economic outreach to Southeast Asia.

3. Ecological Sensitivity & Biodiversity

Great Nicobar is not a standard landmass; it is a unique oceanic ecosystem within the Sundaland Biodiversity Hotspot.

Biosphere Reserve– Most of the 910 sq. km island is a UNESCO-recognized Biosphere Reserve.

Endemic Species– Home to the Nicobar Megapode (a scrub bird that builds mounds) and the Nicobar Long-tailed Macaque.

Galathea Bay– The primary site for the port is also the most important nesting site in the northern Indian Ocean for the Leatherback Sea Turtle (the world's largest turtle).

Geological Fragility– The island is seismically active (prone to earthquakes and tsunamis) and highly vulnerable to sea-level rise.

4. Major Environmental Concerns

Massive Deforestation– The removal of a million trees threatens the "lungs" of the region and carbon sequestration capacity.

Habitat Disruption– Construction at Galathea Bay may permanently deter Leatherback turtles from nesting.

Marine Ecology Damage– Reclamation of land using 33 million cubic metres of material risks burying coral reefs and altering sediment flow, suffocating marine life.

Carrying Capacity– Critics argue the island cannot ecologically sustain the projected population surge (from ~8,500 to 6.5 lakh by 2050).

5. Socio-Cultural Impact on Indigenous Tribes

The project poses an existential threat to two main groups protected under the Andaman and Nicobar Islands (Protection of Aboriginal Tribes) Regulation, 1956

The Shompen Tribe– A **Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG)** of ~250 hunter-gatherers. Their limited contact with the outside world makes them biologically vulnerable to common diseases.

The Nicobarese– Indigenous communities who lost ancestral lands during the 2004 Tsunami and are still navigating rehabilitation; they fear the project will lead to further displacement.

Consent Issues– Allegations exist regarding the lack of "Free, Prior, and Informed Consent" (FPIC) from Tribal Councils, potentially violating the Forest Rights Act (2006).

6. Governance and Regulatory Challenges

Strategic Balancing– The NGT's decision prioritizes "Strategic Importance" over "Ecological Integrity," setting a controversial precedent for future projects in fragile zones.

Denotification of Sanctuaries– The government denotified the Galathea Bay Wildlife Sanctuary to facilitate the port, which critics view as a dilution of the Wildlife Protection Act.

Compensatory Mitigation– Plans to create "equivalent" sanctuaries on Little Nicobar are questioned by ecologists, as habitats are location-specific and cannot be "moved."

Assessment Gaps– There is a call for a Cumulative Impact Assessment rather than individual sector clearances to understand the total burden on the island.

Conclusion– The Path Forward

The Great Nicobar Project represents a classic "Development vs. Conservation" dilemma. While the strategic necessity in a changing Indo-Pacific is undeniable, the project must adhere to the principle of "Strategic but Sustainable."

Recommendations

Strict Environmental Oversight- Implementing a "Zero Discharge" policy for the port and township.

Tribal Buffer Zones- Ensuring the Shompen's foraging grounds remain strictly off-limits to the 6.5 lakh projected settlers.

Independent Monitoring- Establishing a high-level committee of ecologists and anthropologists to monitor construction in real-time.

Source- <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/as-ngt-clears-great-nicobar-project-a-look-at-its-strategic-importance-and-ecological-fallout-10539365/>



Editorial of the Day – 20.02.2026

Index

1. Privacy and transparency- On the RTI Act amendment, petitions (TH)
2. ISRO's improved fire-detection algo ready for test in rabi harvest season (IE)
1. Privacy and transparency- On the RTI Act amendment, petitions (TH)

General Studies 2- Governance

Topic- Important aspects of governance, transparency, and accountability.

Sub Topic- Right to Information (RTI) – Role of civil society, institutional framework, and challenges.

1. Introduction

The Right to Information (RTI) Act, 2005 is a landmark "sunshine law" that empowers Indian citizens to request information from public authorities, making the government more transparent and accountable. It transitioned India from a culture of secrecy (under the Official Secrets Act) to a culture of openness.

2. Background and Evolution

Grassroots Roots- The movement began with the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS) in Rajasthan, demanding transparency in village accounts and minimum wages.

Constitutional Basis- The Supreme Court, in *State of Uttar Pradesh v. Raj Narain* (1975), ruled that the "Right to Know" is a fundamental right derived from Article 19(1)(a) (Freedom of Speech and Expression).

Legislative Path- It replaced the weaker Freedom of Information Act, 2002 and officially came into force on 12 October 2005.

3. Key Objectives

Empowerment- To enable citizens to participate in decision-making processes.

Transparency- To ensure government operations are open to public scrutiny.

Accountability- To curb corruption and arbitrary use of power.

Democracy- To make democracy work for the people in the real sense.

4. Salient Features & Institutional Framework

Scope and Application

Jurisdiction- Applies to all Central, State, and local bodies.

Public Authorities- Includes bodies established by the Constitution, Parliament, State Legislatures, and organizations "substantially financed" by the government (including PSUs).

The Mechanism

Suo Motu Disclosure (Section 4)- Mandates public authorities to proactively publish information so citizens need minimal recourse to the Act.

Timeframes- * Standard requests- 30 days.

Matters of Life and Liberty- 48 hours.

Appellate Structure-

1. **PIO (Public Information Officer)-** First point of contact.

2. **First Appeal-** Internal department officer.

3. **Second Appeal-** Independent Commissions (Central Information Commission or State Information Commission).

Definition of "Information" (Section 2(f))

Includes- Records, documents, memos, emails, opinions, press releases, contracts, reports, and data in electronic form.

Excludes- Seeking personal interpretations or clarifications (questions like "Why was this done?").

5. Exemptions and Penalties

Exemptions (Sections 8 & 9)

Information can be denied if it affects–

National Interests– Sovereignty, integrity, security, and strategic interests of India.

Legal/Commercial– Trade secrets, IP, or information forbidden by a court.

Privileged Info– Cabinet papers (until a decision is made and the matter is complete).

Privacy– Personal info unrelated to public activity, unless the public interest outweighs the harm.

Penalties

The Commission can fine PIOs ₹250 per day (up to a maximum of ₹25,000) for unreasonable delays or denials. The Commission can recommend disciplinary action against erring officials.

6. Critical Legal & Legislative Developments

Landmark Judgments

CBSE v. Aditya Bandopadhyay– Confirmed that students have a right to see their evaluated answer sheets under RTI.

Girish Ramchandra Deshpande v. CIC– Clarified that personal details (like income tax returns) are exempt unless a larger public interest is proven.

RTI (Amendment) Act, 2019

Control– Gave the Central Government power to set the tenure, salaries, and service conditions of Information Commissioners (both Central and State).

Criticism– Critics argue this undermines the independence and neutrality of the Commissions, effectively making them subordinate to the Executive.

7. Achievements vs. Current Challenges

Achievements

Scam Exposure– Helped uncover high-profile corruption (e.g., Adarsh Housing, 2G).

Welfare Delivery– Improved the efficiency of the PDS and MNREGA by exposing leakages.

Participation– Bridged the gap between the rural poor and the administrative machinery.

Challenges (The "Current News" Context)

Institutional Vacancies– High number of vacant positions in Information Commissions leads to massive backlogs.

Pendency– Thousands of cases are pending, sometimes for years, defeating the "time-bound" essence.

Safety– Growing instances of threats, harassment, and attacks on RTI activists.

Misuse– Concerns regarding "vexatious" or "frivolous" applications used for blackmail.

8. Conclusion

The RTI Act, 2005 remains the strongest tool for participatory democracy in India. However, to maintain its "sunshine" status, the government must ensure institutional independence, fill vacancies promptly, and protect whistleblowers. Without an effective enforcement mechanism, the "Right to Know" risks becoming a dead letter.

Source– <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/privacy-and-transparency-on-the-rti-act-amendment-petitions/article70652568.ece>

2. ISRO's improved fire-detection algo ready for test in rabi harvest season (IE)

General Studies 3– Environment

Topics– Environmental pollution and degradation; Developments in Science and Technology.

Sub Topic– Air pollution in Delhi-NCR, Satellite technology for environmental monitoring (ISRO), and Crop Residue Management (CRM).

1. Introduction

In a significant technological upgrade, the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) is set to pilot a fine-tuned satellite-based fire detection algorithm during the 2026 Rabi harvest. This initiative, prompted by the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM), aims to rectify existing gaps in monitoring farm fires—a primary contributor to the severe air quality crisis in the Indo-Gangetic Plain.

2. The Core Problem– Stubble Burning Dynamics

Scale of Residue– Punjab, Haryana, and UP-NCR generate approximately 28 million tonnes of paddy stubble annually.

The "Window" Constraint– A narrow 10–20-day gap between harvesting paddy and sowing wheat forces farmers to use burning as the quickest field-clearing method.

Economic Barriers– High operational costs of machines like the Happy Seeder or *Super SMS* make them inaccessible for small and marginal farmers.

Contribution to Pollution– During peak periods, stubble burning accounts for up to 40% of Delhi's PM_{2.5} load.

3. Limitations of Existing Monitoring Systems

Satellite Detection Gaps– Current sensors (MODIS on Terra/Aqua and VIIRS on Suomi-NPP) often miss fires due to cloud cover or small fire sizes.

Fixed Observation Windows– Satellites pass at specific times. Farmers have adapted by shifting burning to around 5–00 PM (post-satellite pass), leading to under-reporting.

Data Mismatch– Ground teams often find burnt areas that were never "counted" by satellites, leading to policy misalignment and reduced enforcement credibility.

4. ISRO's Technological Intervention

ISRO has modified its in-house algorithm to enhance the precision of thermal anomaly detection–

Improved Differentiation– The algorithm can now better distinguish between active fires and residual burnt patches (smoldering).

Year-Round Monitoring– Moving beyond the traditional Kharif (winter) focus to include the Rabi season (March–May) to establish a persistent pollution baseline.

Integrated Verification– Satellite data will now be cross-referenced with farm mapping and field validation by district-level teams for higher accuracy.

5. Environmental and Health Impacts

Particulate Matter– Release of massive loads of PM_{2.5}, CO₂, Methane, and Nitrogen Oxides.

Meteorological Factors– Post-monsoon temperature inversion and calm winds trap these pollutants near the ground.

Health Burden– Direct correlation with a spike in respiratory illnesses, cardiovascular diseases, and reduced life expectancy in North India.

Trans-boundary Nature– North-westerly winds transport smoke across state borders, making it a regional rather than a local issue.

6. Institutional & Policy Framework

CAQM Mandate– The statutory body has shifted toward stricter enforcement and state-specific action plans for 2026.

In-situ Management– Central subsidies for Crop Residue Management (CRM) machinery (e.g., mulchers, Happy Seeders).

Ex-situ Management– Promoting the use of straw for Bio-CNG, biomass power pellets, fodder, and packaging.

Judicial Oversight– The Supreme Court continues to monitor the implementation of these technologies to ensure executive accountability.

7. Structural Challenges & Barriers

Economic Rationality- Burning remains the "cheapest" option for a debt-ridden farmer compared to the logistics of machinery.

Fragmented Landholdings- Small farm sizes make owning expensive CRM equipment unviable.

Market Gaps- Weak supply chains for collecting and transporting stubble to Bio-CNG plants (lack of assured procurement).

Enforcement Limits- Penalties (Environmental Compensation) often face political and social resistance.

8. Conclusion

While ISRO's improved algorithm provides the "data teeth" needed for better monitoring, technology alone is not a silver bullet. A sustainable solution requires a multi-pronged approach

Technological- Accurate, real-time satellite surveillance.

Economic- Incentivizing farmers through "Bhavantar" (price difference) schemes or direct cash transfers for residue management.

Industrial- Creating a robust market for biomass and ex-situ utilization.

Federal- Cooperative action between Punjab, Haryana, and Delhi to align environmental goals with agrarian realities.

Source- <https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/delhi/isros-improved-fire-detection-algo-ready-for-test-in-rabi-harvest-season-10541828/>



Editorial of the Day – 21.02.2026

Index

1. Treatise for federalism– On Tamil Nadu and the Kurian Joseph report (TH)

2. India's First Nationwide Childhood Cancer Survivorship Registry (2026) (IE)

1. Treatise for federalism– On Tamil Nadu and the Kurian Joseph report (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– Devolution of powers and finances up to local levels and challenges therein; Role of the Governor; Constitutional Provisions and Amendments.

1. Introduction

The Government of Tamil Nadu constituted a high-level, three-member committee chaired by Justice Kurian Joseph (Retd. Supreme Court Judge) to evaluate the evolving landscape of Union-State relations in India. Against the backdrop of a shifting political and fiscal climate, the report warns of a "federal erosion" and advocates for a structural reset of Indian federalism, equating the necessity of these reforms to the landmark 1991 economic liberalization.

2. Foundational Context and Methodology

The Committee's findings are rooted in a multi-disciplinary approach–

Historical Analysis– Reviewed Constituent Assembly debates to understand the "centralized federalism" chosen during the post-Partition era and the integration of princely states.

Academic Rigor– Integrated scholarship across law, economics, and political science.

Comparative Study– Analysed previous commissions (like Sarkaria and Punchi) alongside recent governance practices.

Core Thesis– While centralisation was a post-1947 necessity for national integrity, it is no longer justified in a modern, diverse, and mature democracy.

3. Key Findings– The "Crisis" of Centralisation

The report identifies a "clear and continuing" trend of power concentration that threatens the following–

Democratic Balance– The checks and balances between different levels of government are weakening.

State Autonomy– States are increasingly being reduced to administrative arms of the Centre.

Developmental Outcomes– Excessive centralisation is labelled as administratively inefficient and politically risky.

4. Critical Areas of Concern (The "Federal Erosion")

The Committee flags several recent trends that have disrupted the Union-State equilibrium–

A. Institutional & Territorial Integrity

Alteration of Boundaries– The 2019 reorganisation of Jammu and Kashmir is cited as a precedent where the Centre exercised significant power over a State's territorial existence.

Ease of Amendments– The report notes that the Constitution can be amended with relative ease, facilitating a self-perpetuating cycle of centralisation.

B. Governance & Political Overreach

Role of Governors– Highlighted as a primary friction point; Governors are increasingly perceived as "agents of the Centre" interfering in State-level governance.

Control over Elections- The Union's significant authority in election conduct is seen as a tilt in the level playing field.

Language Policy- Assertive pushes toward a single national language are viewed as a threat to India's cultural and federal diversity.

C. Fiscal & Sectoral Centralisation

GST Impact- The GST regime has fundamentally reconfigured the fiscal framework, leading to fiscal dependency and reduced autonomy for States.

Encroachment on State Subjects- Sectors traditionally managed by States, such as Health and Education, are increasingly being brought under Central control through schemes and policy mandates.

D. The Delimitation Threat

Representation Gap- The proposed inter-State Lok Sabha delimitation creates anxiety that States which successfully implemented population control (like Tamil Nadu) will lose political weight and representation in Parliament.

5. Recommendations for a "Structural Reset"

The Committee argues that federalism is the only path to sustainable progress and recommends-

Restoration of Autonomy- Decentralising decision-making in key sectors like Health and Education.

Institutional Rebalancing- Strengthening bodies like the Inter-State Council to ensure they are not just consultative but functional.

Fiscal Reform- Re-evaluating the GST framework to provide States with more predictable and independent revenue streams.

National Dialogue- Initiating a country-wide conversation on federal restructuring to safeguard the "Basic Structure" of the Constitution.

6. Conclusion

The Justice Kurian Joseph Committee concludes that excessive centralisation is a threat to national unity. By advocating for a "structural reset," the report emphasizes that a strong Union can only exist if its constituent States are empowered, autonomous, and respected. Restoring this equilibrium is not just a legal necessity but a prerequisite for India's long-term developmental and democratic health.

Source- <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/treatise-for-federalism-on-the-tamil-nadu-and-the-kurian-joseph-report/article70656419.ece>

2. India's First Nationwide Childhood Cancer Survivorship Registry (2026) (IE)

General Studies 3- Science & Technology

Topics- Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health.

Sub Topic- Recent developments in Indian Medicine and Research; Public Health Infrastructure and Policy.

1. Introduction

India has achieved a landmark in paediatric oncology with the release of its first nationwide Childhood Cancer Survivorship (C2S) Registry (February 2026). Coordinated by AIIMS New Delhi under the Indian Paediatric Haematology Oncology Group, the registry marks a transition from a "cure-centric" approach to a "care-continuum" model. It highlights an impressive 94.5% five-year survival rate while sounding an alarm on long-term health complications for survivors.

2. The C2S Cohort- Scope and Methodology

Duration & Scale- The study tracked 5,419 survivors across 20 centres nationwide between 2016 and 2024.

Treatment Modalities- Reflected modern multimodal care-

1. Chemotherapy- 94.7%
2. Surgery- ~30%

3. Radiotherapy- 26.3%

Monitoring Protocol- Survivors were monitored every 3 months for the first two years and every 6 months thereafter to ensure longitudinal data integrity.

3. Key Survival Outcomes and Statistical Highlights

Overall Survival (OS)- 94.5% at five years, indicating that nearly 95 out of 100 children survive the critical post-diagnosis window.

Event-Free Survival (EFS)- 89.9%, meaning the vast majority remained free from relapses or major acute complications.

Follow-up Correlation- Survival rates rose to 98.2% for children who received structured monitoring for at least two years.

Global Benchmarking- These figures bring India closer to high-income country standards, signalling a maturation of India's oncology protocols.

4. Burden of Childhood Cancer in India

Annual Incidence- Approximately 50,000 new cases are diagnosed every year.

Common Malignancies- Acute leukaemia, Hodgkin lymphoma, bone tumours, and retinoblastoma are the most prevalent.

Age Vulnerability- 44% of cases occur in the 2–8 age group, necessitating targeted paediatric screening.

The Socio-Economic Gap- High incidence among lower-income families highlights the urgent need for equitable access to early diagnosis and affordable long-term care.

5. The "Hidden Burden"- Late Effects of Treatment

While survival is high, the registry warns of "Late Effects"—complications that emerge months or years after treatment—

Prevalence- International data suggests 33–50% of survivors develop long-term health issues.

Clinical Risks- Includes cardiac problems, endocrine (hormonal) disorders, and cognitive difficulties.

Psychosocial Impact- Survivors face challenges in schooling, emotional well-being, puberty, and general quality of life.

Multi-disciplinary Requirement- Future care must integrate cardiology, endocrinology, and mental health services into oncology follow-ups.

6. Policy and Health System Implications

The C2S Registry serves as a vital evidence base for national planning—

National Frameworks- Aligns with Ayushman Bharat and the NPCDCS (National Programme for Prevention and Control of Cancer, Diabetes, Cardiovascular Diseases and Stroke).

Standardized Guidelines- Provides the data needed to design national survivorship guidelines and regional "Survivorship Clinics."

Infrastructure Expansion- Underscores the need for more regional cancer centres and specialized paediatric oncologists to bridge rural-urban disparities.

Global Leadership- India's model provides a blueprint for other Low- and Middle-Income Countries (LMICs) to build survival tracking systems.

7. Conclusion

The First Nationwide Survival Registry is a testament to India's growing medical prowess in paediatric oncology. However, the findings emphasize that "surviving" is not the same as "thriving." To secure the future of these 50,000 children diagnosed annually, India must move toward a comprehensive survivorship care model that addresses the physical and psychological scars of cancer long after the final dose of chemotherapy.

Source- <https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/mumbai/india-childhood-cancer-registry-high-survival-late-effect-risks-10540751/>

Editorial of the Day – 23.02.2026

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1. Protecting the freedom of speech of MPs (TH)

2. 'Use summons judiciously, expedite probe, conclude long-pending investigations' – ED chief directs officers (IE)

1. Protecting the freedom of speech of MPs (TH)

General Studies 2– Governance

Topic– Parliament and State Legislatures—Structure, functioning, conduct of business, powers & privileges and issues arising out of these.

Sub Topic– Parliamentary Privileges; Article 105 vs. Article 19; Separation of Powers.

Freedom of Speech in the Houses– Article 105 of the Constitution

1. Introduction

Article 105 of the Indian Constitution serves as the bedrock of parliamentary democracy by ensuring that Members of Parliament (MPs) can perform their duties without fear of legal reprisal. Recently, the Supreme Court has re-emphasized that while the House has the power to regulate its proceedings, procedural rules cannot eclipse the constitutional rights granted to legislators. This clarification addresses the misconception that internal House rules possess the authority to override the express mandate of Article 105.

2. Constitutional Foundation

Article 105(1)– Explicitly guarantees freedom of speech within the walls of Parliament.

Distinct Identity– This is separate from Article 19(1)(a) (general freedom of speech for citizens). While Article 19 is subject to "reasonable restrictions," Article 105 is a Parliamentary Privilege designed to protect the collective independence of the legislature.

Historical Roots– Derived from the British House of Commons traditions, specifically the Bill of Rights 1689, to prevent the Executive or Judiciary from intimidating lawmakers.

3. Scope and Extent of the Freedom

The protection is expansive and covers all forms of legislative participation–

Forums– Applies to the Lok Sabha, Rajya Sabha, and all Parliamentary Committees.

Actions– Includes oral debates, discussions, formal questions, motions, and the act of voting.

Documentation– Covers both verbal statements and written submissions presented in the House.

4. Absolute Immunity from Legal Proceedings

Under Article 105(2), MPs enjoy a "shield" against the judiciary–

Judicial Immunity– No MP is liable in any court for anything said or any vote given in Parliament.

Civil & Criminal Protection– This protects members from defamation suits (civil) and criminal prosecution related to their speech or conduct within the House.

Authorized Publications– Reports, papers, votes, or proceedings published by or under the authority of either House also enjoy this legal immunity.

5. Limitations and Restrictions

While expansive, this freedom is not absolute and is moderated by–

Constitutional Provisions– Specifically Article 121, which restricts discussion on the conduct of Judges of the Supreme Court or High Courts (except during impeachment).

House Rules– Subject to the Rules of Procedure of the House and the authority of the Presiding Officer (Speaker/Chairman).

Internal Discipline- Members can be asked to withdraw remarks, face suspension for disorderly conduct, or have their statements expunged from the official record if deemed inappropriate.

National Security- Deliberations must adhere to established norms regarding sensitive national interests.

6. Rationale and Significance

Independent Functioning- Protects legislators from external pressure by the Executive, Judiciary, or private interests.

Accountability- Enables fearless questioning of the government, ensuring executive accountability.

Separation of Powers- Maintains the constitutional boundary by preventing the Judiciary from scrutinizing the "internal proceedings" of the House.

Minority Voice- Protects the right of opposition and minority members to raise sensitive issues without fear of political vendetta or litigation.

7. Judicial Interpretation and Supremacy

Constitutional Supremacy- Courts generally respect the "internal autonomy" of Parliament. However, the Supreme Court has ruled that parliamentary privileges are subject to constitutional supremacy and cannot violate the Basic Structure of the Constitution.

Balance of Rights- In cases of conflict, the judiciary acts as the arbiter to ensure that privileges do not become a tool to infringe upon fundamental rights outside the scope of legislative necessity.

8. Conclusion

Freedom of speech under Article 105 is the cornerstone of a vibrant democracy. It ensures that the "Grand Inquest of the Nation" remains fearless. While House rules are essential for maintaining decorum, they must function as a regulatory framework, not a restrictive one. A balanced interpretation preserves the dignity of the House while upholding the constitutional mandate of legislative independence.

Source- <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/protecting-the-freedom-of-speech-of-mps/article70663727.ece>

2. 'Use summons judiciously, expedite probe, conclude long-pending investigations'- ED chief directs officers (IE)

General Studies 2- Governance

Topics- Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health.

Sub Topic- Recent developments in Indian Medicine and Research; Public Health Infrastructure and Policy.

Balancing Enforcement and Rights- The Enforcement Directorate (2026)

1. Introduction

In February 2026, the Director of the Enforcement Directorate (ED) issued landmark internal directives to officers to expedite probes and exercise the power of summons judiciously. This shift comes in response to heightened judicial scrutiny regarding "roving enquiries" and the need to reconcile the agency's vast statutory powers under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) with the fundamental rights of citizens.

2. The Enforcement Directorate- Role and Mandate

Specialized Agency- Functions under the Department of Revenue, Ministry of Finance, investigating financial crimes related to money laundering and foreign exchange violations (FEMA).

Statutory Teeth- Powered by the PMLA, 2002, which grants the agency authority to attach properties, conduct arrests, and issue summons.

Economic Security- A pivotal institution for ensuring India's financial integrity, anti-corruption efforts, and compliance with the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) standards.

Growing Workload- A significant surge in cross-border and high-stakes corruption cases has tested the agency's procedural fairness and institutional capacity.

3. Judicial Scrutiny and Constitutional Safeguards

The judiciary has played a corrective role in defining the boundaries of ED's power-

Against "Roving Enquiries"- Courts have warned against "fishing expeditions"—broad, unfocused investigations conducted without specific incriminating material.

Right to Silence- Recent rulings (2024-25) clarified that the ED cannot compel an accused in custody to make self-incriminating statements, upholding the protection against self-incrimination (Article 20(3)).

Proportionality & Due Process- Emphasized that strong laws like PMLA must still adhere to the principle of Article 21 (Right to Life and Liberty).

Non-Bailable Warrants- Courts have ruled that such warrants cannot be issued mechanically, especially when the individual is merely being summoned as a witness.

4. Protection of Lawyer-Client Privilege

A critical recent development involves the independence of the legal profession-

The Controversy- The ED faced backlash for summoning advocates to testify regarding legal advice provided to clients.

Supreme Court Intervention (2025)- The Court established binding directions to protect lawyer-client privilege, viewing it as essential for a fair trial.

Internal Reform- The ED now requires prior approval from the Director before summoning any advocate, marking a significant step toward institutional accountability.

5. Push for Efficiency and Time-Bound Probes

To address the criticism of "never-ending" investigations, the ED has adopted a new framework-

Target Timelines- Aiming to conclude most investigations within 1 to 2 years.

Prosecution Focus- Shifting priority toward filing prosecution complaints rather than prolonged preliminary probes.

Bail Context- Given the stringent "twin conditions" for bail under PMLA, timely investigations are now seen as a constitutional necessity to prevent indefinite incarceration without trial.

Administrative Tech- Implementation of real-time case management and data integrity tools to improve efficiency.

6. Federal and Political Dimensions

Centre-State Frictions- Investigations involving State officials (e.g., District Collectors) have raised questions about the federal balance and the limits of central agency jurisdiction.

Institutional Neutrality- The agency faces the challenge of insulating high-profile investigations from perceptions of political selectivity to maintain public and judicial credibility.

Democratic Accountability- The report stresses that robust enforcement must coexist with the principles of cooperative federalism.

7. Conclusion

The shift toward "rights-sensitive enforcement" acknowledges that the ED's effectiveness is not measured solely by its power to arrest, but by its ability to conduct fair, time-bound, and legally sound investigations. By balancing state power with civil liberties, the agency can strengthen the Rule of Law and ensure that the fight against financial crime does not come at the cost of constitutional values.

Source- <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/ed-chief-asks-officers-to-expedite-probe-use-summons-judiciously-10546594/>

Editorial of the Day – 24.02.2026

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1. Stick together- On India and Brazil and their ties (TH)

2. India's new federal compact must be based on principle of non-domination (IE)

1. Stick together- On India and Brazil and their ties (TH)

General Studies 2- International Relation

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

Sub Topic- Important International institutions, agencies and fora - their structure, mandate; South-South Cooperation.

IBSA Dialogue Forum- Strengthening Democratic Multilateralism

1. Introduction

In February 2026, the IBSA (India, Brazil, South Africa) Dialogue Forum has regained significant geopolitical traction. This resurgence is driven by renewed India-Brazil engagement and the need for a collective response to rising U.S. tariff tensions and global protectionism. As a unique platform of three major democracies from three different continents, IBSA is positioned as the "purest" voice of the Global South, emphasizing a rules-based, equitable international order.

2. Foundational Context

Genesis- Formally established in 2003 via the Brasília Declaration.

Composition- A trilateral grouping of India, Brazil, and South Africa.

Unique Identity- It represents the intersection of three major regional powers and pluralistic democracies from Asia, Africa, and Latin America, distinguishing it from the broader (and now expanded) BRICS.

3. Core Objectives and Institutional Structure

Strategic Goals

South-South Cooperation- Moving beyond the "donor-recipient" model to a partnership-based development model.

Global Governance Reform- Advocating for the urgent reform of the UN Security Council (UNSC) and the Bretton Woods institutions.

Multilateral Coordination- Aligning positions within the UN, WTO, and G20 to safeguard the interests of developing nations.

Sustainable Development- Focusing on poverty alleviation, food security, and climate justice.

Organizational Framework

High-Level Summits- Trilateral meetings of Heads of State/Government.

Ministerial Meetings- Regular interactions between Foreign Ministers (Trilateral Commission).

Functional Depth- Operationalized through over 15 sectoral working groups ranging from environment to transport.

4. Key Pillars of Cooperation

The forum operates across diverse functional areas to build collective resilience-

Political & Geopolitical- Coordination on global security, counter-terrorism, and democratic stability.

Trade & Economy- Promoting intra-IBSA trade and supporting SMEs (Small and Medium Enterprises) and industrial growth.

Defence & Security- The IBSAMAR joint naval exercises serve as a cornerstone for maritime cooperation in the Indian and Atlantic Oceans.

Energy & Health– Focus on biofuels and renewable energy; ensuring access to affordable medicines and public health equity.

Agriculture– Joint research into food security and rural development models.

5. The IBSA Fund– A Success Story

Known officially as the IBSA Facility for Poverty and Hunger Alleviation, the fund is a globally recognized model–

Purpose– Supports developmental projects in Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and post-conflict nations.

Impact– Promotes inclusive growth through localized, sustainable development projects.

Recognition– It has received numerous accolades for its efficiency and for being a pioneer in South–South development assistance.

6. Strategic Importance and Contemporary Relevance

The "Democratic" Advantage

Unlike other groupings, IBSA's common denominator is constitutional democracy, providing a shared language for human rights and the rule of law.

Countering Protectionism (2026 Context)

Amidst rising global protectionism and tariff wars initiated by major economies, IBSA acts as a–

Collective Bargaining Tool– Enhances the negotiating power of emerging markets in the WTO.

Alternative to BRICS– While BRICS has expanded and become more diverse (and complex), IBSA remains a more cohesive, interest-aligned trilateral group.

Global South Leader– Amplifies the voice of developing nations regarding Climate Finance and Digital Sovereignty.

7. Challenges and Obstacles

Institutional Inertia– The need for more consistent summits and a permanent secretariat to maintain momentum.

The "BRICS Overlap"– Frequent questions regarding IBSA's relevance given that all three members are also key players in BRICS.

Domestic Shifts– Divergent political changes within member states can occasionally slow down trilateral initiatives.

8. Conclusion

The IBSA Dialogue Forum remains an indispensable platform for advancing a multipolar world order. By linking three continents through a shared democratic identity, IBSA provides a robust mechanism for South–South cooperation. For India, IBSA is not just a diplomatic forum but a strategic necessity to project leadership in the Global South and ensure that the global governance of the 21st century reflects 21st-century realities.

Source– https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/stick-together-on-india-and-brazil-and-their-ties/article70667887.ece#google_vignette

2. India's new federal compact must be based on principle of non-domination (IE)

General Studies 2– Governance

Topics– Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health.

Sub Topic– Recent developments in Indian Medicine and Research; Public Health Infrastructure and Policy.

A New Federal Compact– Principle of Non-Domination

1. Introduction

In an era described as the dakshinayan phase—where innovative socio-economic models are emerging from Southern states—the Tamil Nadu government-appointed High-Level Committee, chaired by Justice (ret'd) Kurian Joseph, has submitted a report advocating for a "structural reset" of Indian

federalism. The report argues that the current trend of centralization is no longer an "inherited reflex" but a troubling pattern that threatens the "compositional" character of the Indian state.

2. The Call for a "Structural Reset"

The report moves beyond merely reiterating old suggestions, offering a plea for a new federal compact based on principled power distribution–

Beyond the Founding Anxieties– While the original Constitution leaned toward centralization due to post-partition anxieties, the report argues that maintaining this stance today is an institutional distortion.

Federalism and Democracy– It posits that a federation that trusts its states and respects subsidiarity does not weaken sovereignty; rather, it deepens democracy.

Negotiated Accommodation– Unity should be sustained by consent and negotiated accommodation rather than command and enforced uniformity.

3. Dimensions of the Proposed Federal Reset

The article highlights specific reform proposals across four major arenas–

A. Constitutional Reset

Territorial Integrity– Reforming the "draconian power" of the Centre to redraw state boundaries (Article 3) without meaningful state consultation.

Amendment Powers– Checking the Centre's primacy in amending the Constitution without involving states.

Office of the Governor– Proposing a constitutional code to curb the "arbitrariness and partisanship" often displayed by Governors.

Anti-Defection– Eliminating loopholes in current anti-defection laws.

Elections– Transferring the responsibility of assembly elections to State Election Commissions.

B. Sectoral & Functional Reset

Education– Recommending that education be restored to the State List.

State Subjects– Checking central encroachment on state-specific subjects like Health and Agriculture.

C. Fiscal & Representation Reset

GST Reform– Detailed examination and multiple options for reworking the GST regime to restore fiscal balance.

Delimitation– Rejecting the "One Nation, One Election" idea and advocating for a permanent freeze on delimitation based on the ground of balance of power rather than just population metrics.

D. Cultural Reset

Linguistic Uniformity– Challenging the misconception that national unity requires a single language.

Language Equality– Resisting the hegemony of Hindi while advocating for a spirit where all Indian languages are placed on an equal footing.

4. Civilizational and Philosophical Context

The article provides a unique philosophical justification for these reforms–

"Compositional" Character– Unlike the "coming together" federation of the US, India is a "holding together" federation where unity is constituted *through* its regional units.

Salad Bowl vs. Melting Pot– India is described as a "salad bowl" where each piece retains its distinct identity, rather than a "melting pot" that erases diversity.

Deshachar– Rooted in the Indian tradition of respecting local customs (deshachar), proving that the only way to rule the subcontinent is to respect its inherent diversity.

5. The Way Forward– Principles of a New Compact

A frank discussion on the balance of power between Hindi and non-Hindi states is proposed–

Guarantee for Non-Hindi States– A guarantee of non-imposition of Hindi and a freeze on their political representation as it stood in 1971.

Commitment from Southern/Western States– A commitment to continue an equitable distribution of federal revenues to support poorer states in the Hindi heartland and Eastern India.

6. Conclusion

The core of the Justice Kurian Joseph Committee report is the principle of political, cultural, and economic non-domination. It asserts that a just republic cannot be built on enforced uniformity but on a "new federal compact" that recognizes diversity as the very core of the Indian philosophical and constitutional tradition.

Source- <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/yogendra-yadav-writes-indias-new-federal-compact-must-be-based-on-principle-of-non-domination-10548244/>

Editorial of the Day – 25.02.2026

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1. Inglorious retreat- On the Supreme Court and cow vigilantism (TH)

2. As forests shrink and herds grow, central India's elephant crisis is primed to spiral (IE)

1. Inglorious retreat- On the Supreme Court and cow vigilantism (TH)

1. General Studies 2: GOVERNANCE

Topic: Structure, organization, and functioning of the Judiciary; Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors.

Sub Topic: Judicial Activism vs. Judicial Restraint; Enforcement of Fundamental Rights; Role of the State in maintaining Law and Order.

1. Introduction

The Supreme Court of India recently declined to actively enforce its landmark 2018 anti-lynching guidelines, labelling the broad directions as "unmanageable." This shift marks a transition from a "constitutional watchdog" role to a "case-by-case" adjudicatory approach. The decision comes amidst a backdrop of rising cow vigilantism and allegations that several states have failed to implement preventive, punitive, and remedial measures mandated six years ago.

2. The 2018 Landmark Judgment- A Recall

To understand the "retreat," one must look at the original mandate established by a Bench led by then CJI Dipak Misra

Condemnation- The Court vehemently condemned mob lynching and cow vigilantism, stating that such acts must be "curbed and crippled."

State Duty- It emphasized that protecting citizens from mob violence is the "sacrosanct duty" of the State.

Preventive Framework- It established a three-tier mechanism-

1. Preventive- Appointing a nodal officer in each district.
2. Remedial- Fast-tracking trials and compensation for victims.
3. Punitive- Action against officials who fail to prevent such crimes.

3. The Current Judicial Shift

The recent observations by the Bench (led by Justice Surya Kant) indicate a significant change in stance-

From Systemic to Specific- The Court now prefers a case-by-case approach rather than monitoring the systemic compliance of all States.

The "Unmanageable" Tag- The Court described the 2018 general directions as difficult to monitor at a national level.

Rejection of Contempt Petitions- The Court declined to entertain contempt proceedings against States that have reportedly ignored the 2018 directives.

Delegation to High Courts- Petitioners challenging the legal backing given to vigilante groups by certain States were advised to approach individual High Courts instead of the Apex Court.

4. Failure of Law Enforcement & State Accountability

The persistence of vigilantism highlights a breakdown in the traditional rule of law-

Institutional Failure- The initial 2018 intervention was a response to the police's failure to act independently. The Court's withdrawal suggests a reliance on the very institutions that necessitated the intervention.

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

Quasi-Policing Powers- Some States have allegedly granted legal or semi-legal recognition to cow vigilante groups, complicating the distinction between law enforcement and private mobs.

Police Inaction- Reports suggest that in several instances, local authorities have either overlooked or indirectly enabled vigilante actions.

5. Critical Implications

The Supreme Court's "retreat" carries heavy consequences for the Indian legal landscape-

Judicial Diffidence- There are concerns that the Court is showing "judicial diffidence" in the face of sensitive majoritarian politics.

Weakening of Rule of Law- Without a central monitoring body, the enforcement of anti-lynching measures becomes fragmented and inconsistent across different States.

Erosion of Public Confidence- A perceived withdrawal from protecting vulnerable citizens may weaken public trust in the constitutional promise of Equal Protection (Article 14) and Right to Life (Article 21).

Empowerment of Vigilantes- The lack of strict judicial oversight may be interpreted by vigilante groups as a reduction in legal pressure.

6. Conclusion

While the Supreme Court is correct that policing is primarily a State subject under the Seventh Schedule, its role as the "custodian of the Constitution" necessitates oversight when States fail to uphold fundamental rights. The shift from systemic monitoring to a case-by-case approach risks turning a proactive shield against mob violence into a reactive remedy that arrives too late. Upholding the rule of law requires a consistent commitment to state accountability and the unwavering protection of all citizens from extra-judicial violence.

Source- <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/inglorious-retreat-on-the-supreme-court-and-cow-vigilantism/article70671862.ece>

2. As forests shrink and herds grow, central India's elephant crisis is primed to spiral (IE)

General Studies 3: Environment

Topics: Conservation, Environmental Pollution, And Degradation; Environmental Impact Assessment.

Sub Topic: Human-Wildlife Conflict; Habitat Fragmentation; Project Elephant; Linear Infrastructure Impacts.

1. Introduction

Central India, particularly the East-Central landscape (Odisha, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, and West Bengal), has emerged as the global epicentre of HEC fatalities. Despite hosting only ~8.4% of India's elephant population (roughly 1,891 out of the national total of 22,446 according to the 2025 WII Status Report), the region accounts for nearly 45% of all human deaths caused by elephants. This disproportionate conflict is driven by the collapse of traditional migration corridors due to mining and infrastructure.

2. The 2025 Scientific Baseline (DNA-Based Census)

The Synchronous All-India Elephant Estimation (SAIEE) 2021-25 released in late 2025 marked a paradigm shift-

New Methodology- For the first time, India used DNA-based mark-recapture (from 21,056 dung samples) to establish a fresh scientific baseline.

Population Dynamics- The estimated total stands at 22,446, a figure not directly comparable to the 2017 count of ~29,000 due to methodological improvements.

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

State-wise Distribution- Karnataka leads (6,013), followed by Assam (4,159). However, in Central India, numbers are shifting; while Jharkhand and Odisha populations are under stress, Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh have seen increases due to cross-border migration.

3. Drivers of Displacement- The "Mining-Infrastructure" Trap

The crisis is primarily an anthropogenic one, fuelled by-

Extractive Industries- Coal and iron ore mining in Singhbhum (JH), Keonjhar (OD), and Hasdeo Arand (CT) have shattered core habitats. In Odisha, over 1,700 sq. km of tree cover was lost between 2001 and 2024.

The "Barrier Effect"- Linear infrastructure (National Highways and Rail lines) cuts through 60% of elephant corridors. Train hits and electrocution (the leading cause of elephant death in Odisha and Jharkhand) act as lethal bottlenecks.

Drought & Climate Stress- Historical El Niño events (1980s) and modern climate variability have depleted forest water sources, forcing herds to become "resident crop-raiders" in farmlands.

4. Habitat Fragmentation and Corridor Disruption

Corridor Status- India has identified 150 ground-validated corridors, but many in Central India remain unnotified or encroached upon.

Ecological Carrying Capacity- Fragmented "island" forests cannot support the high calorie demands of megafauna. This pushes elephants into "historical ranges" (like Gadchiroli in Maharashtra) where local communities lack a "culture of coexistence."

Monoculture Impact- Shift toward timber-heavy monoculture plantations provides zero fodder, turning nutritious crops (Paddy, Sugarcane) into the primary food source for herds.

5. Behaviourally Altered Herds- The New Conflict Profile

Disproportionate Killers- Less than 8% of elephants (mostly specific "crop-habituated" bulls or herds) are responsible for the majority of human casualties.

Generational Loss- Calves born into crop-raiding herds no longer learn forest foraging; they are "born into conflict," making traditional mitigation (driving them back to forests) ineffective.

Nutritional Paradox- High-calorie crops lead to better breeding success, increasing elephant densities in already disturbed and high-conflict landscapes.

6. Institutional & Policy Framework

Project Elephant (1992)- The core scheme for protecting 33 Elephant Reserves.

National Elephant Action Plan (2020/2025 updates)- Focuses on "landscape-level" governance rather than isolated reserves.

Technological Interventions- AI-based tracking and SMS alerts (used in Assam and West Bengal) have reduced deaths by 30% in pilot zones.

Compensation Reforms- States like Kerala and Jharkhand are revising ex gratia (up to ₹25 lakh for human death) and exploring voluntary relocation of forest-fringe settlements.

7. Conclusion

The human-elephant crisis in Central India is a symptom of "ecological insolvency." Addressing it requires moving beyond post-mortem compensation to proactive landscape-scale governance. This includes legally notifying corridors under the Environment Protection Act, enforcing stricter mining regulations in the Hasdeo Arand and Saranda forests, and scaling up early-warning technology. As wildlife biologist Qamar Qureshi noted at AAD 2026, India has reached its "social limit" of conservation success; the next phase must prioritize the survival of both the megafauna and the marginal farmer.

Source- <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-elephant-forests-herd-10550119/#~:text=From%20less%20than%2010%20annual,year%2C%20raiding%20paddy%20and%20maize.>

Editorial of the Day – 26.02.2026**Index****1.Unpackaging the myth of safe bottled water in India (TH)****2.Deterrence cannot be built on hope. Growing defence budget is a course correction (IE)****1.Unpackaging The Myth of Safe Bottled Water in India****General Studies 3 – Environment**

Topic – Environmental pollution and degradation; Issues relating to the development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health.

Sub Topic – Plastic pollution (Microplastics); Food safety regulations (FSSAI); Public health infrastructure.

1. Introduction

The "myth" of safe bottled water in India is being unpacked as rising evidence points toward systemic contamination. While consumers pay a premium for perceived purity, studies across major Indian hubs reveal the presence of microplastics and leached chemicals. This shift in news highlights the urgent need for the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) to evolve its oversight mechanisms beyond traditional bacterial testing.

2. The Shift in Consumption Patterns

Trust Deficit – A chronic lack of faith in municipal water supplies has transitioned bottled water from an occasional luxury to a daily survival necessity.

Safety Perception – The "sealed" nature of plastic bottles is equated with hygiene, leading to a massive over-dependence across urban and rural India.

Emergency Reliance – It remains the primary source of hydration during disasters and infrastructure failures.

3. Emerging Scientific Concerns – The Invisible Risks

Modern threats in bottled water extend beyond biological pathogens to chemical and physical pollutants –

A. Microplastics & Nano plastics

Definition – Particles smaller than 5mm (microplastics) and even smaller sub-micron particles (nano plastics).

Regional Findings – * Nagpur – 72–212 particles per litter detected across various brands.

Mumbai & Andhra Pradesh – Similar high concentrations found in coastal and metropolitan samples.

Biological Impact – Smaller particles possess the ability to cross biological barriers (like the blood-brain barrier or placenta), posing unknown long-term health risks.

B. Chemical Leaching

The Culprits – Chemicals like Antimony (used in PET production) and Phthalates (plasticizers).

Catalysts – Leaching is significantly accelerated by –

1. Exposure to high temperatures (common during Indian summers).
2. Direct sunlight during transport.
3. Prolonged storage in warehouses.

Cumulative Effect – Current safety checks often look at short-term exposure, ignoring the "cocktail effect" of multiple chemicals over a lifetime.

4. Regulatory Gaps and Enforcement Issues

FSSAI Limitations – While the FSSAI regulates bottled water, current protocols do not mandate limits for microplastics.

Testing Voids – There is no standardized requirement for testing long-term chemical leaching or nano plastic concentration.

Fragmented Industry – While major brands are monitored, thousands of small-scale, local bottling units operate with minimal oversight and poor-quality control.

5. The Environmental-Health Nexus

The Plastic Cycle – Over-dependence fuels India's plastic waste crisis. Single-use bottles degrade in landfills into microplastics, which eventually re-enter the human food chain through soil and water.

Ecosystem Damage – Plastic waste is not just a litter problem; it is a systemic pollutant affecting biodiversity.

6. Strategic Roadmap for Reform

To ensure "water security" that is actually safe, the following steps are required –

Regulatory Update – FSSAI must incorporate routine microplastic and cumulative chemical testing into standard quality norms.

Strengthening Municipal Systems – Reducing the need for bottled water by improving the reliability and "drinkability" of tap water.

Point-of-Use (POU) Alternatives – Encouraging home filtration systems and glass/stainless steel storage to reduce plastic contact.

Public Disclosure – Mandatory labelling or public dashboards regarding the chemical and plastic footprint of bottled water brands.

7. Conclusion

Bottled water can no longer be viewed as a default "safe" convenience. The documented presence of microplastics and chemical leaching signifies a gap between consumer perception and scientific reality. Protecting public health requires a multi-pronged approach – updating safety standards, tightening enforcement on small manufacturers, and ultimately restoring public trust in municipal water to reduce our toxic reliance on single-use plastics.

Source – <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/unpackaging-the-myth-of-safe-bottled-water-in-india/article70676165.ece>

2.Deterrence cannot be built on hope. Growing defence budget is a course correction (IE)

General Studies 3 – INTERNAL SECURITY

Topics – Various Security forces and agencies and their mandate; Effects of liberalization on the economy; Indigenization of technology.

Sub Topic – Defence Budgeting; Atmanirbhar Bharat in Defence; Strategic Deterrence; Two-Front War Contingency.

1. Introduction

The 2026–27 defence allocation represents approximately 14.67% of the total Union Budget and roughly 2% of India's GDP. The government's fiscal strategy indicates a decisive shift from maintenance-heavy spending to capital-intensive modernization, aimed at ensuring "credible deterrence" against regional adversaries while fostering a robust domestic defence industrial base.

2. Breakdown of the Defence Surge

Component	Allocation (₹ Crore)	Growth (YoY)	Primary Focus
Total Defence Budget	₹7,84,678	15.2%	Overall National Security
Capital Outlay	₹2,19,306	21.8%	Modernization & New Acquisitions
Revenue (Operational)	₹3,65,479	17.2%	Maintenance, Stores, & Readiness
Defence Pensions	₹1,71,338	6.6%	Support for ~34 lakh pensioners

3. Strategic Logic – Deterrence vs. Militarism

The surge is positioned as a "defensive necessity" rather than offensive expansionism –

Credible Deterrence – Strengthening military hardware to raise the cost of aggression for adversaries, thereby preventing conflict.

Closing Capability Gaps – Addressing critical shortages in fighter jet squadrons (IAF), submarine strength (Navy), and advanced surveillance (Army).

Operation Sindoor Impact – Recent operational requirements on the borders have highlighted the need for immediate force replenishment and high-altitude logistics.

4. Driving "Atmanirbharta" (Self-Reliance)

A cornerstone of this budget is the massive push for indigenous procurement –

Domestic Earmarking – 75% of the modernization budget (approx. ₹1.39 lakh crore) is reserved for procurement from Indian industries.

Defence Exports – India's exports reached a record ₹23,622 crore in FY 2024-25. The new budget aims to scale this toward a target of ₹50,000 crore by 2029.

R&D Boost – Allocation to the DRDO increased to ₹29,100 crore, with a specific focus on private sector-led research through the IDEX and Technology Development Fund (TDF).

5. Key Priority Areas for Modernization

Airpower – ₹63,734 crore (29% of capital outlay) earmarked for aircraft and aero-engines, including Tejas Mk1A and upcoming multi-role fighter acquisitions.

Naval Expansion – ₹25,024 crore (11% of capital outlay) for the naval fleet, focusing on submarines and the third aircraft carrier's preparatory phases.

Border Infrastructure – The Border Roads Organisation (BRO) saw its capital budget increased to ₹7,394 crore to accelerate strategic tunnels and bridges in Ladakh and Arunachal Pradesh.

6. Emerging Concerns and Structural Challenges

The Pension Burden – Pensions still consume over 21.8% of the total budget. While the Agnipath scheme aims to lower this in the long run, the current fiscal pressure remains high.

Fiscal Trade-offs – Balancing a ₹7.85 lakh crore military spend against the urgent needs of the social sector (health and education) remains a point of intense policy debate.

Technology Absorption – The challenge lies not just in buying platforms but in integrating AI, Cyber, and Space capabilities into a unified battle-force.

7. Conclusion

India's defence surge in 2026 is a calculated response to the reality of "permanent multi-domain threats." By linking massive capital outlays with the Atmanirbhar Bharat agenda, India is attempting to transform from the world's largest arms importer into a self-reliant security provider. However, the ultimate success of this surge depends on timely procurement, effective technology absorption, and the swift implementation of Integrated Theatre Commands to maximize the bang for the buck.

Source – <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/shashi-tharoor-writes-deterrence-cannot-be-built-on-hope-growing-defence-budget-is-a-course-correction-10552562/>

Editorial of the Day – 27.02.2026**Index****1. Taking sides– On Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Israel (TH)****2. 'Rare earth shortages worsen in US despite trade truce' (IE)****1. Taking sides– On Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Israel (TH)****General Studies 2– International Relation**

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

Sub Topic– India's West Asia Policy; Israel-Palestine Conflict; Strategic Autonomy; Diaspora and Labour Mobility.

1. Introduction

PM Modi's state visit (February 25–26, 2026) was the first by an Indian leader to address the Knesset. While ostensibly a bilateral outreach focused on technology and defense, the visit's optics—marked by intense personal chemistry between Modi and Netanyahu—suggest a shift toward a more visible alliance. While India reaffirmed its support for a two-state solution, the absence of direct criticism regarding the humanitarian situation in Gaza has sparked a debate on whether India is finally "taking sides."

2. Key Outcomes– Beyond Traditional Diplomacy

The visit resulted in 17 agreements and over 15 MoUs, reflecting a diversification of ties—

Special Strategic Partnership– Elevation from a 'Strategic Partnership' (2017) to a 'Special' one, emphasizing peace and innovation.

Labor Mobility– A landmark agreement to facilitate the employment of 50,000 Indian workers over five years, filling the vacuum left by the suspension of Palestinian work permits.

Economic Integration– * Fast-tracking of the Free Trade Agreement (FTA).

1. Linking India's UPI with Israel's payment systems for seamless remittances.

Technological Frontiers– Collaboration on Critical and Emerging Technologies (iCET), including AI, semiconductors, and quantum computing.

3. The "Palestine Dilemma" and Strategic Balance

India's evolving stance is characterized by "principled pragmatism"—

Indirect References– In the Knesset, PM Modi supported the Gaza Peace Initiative and a two-state solution but refrained from naming specific civilian casualties in Gaza, focusing instead on a broader message that "humanity must not be a victim of conflict."

Terrorism Alignment– India maintained a firm stance against terrorism "in all forms," aligning closely with Israel's security narrative following the October 2023 attacks.

The Balancing Act– Analysts suggest a follow-up visit to Ramallah or increased humanitarian aid to Palestine may be necessary to restore the "moral equilibrium" in India's West Asia policy.

4. Geopolitical and Regional Implications

The visit reinforces India's role as a major stakeholder in West Asian architecture—

Connectivity (IMEC & I2U2)– Reaffirmed commitment to the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC), positioning Israel as a key maritime and rail gateway for Indian goods to Europe.

Minilateralism– Bolstering the I2U2 framework to address regional food and energy security.

Tensions with Iran– India's "visible" tilt toward Israel occurs amidst U.S.-Iran friction, potentially complicating India's interests in the Chabahar Port and the INSTC.

5. Challenges and Risks

Majoritarian Perception– Critics argue the shift reflects ideological alignment rather than purely pragmatic statecraft, potentially alienating Arab partners.

Regional Polarization– As West Asia divides into pro- and anti-Israel blocs, India's "multi-alignment" strategy faces its toughest test.

Credibility in the Global South– As a leader of the Global South, India's perceived silence on Palestinian displacement could impact its soft power in Africa and Southeast Asia.

6. Conclusion

The Jerusalem visit underscores that for India, Israel is no longer just a defense supplier but a "partner in prosperity." However, the "inglorious retreat" from a balanced moral posture—if it persists—could turn India's West Asia policy into a zero-sum game. To preserve its strategic autonomy, India must ensure that its deepening security embrace of Israel does not come at the cost of its historical credibility as a neutral, peace-seeking power in the region.

Source- https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/taking-sides-on-prime-minister-narendra-modis-visit-to-israel/article70680503.ece#google_vignette

2. 'Rare earth shortages worsen in US despite trade truce' (IE)

General Studies 3– Internal Security

Topics– Various Security forces and agencies and their mandate; Effects of liberalization on the economy; Indigenization of technology.

Sub Topic– Defence Budgeting; Atmanirbhar Bharat in Defence; Strategic Deterrence; Two-Front War Contingency.

1. Introduction

The global shortage of Yttrium and Scandium—two niche but indispensable Rare Earth Elements (REEs)—has emerged as a major flashpoint ahead of the March 2026 U.S.–China Summit. With China controlling over 90% of the processing for these elements, their scarcity has directly impacted the manufacturing of 5G chips and high-temperature jet engine coatings, turning industrial materials into tools of diplomatic leverage.

2. Strategic Importance of Rare Earth Elements (REEs)

REEs are a group of 17 elements (15 Lanthanides + Scandium & Yttrium). They are not "rare" in the crust but are rarely found in concentrations high enough for economic extraction.

Element	Key Application	Strategic Criticality
Yttrium	Thermal Barrier Coatings (TBC) for turbines.	Allows jet engines to operate at 1,600°C+; essential for defence and aviation.
Scandium	5G semiconductors & aluminium alloys.	Reduces aerospace structural weight by 30%; critical for telecom hardware.
Neodymium	Permanent Magnets.	Vital for Electric Vehicle (EV) motors and wind turbines.
Dysprosium	High-temp magnets.	Maintains magnetic strength in heat-intensive environments (missile guidance).

3. China's Dominance and the "Processing Monopoly"

The Chokepoint– While mining occurs globally, China controls 85–90% of the refining and separation capacity.

Weaponization– Beijing's revised Export Control Law (2025/26) requires end-user declarations, allowing it to track and restrict minerals intended for specific U.S. defence or semiconductor firms.

Price Volatility– Yttrium prices have surged 60% since late 2025, reaching nearly 70 times their 2024 levels, leading to rationing by Western manufacturers.

4. Impact on Semiconductor and 5G Ecosystem

Production Halts- Major North American coating firms have temporarily paused production due to a lack of yttrium oxide.

5G Delays- Scandium shortages are risking the rollout of next-generation 5G base stations, as alternative materials often fail to meet the required electrical conductivity and heat tolerance.

Rationalization- Supply chains are currently prioritizing large engine makers (Boeing/Airbus) over smaller tech firms, creating a "tiered" access to technology.

5. India's Emerging Role- Opportunity Amidst Crisis

India is positioning itself as a resilient alternative through aggressive policy shifts in the Union Budget 2026-27-

Dedicated Rare Earth Corridors- Announced for Odisha, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu to streamline mining and processing of monazite sands.

Semiconductor Mission 2.0- A ₹40,000 crore outlay to expand beyond chip design into equipment and raw material (REE) processing.

REPM Scheme- Incentivizing the manufacturing of Rare Earth Permanent Magnets (REPM) to build an end-to-end ecosystem.

International Alliances- India's inclusion in "Pax Silica" (U.S.-led silicon supply chain) and the Minerals Security Partnership (MSP) aims to bridge the "skills-to-fab" gap.

6. Key Challenges and Way Forward

Environmental Barrier- REE processing generates radioactive thorium waste; sustainable extraction technologies are a prerequisite for social acceptance.

Technological Gap- India currently lacks the advanced high-purity separation technology mastered by China; R&D and technology transfer via the Quad are crucial.

Recycling (Circular Economy)- Building a secondary supply stream by recovering REEs from e-waste (magnets and screens) to reduce reliance on fresh mining.

7. Conclusion

The 2026 rare earth squeeze is a "watershed moment" for industrial sovereignty. For India, the crisis serves as a catalyst to move from a raw material exporter to a high-value processor. By integrating its Rare Earth Corridors with Semiconductor Mission 2.0, India can secure its technological future and offer a credible "China+" insurance policy to the global market.

Source- [https://www.pressreader.com/india/the-indian-](https://www.pressreader.com/india/the-indian-express/20260227/282235197139355?srsId=AfmBOoohwEntoYQM9Vr06taFiQ4IsJTyaMbFovNRZV56PWNGaBn5lPn4)

[express/20260227/282235197139355?srsId=AfmBOoohwEntoYQM9Vr06taFiQ4IsJTyaMbFovNRZV56PWNGaBn5lPn4](https://www.pressreader.com/india/the-indian-express/20260227/282235197139355?srsId=AfmBOoohwEntoYQM9Vr06taFiQ4IsJTyaMbFovNRZV56PWNGaBn5lPn4)

Editorial of the Day – 28.02.2026**Index****1. International law is not dead, its rules stay resilient (TH)****2. New GDP series boost- Q3 growth at 7.8%, FY26 seen at 7.6% (IE)****1. International law is not dead, its rules stay resilient (TH)****General Studies 3- Environment**

Topic- Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.

Sub Topic- Marine Biodiversity, UNCLOS, Blue Economy, and Global Commons.

1. Introduction

The High Seas Treaty is the third implementing agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS, 1982). While UNCLOS provided the "constitution for the oceans," it lacked specific mechanisms to protect biodiversity in the high seas—the waters starting 200 nautical miles from shore. Finalized in 2023 and reaching the 60-ratification milestone in September 2025 (with Morocco being the 60th), it is now legally binding for its parties.

2. Why the Treaty Was Needed

The "Wild West" of Oceans- The High Seas cover two-thirds of the world's oceans and 95% of its volume, yet less than 1% were effectively protected before this treaty.

Regulatory Gaps- Governance was fragmented across various bodies (fisheries, shipping, mining) with no unified focus on biodiversity.

Triple Planetary Crisis- Addressing the combined threats of climate change (acidification/warming), biodiversity loss, and pollution (plastic waste).

Equity Issues- Technological gaps meant only a few wealthy nations could benefit from deep-sea genetic resources.

3. Core Pillars (Key Provisions)**A. Marine Protected Areas (MPAs)**

The 30x30 Target- Provides the legal mechanism to protect 30% of the world's oceans by 2030, as per the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.

Collective Action- Enables the international community to designate zones where human activities (fishing, shipping) are restricted to allow ecosystems to recover.

B. Marine Genetic Resources (MGRs)

Common Heritage- Treats genetic material from deep-sea organisms as the "common heritage of humankind."

Benefit Sharing- Ensures that scientific and monetary benefits from discoveries (e.g., new medicines) are shared fairly, preventing "biopiracy."

C. Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs)

Mandatory Scrutiny- Requires nations to conduct assessments for any planned activity in international waters that may cause substantial pollution or harmful changes.

Transboundary Impact- Also applies to activities within national waters that could impact the high seas.

D. Capacity Building & Technology Transfer

Bridging the Divide- Mandates developed nations to share marine technology and scientific knowledge with developing countries and Small Island Developing States (SIDS).

4. Institutional Framework

To ensure implementation, the treaty establishes-

Conference of Parties (COP)– The supreme decision-making body (the first meeting is expected within a year of entry into force).

Scientific and Technical Body– Provides expert advice on MPA designations and EIAs.

Secretariat & Clearing-House Mechanism– A centralized platform for data sharing on MGRs and research.

5. Significance for India

Blue Economy Growth– Supports India's Deep Ocean Mission and sustainable use of marine resources.

Global Leadership– India's early signature (September 2024) and move toward ratification strengthens its position as a "Voice of the Global South."

Climate Resilience– Protecting the high seas—a major carbon sink—is vital for India's long-term climate security and monsoon stability.

6. Challenges and Concerns

Enforcement– Monitoring millions of square miles of remote ocean require expensive satellite and AI technology.

Geopolitics– Major powers like the US (signed but Senate yet to ratify) and Russia (opposed) may create gaps in universal application.

Overlapping Mandates– Potential friction with the International Seabed Authority (ISA) regarding deep-sea mining.

7. Way Forward

Expedited Ratification– Encouraging the remaining 140+ signatories to ratify to ensure truly global enforcement.

Funding– Operationalizing the "Global Ocean Programme" and other financial mechanisms to support developing nations.

Technological Integration– Utilizing digital tracking and remote sensing for real-time monitoring of MPAs.

Conclusion

The entry into force of the High Seas Treaty in 2026 is a "Paris Moment" for the ocean. It shifts the paradigm from "freedom of the seas" (unregulated exploitation) to "collective stewardship." While the legal framework is now in place, its success depends on the political will of nations to prioritize long-term ecological health over short-term commercial interests.

Source- <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/international-law-is-not-dead-its-rules-stay-resilient/article70685226.ece>

2. New GDP series boost- Q3 growth at 7.8%, FY26 seen at 7.6% (IE)

General Studies 3- Economy

Topics– Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development, and employment.

Sub Topic– National Income Accounting, GDP Estimation Methodology, and Fiscal Policy.

1. Introduction

A base year revision is a periodic exercise to ensure that the GDP reflects the current economic reality. The new 2022–23 series replaces the decade-old 2011–12 series. This update is not just a change in numbers but a comprehensive overhaul of methodology and data sources, providing a more accurate "health check" of the world's fourth-largest economy.

2. Why the Revision Was Needed

Capturing Structural Shifts– The previous base year (2011–12) did not account for the explosion of the gig economy, digital payments, and e-commerce.

Post-Pandemic Normalcy– 2022–23 was chosen as it represents the first "normal" year after the COVID-19 disruptions (2019–2021).

Global Alignment– To bring India's statistical standards in line with the System of National Accounts (SNA) 2008 and prepare for the upcoming SNA 2025.

3. Key Methodological Reforms

A. Shift to Double Deflation

Historically, India used "Single Deflation"—adjusting only the output value for inflation.

New Method- The 2022–23 series adopts Double Deflation for manufacturing and agriculture. It separately deflates inputs and outputs using specific price indices.

Precision- This prevents growth from being overstated when raw material prices fall faster than final product prices.

B. Integration of Supply and Use Tables (SUT)

MoSPI now integrates SUT to ensure internal consistency. It matches what industries produce (Supply) with how those products are consumed (Use), significantly reducing the "discrepancies" often seen in earlier GDP data.

4. Modernized Data Sources

The new series moves away from "proxy indicators" and "extrapolations" toward real-time administrative data—

GST Data- Used for real-time tracking of corporate value addition across states.

ASUSE & PLFS- The Annual Survey of Unincorporated Sector Enterprises and Periodic Labour Force Survey allow for an annual, direct measurement of the informal/household sector.

e-Vahan Database- Provides precise data on vehicle registrations for calculating road transport services.

MCA-21 & MGT-7- Enhanced use of corporate filings to segregate value added by specific activities rather than the whole company.

5. Economic Outlook- FY26 and Beyond

Growth Revision- Real GDP growth for FY26 is now estimated at 7.6% (up from 7.4% under the old series).

Sectoral Performance-

1. Manufacturing- Projected to grow at a stellar 12.5% in FY26.
2. Agriculture- Revised upward in absolute size (by ~4–6%) due to better value-chain capturing, though growth rate for FY26 is pegged at 2.5%.
3. Services- High-frequency data shows a seven-quarter high of 9.5% in certain sub-sectors.

FY27 Projection- The Chief Economic Adviser (CEA) projects a steady 7–7.4% growth for the next fiscal year.

6. Broader Implications

Fiscal Arithmetic- While real growth is up, Nominal GDP (in absolute rupee terms) was revised slightly downward.

1. Impact- Since the fiscal deficit is a % of Nominal GDP, the FY26 deficit ratio rises slightly (e.g., from 4.36% to 4.51%) without any change in actual borrowing.

Debt-to-GDP- Lower nominal base increases the debt-to-GDP ratio, making the path to fiscal consolidation mathematically steeper.

Investor Confidence- A more transparent, survey-based methodology enhances the credibility of Indian data among global rating agencies and investors.

7. Way Forward

Back-Series Release- MoSPI must prioritize the release of historical data (back-series) by December 2026 to allow for long-term trend analysis.

Informal Sector Focus- Continual strengthening of ASUSE is vital to prevent the "under-estimation" of India's massive informal workforce.

Institutional Autonomy- Ensuring the National Statistical Office (NSO) remains independent and well-resourced to maintain public and global trust.

Conclusion

The 2022–23 GDP revision is a landmark in India's journey toward evidence-based policymaking. By integrating digital-age data like GST and shifting to double deflation, India has sharpened its

economic lens. However, the resulting tighter fiscal ratios remind policymakers that while the "growth story" is robust, the "fiscal room" requires careful management.

Source- <https://indianexpress.com/article/business/new-gdp-series-boost-q3-growth-at-7-8-fy26-seen-at-7-6-10555274/>

