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JUNE – MONTHLY EDITORIAL , 2026

The cover features a dark red background with a faint world map and the Indian Parliament building. In the foreground, there is a stack of books including 'CONSTITUTION OF INDIA', 'INDIAN POLITY', 'INDIAN ECONOMY', and 'INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS'. An open notebook displays the text: 'The more you know, the stronger your foundation. – For UPSC For India'. To the right of the notebook is a globe, a pen, a compass, and a mug that says 'FOCUS PLAN PREPARE ACHIEVE'. A newspaper titled 'THE HINDU' is also visible.

**RAJA SIR
IAS ACADEMY**

— FEEL THE PULSE OF UPSC —

**MONTHLY
EDITORIAL**

JUNE MONTH 2026

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Africa's New Battleground: India's Role

India's Africa Policy 2026 – IAFS, Strategic Engagement & India-Africa Relations

Africa: From “Dark Continent” to “Continent of Hope”

Africa today is no longer viewed through outdated colonial lenses. With rapid growth, a vast youth population, and expanding markets, it has become the new frontier of global competition. Major powers—China, the EU, France, Germany, South Korea—are racing to secure influence. India, too, is stepping back into the arena by hosting the Fourth India Africa Forum Summit (IAFS) in May 2026, its first high-level engagement since 2015.

IAFS – The Platform for Partnership

The India Africa Forum Summit (IAFS) is the official mechanism for dialogue between Indian leadership and African nations.

- » 2008: First summit in New Delhi.
- » 2011: Second summit in Addis Ababa.
- » 2015: Third summit in New Delhi.
- » 2026: Fourth summit scheduled for May 28–31, after delays caused by COVID-19 and global geopolitical upheavals.
- » India's guiding principle remains the Kampala Principles, articulated by Prime Minister Modi in 2018: Africa's priorities must shape the partnership, not external agendas.

The Challenges in India–Africa Relations

Despite goodwill and shared history, India's Africa policy faces serious gaps:

- » Irregular Engagement: An 11-year gap between summits weakened ties.
- » Competitive Pressure: China's institutionalized Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) gives it a structural advantage.
- » Delivery Deficit: India is often accused of rhetoric without timely execution.
- » Diminishing Goodwill: Shared colonial history is no longer enough; African nations demand tangible results.

Building a Process-Driven Partnership

India must move beyond episodic summits to sustained engagement.

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- » Three-Tier Framework: Strengthen bilateral, regional (RECs), and pan-African ties.
- » Annual High-Level Visits: Invite the African Union Chairperson regularly.
- » Track 1.5 Diplomacy: Combine government, think tanks, and industry for actionable projects.
- » Institutionalized Commitments: Monitor progress to ensure promises translate into delivery.

India's Value Proposition

India offers a distinct model compared to resource-driven or debt-heavy approaches:

- » Capacity Building: Training and skill development through the ITEC program.
- » Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI): Exporting innovations like UPI and Aadhaar, already adopted in Mauritius and Namibia.
- » Green Energy: Collaboration via the International Solar Alliance (ISA).
- » Agriculture & Counter-Terrorism: Sharing expertise in sectors critical to African economies.

Conclusion

- » India's Africa policy in 2026 stands at a decisive moment. The continent is crowded with competitors, and goodwill alone will not suffice. By institutionalizing engagement, delivering on commitments, and leveraging its strengths in technology, capacity building, and green energy, India can forge a sustainable and mutually beneficial partnership. The upcoming IAFS must mark not just a symbolic return, but the beginning of a process-driven, future-oriented India–Africa relationship.



Balancing China: India–Myanmar Ties

India–Myanmar Relations: Strategic Importance, Connectivity & China Factor

- » Context: In June 2026, Myanmar's President Min Aung Hlaing visited India, beginning his trip at Bodh Gaya — underscoring cultural diplomacy and shared Buddhist heritage.

Why Myanmar Matters for India:

- » Strategic Location: Gateway to Southeast Asia; 1,643 km border with India's Northeast.
- » China Factor: With Western sanctions, China deepened its influence; India seeks to balance this dominance.

India's Approach – Realpolitik:

- » Pragmatic Policy: Engagement with the ruling government to safeguard national interests.
- » Strategic Necessity: Cooperation ensures security, connectivity, and regional balance without endorsing military rule.

Connectivity Projects:

- » Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Project: Links Kolkata–Sittwe–Paletwa–Mizoram; faces terrain and conflict challenges.
- » India–Myanmar–Thailand Trilateral Highway: Aims to boost trade and regional integration; progress slowed by Myanmar's internal unrest.

Outcomes of 2026 Visit:

- » Economic Cooperation: Bilateral trade ~\$1.95 billion; push for local currency trade.
- » Cyber Security: Rising scams from Myanmar targeting Indians.
- » Cultural Relations: Scholarships under Mekong-Ganga Cooperation expanded.

Conclusion:

India's Myanmar policy reflects strategic realism — balancing democratic concerns, national security, China's influence, and connectivity imperatives.

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Climate Capital for India: Funding the Road to 2070

Funding India's Climate Future: Bridging the Finance Gap, Expanding Green Bonds, and Achieving Net Zero

India stands at a critical juncture in its climate journey. To meet its Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) by 2030, the country requires an estimated ₹162.5 trillion (\$2.5 trillion). Looking further ahead, the cost of reaching net-zero emissions by 2070 is projected at \$10.1 trillion. With global commitments falling short, India must urgently build a strong domestic financial architecture to mobilize green capital at scale.

The Financing Gap

- » **Sectoral Needs:** Decarbonizing steel, cement, power, and road transport demands an additional \$467 billion between 2022–2030 (around \$54 billion annually).
- » **Regulatory Imperatives:** Private capital alone will not flow into these sectors, as green steel and cement remain economically unviable without policy support.
- » **Global Shortfalls:** Developed nations failed to meet the Paris pledge of \$100 billion annually. The Baku NCQG target of \$300 billion by 2035 is widely seen as inadequate.
- » **Domestic Push:** The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) estimates India must inject an extra 2.5% of GDP annually into green finance.
- » **Positive Momentum:** By late 2024, India had issued \$55.9 billion in sustainable debt, with green bonds forming 83% of the total. Sovereign green bonds worth ₹477 billion have already boosted investor confidence.

Key Challenges

- » **Missing Connective Tissue:** Instruments like green bonds, blended finance, and InvITs exist, but lack a standardized taxonomy, guarantee structures, and liquidity mechanisms to make green lending cheaper than carbon-heavy alternatives.

- » **RBI's Green Push:** In 2025, RBI mandated banks to integrate climate risks into risk management. Crucially, green projects now qualify under Priority Sector Lending (PSL).
- » **Power of PSL:** For every ₹10,000 crore lent, ₹4,000 crore must go to priority sectors. Including green projects under PSL instantly shifts banking focus toward sustainability.
- » **Taxonomy Foundation:** The 2024–25 Union Budget announced a national climate-finance taxonomy, essential to verify green assets, prevent greenwashing, and align with international standards.
- » **State-Level Barriers:** Climate adaptation projects (like drought-proofing in Vidarbha or coastal defense in Odisha) are state-led, but states lack borrowing authority to access global capital markets. This leaves vital regional projects stranded.
- » **Underutilized Blended Finance:** India has yet to fully leverage blended finance. For example, a \$100 million public first-loss guarantee could unlock \$1 billion in private investment for green hydrogen or wind energy.

Way Forward

- » **Finalize Taxonomy:** Enact the national Climate Finance Taxonomy and sector-specific frameworks (e.g., Green Steel Taxonomy) to provide clear legal definitions of “green.”
- » **Mandates over Incentives:** RBI should move from encouragement to enforcement — imposing differentiated capital requirements that make brown lending costlier, alongside climate stress tests for banks.
- » **Empower States:** Establish a State Climate Finance Facility, capitalized by the Union, NABARD, and international partners, to give states and municipalities direct access to green debt markets.
- » **Deepen Sovereign Markets:** Scale up sovereign green bond issuance and embed them into the Statutory Liquidity Ratio (SLR) framework to secure consistent domestic institutional capital.

Conclusion

India's climate finance challenge is not a shortage of money, but a shortage of institutional capacity to channel it effectively. By refining regulatory levers, finalizing

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taxonomies, and empowering states, India can transform climate finance from a bottleneck into a driver of sustainable growth. With decisive action, the country can convert its natural capital into its strongest line of economic defense — resilient, equitable, and future-ready.

Defections, Mergers, and the Crisis of Accountability

Anti-Defection Law and the Tenth Schedule: Loopholes, Merger Exemptions, and the Reform Imperative

The June 2026 defection crisis involving Trinamool Congress MPs and their attempted merger with the Nationalist Citizens Party of India (NCPI) has once again exposed the fragility of India's anti-defection framework. The episode underscores how legislators continue to exploit loopholes in the Tenth Schedule to evade disqualification, undermining both party discipline and the sanctity of the voter's mandate.

Origins of the Anti-Defection Law

India's political instability during the "Aaya Ram, Gaya Ram" era (1967–1985), marked by over 1,500 rapid defections, prompted the 52nd Constitutional Amendment in 1985. The Tenth Schedule was introduced to curb rampant floor-crossing by disqualifying members who defied party lines. Later, the 91st Amendment (2003) eliminated the one-third split exemption, leaving only the two-thirds merger clause as a legal escape route.

Scope and Application

The law applies uniformly across Parliament and state assemblies. Members face disqualification if they resign from their party, vote against the whip, or—if independent—join a party post-election. Nominated members must declare affiliation within six months.

Exploiting the Merger Clause

The deletion of the split exemption inadvertently incentivized mass defections disguised as mergers. Rebel factions have repeatedly engineered two-thirds majorities within legislative wings to claim legitimacy, even when the parent party organization remains intact. Cases involving the Shiv Sena (2022), NCP (2023), BSP

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in Rajasthan (2019), and Congress in Goa (2022) illustrate how this loophole has been weaponized.

The Trinamool Crisis of 2026

In West Bengal, 60 of 80 TMC MLAs formed a separate faction, while 20 of 28 Lok Sabha MPs sought to merge with NCPI. Their defense rests on meeting the two-thirds threshold. Yet, a strict reading of the Tenth Schedule requires an organizational merger by the parent party first, followed by legislative ratification—a condition clearly unmet in this case.

Institutional Fault Lines

- » Partisan adjudication: Speakers and Chairpersons, often politically aligned, decide defection cases without fixed timelines, enabling delays that benefit ruling coalitions.
- » Judicial bottlenecks: Courts can only intervene after presiding officers rule, creating enforcement gaps.
- » Suppression of dissent: Rigid party whips stifle independent legislative debate, reducing lawmakers to mere extensions of party leadership.

Reform Pathways

- » Independent tribunals: The Supreme Court has urged transferring adjudication powers to neutral judicial bodies.
- » Eliminating merger exemptions: Constitutional experts and the Law Commission have long argued for deleting Paragraph 4 altogether, enforcing a zero-tolerance model where any defection triggers automatic disqualification and a fresh mandate.

Conclusion

The anti-defection law, once designed to stabilize democracy, has devolved into a numbers game. Unless merger exemptions are abolished and adjudication powers shifted to independent tribunals, India risks further erosion of parliamentary integrity. To protect the voter's trust, lawmakers must be held strictly accountable to the parties—and the people—that elected them.



Defence Dependence vs Strategic Autonomy

India's Defence Sector – Atmanirbhar Bharat, Defence Imports & Indigenous Challenges

Indigenous Success and Persistent Dependence

At the North Tech Symposium in Prayagraj, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh highlighted the successful deployment of indigenous systems during *Operation Sindoor*. Yet, despite progress under the Atmanirbhar Bharat initiative, India remains one of the world's largest defence importers. Critical technologies—jet engines, missile guidance systems, submarine propulsion, and advanced semiconductors—still come from abroad. Domestic assembly has grown, but true technological self-reliance remains elusive.

Challenges in Indigenous Defence Development

India's defence sector faces multiple structural hurdles:

- » **Technological Bottlenecks:** Projects suffer delays, cost overruns, and limitations in advanced systems. The Kaveri Engine Project exemplifies India's struggle to master aero-engine technology.
- » **Low R&D Investment:** Compared to the U.S. and China, India spends far less on defence research, weakening innovation and long-term capacity.
- » **Brain Drain:** Top engineering talent often opts for private or overseas careers, citing better pay, infrastructure, and opportunities.
- » **Bureaucratic Delays:** Centralized procurement, red tape, and corruption slow modernization.
- » **Unrealistic Requirements:** Ambitious specifications often exceed domestic capabilities, complicating procurement and discouraging indigenous manufacturers.

Lessons from China

China's defence transformation since the 1960s shows the power of sustained investment in R&D, industrial ecosystems, and innovation. Today, it is a major exporter of advanced defence technologies—an outcome India has yet to replicate.

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Changing Nature of Warfare

The Russia–Ukraine war has demonstrated the disruptive role of low-cost drones, autonomous systems, cyber warfare, and electronic warfare. Modern conflicts highlight the need for technology-driven, asymmetric capabilities rather than reliance solely on expensive platforms.

Government Initiatives

- » Strategic Partnership (SP) Model: Encourages collaboration between Indian private firms and foreign manufacturers, promoting technology transfer and indigenous production.
- » FDI Liberalization: Up to 74% FDI allowed in defence manufacturing via the automatic route, aimed at attracting global expertise and strengthening domestic capacity.
- » Private Sector Challenges: Despite reforms, private firms face delayed payments, excessive documentation, and bias toward Defence Public Sector Undertakings (DPSUs).

Way Forward

To achieve genuine self-reliance, India must:

- » Adopt a Hybrid Model – Government sets strategic priorities, while private firms drive innovation and manufacturing.
- » Act as a Strategic Buyer – Ensure fair competition between PSUs and private players.
- » Boost Defence R&D Spending – Invest significantly in indigenous innovation and advanced technology.
- » Retain Engineering Talent – Offer competitive salaries, research incentives, and innovation ecosystems to reduce brain drain.
- » Transform Government's Role – Focus on regulation, procurement, and strategic planning rather than direct manufacturing.

Conclusion

India's long-term strategic autonomy hinges on genuine defence indigenization. Progress under Atmanirbhar Bharat is encouraging, but dependence on imports



persists. By strengthening R&D, empowering private industry, eliminating bureaucratic hurdles, and fostering innovation, India can build a globally

Degrees Without Jobs: The Innovation Gap

India's Educated Unemployment Crisis: Skill Mismatch, Jobless Growth, and the Innovation Deficit

India's higher education boom has produced millions of graduates, yet nearly one in three remains unemployed. This paradox reveals a deep structural fault: economic growth is increasingly capital-intensive, while the labor market struggles to absorb educated youth.

Capital-Intensive Growth, Shrinking Job Density

Investment is flowing into frontier sectors—semiconductors, AI, advanced defense systems—that generate far fewer jobs per rupee than traditional industries. A textile unit with ₹100 crore investment may employ 1,000 workers, but a semiconductor plant worth ₹1,000 crore creates barely half that number. Automation and Industry 4.0 technologies further reduce labor demand, fueling jobless growth.

The Skill Mismatch

Rigid, theory-heavy curricula leave graduates ill-prepared for modern industry. AI literacy, digital manufacturing, and practical exposure remain absent from most universities. Corporations are forced to retrain recruits, while India's demographic dividend risks turning into a demographic liability.

Innovation Deficit and Global Dependency

India excels at assembling products designed abroad, but this leaves it trapped in low-margin production. Reliance on foreign technology poses sovereignty risks—especially if access is restricted during crises. Meanwhile, the supply of engineering graduates far exceeds the limited R&D roles available, creating frustration and wasted potential.

Strategic Reorientation

- » Modernize academia: Embed AI literacy, ethical tech use, and industry collaboration into curricula.

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- » Shift from assembly to creation: Incentivize indigenous R&D to build intellectual property at home.
- » Empower startups: Expand venture capital pathways to turn youth into job creators, not just job seekers.

Conclusion

India's educated unemployment crisis cannot be solved by producing more degrees. The solution lies in aligning education with industry, scaling domestic R&D, and fostering innovation ecosystems. Only by moving from passive technology users to active creators can India harness its demographic dividend and secure its place as a global hub of design and innovation.

Dreams at Risk: The NEET Fallout

NEET Controversy and the Crisis of Exam Governance

One Nation, One Examination – A Broken Promise

NEET was introduced to unify medical admissions under the principle of “One Nation, One Examination”. The goal was transparency and fairness. Yet, repeated controversies have turned this promise into disillusionment, leaving millions of students questioning the credibility of the system.

The Fragile Foundation of NTA

The National Testing Agency (NTA), created under the Societies Registration Act, 1860, was entrusted with conducting large-scale exams. However, its non-statutory status and weak institutional capacity have left it vulnerable. Allegations of paper leaks, impersonation scams, and disputes over grace marks have become routine, eroding public trust.

The Human Cost of Irregularities

Nearly 22 lakh students appeared for NEET in 2026. For them, every irregularity is not just an administrative lapse but a personal crisis. Families face psychological, financial, and emotional strain. The credibility of exams is not an abstract issue—it directly impacts lives and futures.

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Reforms Ignored: The Radhakrishnan Committee

The K. Radhakrishnan Committee had proposed critical reforms: restructuring the NTA, introducing multi-stage testing, hybrid exam models, and stronger coordination with state authorities. Yet, these recommendations remain largely unimplemented, leaving the system exposed to the same failures year after year.

Governance, Ethics, and Accountability

The NEET crisis is symptomatic of deeper issues—corruption, ethical decline, and lack of accountability. In a society where opportunities are scarce and competition is fierce, examinations become high-stakes battles. Without credible safeguards, they risk becoming breeding grounds for exploitation and mistrust.

Restoring Trust in Examinations

India must move beyond patchwork fixes. Transparent institutions, technological safeguards, and value-based governance are essential. Accountability must be enforced, not merely promised. Students deserve an examination system that protects their aspirations rather than jeopardizes them.

Conclusion

The NEET controversy is more than an exam scandal—it is a mirror reflecting the cracks in India's governance and ethics. Reform is no longer optional; it is imperative. Restoring trust in competitive examinations is vital to safeguard the dreams of millions and uphold the credibility of India's education system.

Democracy's Lifblood: Why Political Competition Matters?

Democracy is not merely about holding elections; it is about ensuring meaningful choice, accountability, and fairness. Just as markets thrive on competition and sports gain excitement from rivalries, democracy too depends on political contestation. Without genuine alternatives, citizens are left with the illusion of choice, and governance risks sliding into authoritarian tendencies.

The Essence of Political Competition



- » Choice as Empowerment: A democracy flourishes when citizens can choose between competing visions of governance. The absence of alternatives leads to the “TINA” (There Is No Alternative) syndrome, which weakens accountability.
- » Robert Dahl's Warning: The political theorist Robert Dahl highlighted that high participation without contestation results in “plebiscitary autocracies.” In such systems, elections exist but lack real competition, reducing them to mere rituals.

Neutral Institutions as Referees

- » Role of the Election Commission: Just as referees ensure fairness in sports, institutions like the Election Commission must remain impartial. Any bias or failure erodes public trust.
- » Case Study – West Bengal: The Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls in West Bengal saw large-scale deletions, raising doubts about fairness. When citizens lose confidence in the process, democracy itself is undermined.

The Dangers of One-Party Dominance

- » Opposition-Mukt Bharat Debate: Calls for an “Opposition-free India” may sound appealing to ruling parties but are dangerous for democracy. Without opposition, elections become one-horse races, stripping citizens of real choice.
- » Pluralism as Safeguard: A vibrant opposition ensures checks and balances, prevents abuse of power, and keeps governments responsive to people's needs.

Democracy's True Strength

- » Possibility of Defeat: The real strength of democracy lies not in guaranteed victories but in the possibility of losing. This uncertainty forces governments to remain accountable and responsive.
- » Citizens as Watchdogs: When people believe their vote can change outcomes, they engage more actively, strengthening democratic legitimacy.



Democracy is sustained by competition, fairness, and accountability. Without genuine political rivalry, elections risk becoming hollow exercises. For India, safeguarding pluralism and ensuring impartial institutions is not just desirable—it is essential. The lifeblood of democracy is contestation, and without it, the system risks decay.

Economic Statecraft and Productivity: India's Twin Engines for Viksit Bharat

The 21st century has transformed the nature of global power. Military strength alone no longer defines influence; instead, economic statecraft—through trade, supply chains, and technology ecosystems—has become central to geopolitics. For India, this shift presents both opportunities and challenges as it seeks to achieve the ambitious goal of *Viksit Bharat by 2047*. Alongside external economic diplomacy, internal productivity reforms are critical to sustain growth and ensure resilience.

Global Transformation: From Military Alliances to Economic Statecraft

- » Collapse of Old Globalisation: Once seen as a driver of cooperation, globalisation is now weaponised through tariffs, sanctions, and supply-chain restrictions.
- » Rise of Economic Power: Nations with control over semiconductors, rare earths, and digital infrastructure wield influence comparable to military alliances.
- » India's Strategic Position: With its large market, political stability, and expanding workforce, India is increasingly viewed as a reliable partner in diversified global supply chains.

India's External Strategy: Economic Security and Partnerships

- » Semiconductors & Critical Minerals: Partnerships in these sectors are no longer commercial but strategic, ensuring resilience against supply shocks.



- » **Diversification Imperative:** Overdependence on one nation—whether for technology or trade—creates vulnerability. India's multi-alignment strategy helps preserve autonomy.
- » **Flexible Alliances:** As multilateralism weakens, India must build agile bilateral and regional partnerships tailored to strategic interests.

Internal Imperative: Productivity for Viksit Bharat

- » **Manufacturing as the Missing Link:** India's growth has been service-driven, leaving manufacturing underdeveloped. For structural transformation, manufacturing must absorb labour and drive productivity.
- » **Zombie Firms Challenge:** Inefficient firms continue to survive due to weak insolvency mechanisms and credit misallocation, locking resources in low-productivity activities.
- » **Business Dynamism:** Productivity requires creative destruction—efficient firms must replace inefficient ones. Stronger R&D, better financing, and regulatory simplification are essential.

Reform Priorities

- » **Strengthening Manufacturing Competitiveness:** Integration into global value chains, sustained infrastructure investment, and trade facilitation.
- » **Boosting Productivity:** Encouraging mid-sized firms to scale, fostering innovation, and enabling efficient resource allocation.
- » **Exit Mechanisms:** Strengthening insolvency frameworks to allow unproductive firms to exit, freeing capital and labour.
- » **Institutional Credibility:** Political stability, democratic institutions, and social cohesion are vital for sustained economic growth.

India's path to *Viksit Bharat* requires a dual strategy: externally, leveraging economic statecraft to secure supply chains and partnerships; internally, driving productivity through manufacturing reforms and business dynamism. The fusion of economics and geopolitics has reshaped the world order, and Indi



From Declaration to Division: The Mountbatten Plan at 79

Mountbatten Plan at 79: June 3 Declaration and the Partition of India

Seventy-nine years ago, the June 3 Plan of 1947 marked a turning point in South Asian history. Announced by Lord Mountbatten, it accepted the partition of British India to contain escalating communal violence and advanced the transfer of power to August 15, 1947.

The June 3 Declaration

Mountbatten arrived in March 1947 with instructions from Prime Minister Clement Attlee to complete the transfer of power by June 1948. However, worsening riots demanded urgency. The plan proposed:

- » Partition votes in Punjab and Bengal assemblies.
- » Self-determination through the Sindh assembly, a referendum in the NWFP, and another in Sylhet (Assam).
- » A Boundary Commission to demarcate borders if partition was approved.
- » Lapse of paramountcy over princely states, requiring them to accede to India or Pakistan.

Why Congress and the Muslim League Accepted

Congress leaders like Nehru and Patel saw partition as the only way to halt bloodshed and secure a strong central government. They rejected “Plan Balkan,” which risked total disintegration. For Jinnah and the Muslim League, the plan guaranteed Pakistan. Though he resented the “moth-eaten” division of Punjab and Bengal, Jinnah accepted compromise as preferable to no Pakistan at all.

Partition's Humanitarian Crisis

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The plan left millions uncertain about borders and citizenship. Mountbatten dismissed concerns of mass migration, but the lack of preparation triggered one of the largest forced migrations in history. Communities were torn apart, and violence spread across the subcontinent.

The “Three Cs” of Partition Failure

- » Cognisance: Authorities ignored the trauma of displacement, treating partition as a mere administrative exercise.
- » Counting: Population data in border districts was rushed and concealed, worsening panic.
- » Categorisation: Rigid division into India and Pakistan disregarded centuries of shared cultural and economic ties.

Conclusion

The June 3 Plan was less a visionary solution than a hurried compromise born of political exhaustion. It dismantled colonial rule and created two nations, but its flawed design failed to protect ordinary citizens. The outcome was a monumental humanitarian tragedy that continues to shape South Asia's collective memory.

India's Struggle for Independent Strategy

Iran War and India's Strategic Autonomy Challenges

A Multipolar World Tested by Conflict

The Israeli-American strikes on Iran have reignited questions about India's ability to preserve its strategic autonomy in a world increasingly defined by polarisation. Despite deepening defence and trade partnerships with Europe, India finds itself under mounting U.S. pressure, caught between its national interests and the demands of global power blocs.

India's Stakes in Iran

For India, Iran is not just another partner—it is a lifeline.



- » **Energy Security:** Iran remains a crucial supplier of oil.
- » **Connectivity:** The Chabahar Port provides India with access to Central Asia and Afghanistan, bypassing Pakistan.
- » **Geopolitical Balance:** Iran's proximity to Pakistan makes it strategically indispensable.

Yet, U.S. demands to abandon Chabahar, stop Russian oil imports, and reject alternatives to the dollar within BRICS directly challenge India's autonomy. The recent attack on an Iranian ship returning from exercises in India underscores Washington's disregard for New Delhi's strategic sensitivities.

Strategic Autonomy Under Strain

India's historic policy of non-alignment is being tested. The global "camp mentality" is pushing nations toward rigid blocs, and India risks being pulled into the U.S.-led Western orbit.

- » **Defence Diversification:** Efforts such as the Rafale jet deal with France aim to reduce reliance on the U.S. and Russia. Yet, refusal to share core technologies limits India's ability to achieve true self-reliance.
- » **Trade Inequality:** Despite signing a Free Trade Agreement, the EU often treats India as a junior partner rather than an equal.
- » **Unipolar vs. Multipolar:** India advocates multipolarity, but U.S. actions continue to reflect a unipolar mindset.

Lessons from Taiwan and U.S. Reliability

The Taiwan situation offers a sobering lesson. Despite American assurances, high-level U.S.-China engagements have left Taiwan questioning Washington's reliability. India must heed this warning: dependence on U.S. support alone could leave it strategically exposed if global alignments shift.

The Way Forward for India

To safeguard its autonomy, India must embrace a multi-alignment doctrine—engaging simultaneously with multiple power centres rather than relying on any single bloc.



- » Balance with China: Permanent confrontation is unsustainable; border stability must be maintained.
- » Strategic Hedging: India should pursue geo-economic decoupling and technological sovereignty.
- » Value-Based Governance: Long-term resilience requires ethical governance alongside institutional strength.

Conclusion

The Iran conflict is a stark reminder that India cannot outsource its strategic autonomy. Neither Europe nor the U.S. will safeguard India's interests in moments of crisis. Only through multi-alignment, technological self-reliance, and principled governance can India navigate the turbulence of a multipolar world while protecting its sovereignty.

India, China and the New Industrial Order

India, China and the Limits of Hyper-Globalisation: Lessons for Industrial Growth

The debate on India's economic trajectory since 1991 is once again in sharp focus. As global supply chains fragment and economic nationalism resurges, the comparison with China's industrial rise offers sobering lessons.

India's Post-1991 Path

The liberalisation era was born out of crisis. India embraced trade openness, deregulation, and global integration. Yet, much of its manufacturing became assembly-driven—dependent on imported components and foreign technology. The result: India emerged as a nation of marketers and assemblers rather than producers, leaving critical sectors vulnerable to external shocks.

China's Contrasting Strategy

In 1980, India and China stood at similar technological levels. Four decades later, China's economy has grown 46 times, while India's has expanded 15 times. China's per capita income surged 38-fold compared to India's modest eight-fold rise. This divergence was no accident.

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China pursued an aggressive industrial policy—reverse engineering, currency management, and strategic subsidies. It built deep domestic ecosystems, ensuring that integration with global trade strengthened its own productive capacity. Exports became a lever to expand domestic manufacturing, not a substitute for it.

The “Kicking Away the Ladder” Debate

Economist Ha-Joon Chang's thesis resonates here: advanced economies historically relied on protectionism and state-led industrialisation, only to later champion free trade for others. China's rise exemplifies how strategic state intervention can coexist with global integration. India, by contrast, leaned heavily on the Washington Consensus—privatisation, deregulation, and minimal state involvement—often at the expense of building robust industrial foundations.

Emerging Limits of Hyper-Globalisation

Today, the cracks in hyper-globalisation are visible. Geopolitical tensions, supply-chain disruptions, and trade restrictions have weakened the old model of seamless global production. Countries are rediscovering industrial policy, prioritising resilience, and protecting strategic sectors. Excessive reliance on exports alone is proving unsustainable.

Lessons for India

India must recalibrate. The path forward requires:

- » Strengthening Domestic Manufacturing: Develop deep industrial ecosystems rather than relying on imported components.
- » Boosting Purchasing Power: Rising incomes and stronger domestic demand are essential for sustainable growth.
- » Creating Dignified Employment: Move beyond gig work to high-quality jobs that enhance skills and productivity.
- » Raising Rural Incomes: Empowering farmers will broaden the domestic market and stimulate demand.
- » Adopting Strategic Industrial Policy: The state must actively support sectors with high technological and employment potential.

Conclusion

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India's challenge is not whether to integrate globally, but how to do so while building domestic strength. Hyper-globalisation has reached its limits; resilience and self-reliance must now define industrial growth. China's experience underscores that globalisation without domestic capability is a fragile strategy. For India, the lesson is clear: the next phase of growth must be rooted in manufacturing depth, dignified employment, and strategic statecraft.

India–Pakistan Relations: A History of Dialogue and Discord

India–Pakistan Dialogue – History, Challenges & Future of Bilateral Relations

Dialogue and Its Discontents

Calls for renewed dialogue between India and Pakistan persist, but history reveals a troubling pattern: Indian peace initiatives are often followed by state-sponsored terrorism. This cycle has undermined trust and made sustained engagement nearly impossible.

Key Concepts in the Relationship

- » Jihadi Tanzims: Terrorist groups used by Pakistan as strategic tools.
- » Composite Dialogue: Framework to address all bilateral issues—terrorism, Kashmir, water, trade, and humanitarian concerns—simultaneously.
- » Modus Vivendi: A working arrangement to coexist peacefully despite unresolved disputes.
- » Irredentism: Pakistan's persistent claim over Kashmir, rooted in its national identity.

Issues Under Composite Dialogue

- » Cooperation – Trade, culture, and economic ties.
- » Humanitarian – Prisoners, fishermen, divided families, cross-border movement.
- » Conflict – Kashmir, terrorism, and military tensions.

Historical Background



Pakistan's reliance on militant networks dates back to the Soviet–Afghan war, when Mujahideen groups were supported by the U.S. and Pakistan. After the Soviet withdrawal, many evolved into radical outfits like the Taliban. Pakistan redirected these groups toward insurgency in Kashmir, embedding terrorism into its strategic calculus.

Timeline of Failed Peace Efforts

- » Vajpayee Era: The 1999 Lahore Bus Yatra was followed by the Kargil War; the 2001 Agra Summit collapsed; the Parliament attack occurred later that year.
- » Manmohan Singh Era: Back-channel talks sought a modus vivendi, but the 2008 Mumbai attacks derailed progress.
- » Modi Era: Initial goodwill gestures in 2014–15—including Modi's Lahore visit—were undone by the Pathankot and Uri attacks, leading to surgical strikes. The 2019 Pulwama attack prompted air strikes.

Why Pakistan Avoids Peace

- » Identity Crisis – A peaceful Kashmir undermines Pakistan's Two-Nation Theory.
- » Irredentism – Obsession with Kashmir overrides economic and social priorities.
- » Military Interests – The Pakistan Army thrives on hostility with India, ensuring budgets and power.

India's Current Policy

India has shifted from unconditional dialogue to a deterrence-first approach:

- » No Talks Amid Terrorism – Dialogue contingent on cessation of violence.
- » Suspension of Treaties – Leveraging agreements like the Indus Water Treaty.
- » Limited Engagement – Restricting talks to humanitarian issues.
- » Active Retaliation – Surgical and air strikes to signal zero tolerance.

Anecdote: Durban Summit 1998



Following nuclear tests by both nations, Prime Minister Vajpayee instructed negotiators to finalize a dialogue framework. Talks with Pakistani diplomat Tariq Altaf laid the groundwork for the Composite Dialogue, later announced by Vajpayee and Nawaz Sharif in New York.

Conclusion

India's repeated peace initiatives have been undermined by terrorism and military hostility. The obstacle lies not in the absence of dialogue but in Pakistan's structural dependence on anti-India sentiment and Kashmir irredentism. India's path forward must combine firm deterrence with limited humanitarian engagement, ensuring national security while keeping open minimal channels for human concerns.

India's Digital Census: Promise and Peril

- » The 2027 Census will shape political representation, welfare schemes, and governance.
- » Two major changes:
- » Caste enumeration (first time since Independence).
- » Digital enumeration via smartphones and self-enumeration.
- » These innovations bring efficiency but also challenges in accuracy, confidentiality, and public trust.

Inclusion of Caste Enumeration

- » Caste remains a sensitive social and political issue.
- » Past surveys in Bihar and Karnataka showed disputes over classification and figures.
- » Communities may reject results if they feel undercounted.
- » Solution: Extensive pre-testing of questionnaires and clear training for enumerators to avoid misclassification.

Method of Enumeration & Political Representation

- » India uses the extended de facto method: counting people at their usual residence, including visitors.

- » This creates differences between Census and voter rolls, which matter for future delimitation of constituencies.
- » Political implications make accuracy critical.

Digital Enumeration – Challenges

Lack of Technical Skills:

- » Enumerators may struggle with smartphones/tablets.
- » Karnataka's SECC survey showed difficulties in handling devices.

Confidentiality Risks:

- » Paper-to-digital transfer may cause errors or misuse.
- » Family members assisting could compromise privacy.
- » Sensitive data (caste, migration, disability) needs strict safeguards.
- » Problems in Self-Enumeration
- » Complex questions: Definitions of work, disability, occupation often misunderstood.
- » Respondent fatigue: Long questionnaires discourage careful answers; some may give false responses.
- » Risk of omissions: Helpers, relatives, or unrelated residents often missed.
- » Fraudulent enumeration: Groups may manipulate figures to influence reservations and welfare distribution.

Measures to Improve Accuracy

- » Extensive field testing of questionnaires.
- » Better training for enumerators.
- » Simplified, clear language in questions.
- » Verification systems for digital data.
- » Confidentiality safeguards.
- » Design to reduce omissions of household members.
- » Monitoring mechanisms against fraud.

The 2027 Census blends technological innovation with social complexity.

- » Caste data and digital systems can improve scope and efficiency.
- » Risks: accuracy, privacy, omissions, manipulation.

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- » Success depends on training, simplified questionnaires, reliable digital systems, and strict safeguards.

A credible Census is vital for fair representation, effective policymaking, and democratic accountability in India.

India's Workforce: Opportunities and Obstacles

India's Labour Market 2026 – Demographic Dividend, Employment Challenges & Skill Gap

Growth at a Crossroads

India remains the fastest-growing major economy, with real GDP growth of 6.5% in 2024–25. Yet, this momentum masks deep structural challenges. The nation's demographic dividend—its vast young workforce—offers a historic opportunity, but without investment in skills and productivity, growth risks becoming unsustainable.

Understanding the Labour Market

Three key indicators define the labour landscape:

- » Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) – 59%
- » Workforce Participation Rate (WPR) – 57%
- » Unemployment Rate – 3%

While these numbers suggest stability, they conceal pressing issues of employability, skill gaps, and quality of work.

Youth Entry and Human Capital

Every year, 70 lakh to 1 crore youth enter the labour market—the most educated generation in India's history. Yet, the economy struggles to absorb them. As Amartya Sen has long argued, growth without investment in human capital—education, skills, and health—cannot be sustained.

Shifts in Employment Patterns

- » Regular Salaried Jobs: Rising from 22% to 24%, offering stability and benefits.

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- » Self-Employment: Declining from 58% to 56%, signaling gradual formalisation.
- » Agriculture to Services: Employment in agriculture has dropped from 50% to 43%. Unlike the Lewis growth model, India has largely skipped manufacturing, moving directly into services—wealth-generating but limited in mass employment.

Women in the Workforce

Female labour force participation is at a historic high, especially in rural areas. Salaried women have seen 7% wage growth, outpacing men at 6%. Yet, women continue to face the double burden of paid work and unpaid care responsibilities, limiting their long-term participation.

Challenges Ahead

- » Degree-Employability Mismatch: Millions graduate each year, but nearly half remain unemployed due to lack of industry-ready skills.
- » Skilling Crisis: Only 4% of India's working-age population has formal vocational training, compared to 96% in South Korea.
- » NEET Youth: One in four young people (15–29) are Not in Education, Employment, or Training, posing a major social and economic risk.

Global Shifts – Three Storms

India's labour market must brace for:

- » AI & Automation – reducing traditional job roles.
- » Green Transition – requiring massive retraining.
- » Geopolitical Realignment – supply chain shifts (China+1) demanding readiness for new manufacturing opportunities.

Four Priority Interventions

- » Curriculum Realignment – Align education with industry needs.
- » Gender-Responsive Policies – Support systems like crèches and day-care to retain women in the workforce.
- » Apprenticeships for NEET Youth – On-the-job training to re-integrate idle youth.

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- » Green Sector Investment – Skill development in renewable energy, EVs, and climate-resilient industries.

Conclusion

India's labour market in 2026 stands at a decisive juncture. The demographic dividend is a fleeting window that will begin closing after 2030. To achieve the vision of Viksit Bharat, India must shift focus from headline GDP growth to labour productivity, skill development, and human capital investment. Without urgent reforms, the dividend risks turning into a demographic burden.

India's Remote Work Revolution

Work From Home vs Corporate Mindset – India's Digital Transition

The Clash Between Vision and Mindset

Prime Minister Modi's recent advocacy for Work From Home (WFH) as a national economic strategy highlights a forward-looking vision. Yet, this idea collides with India's entrenched factory-era corporate mindset, where physical presence is still equated with productivity. The government sees remote work as a tool for efficiency, but corporate India remains hesitant to embrace it.

Economic Motivation Behind WFH

Remote work offers tangible national benefits:

- » Reduced Fuel Consumption: Fewer commutes lower domestic fuel demand.
- » Lower Import Bills: Cutting fuel usage reduces India's dependence on energy imports and saves foreign exchange.

This makes WFH not just a workplace reform but a potential contributor to macroeconomic stability.

The "Boss Problem"

Many organisations continue to measure productivity by headcount and visibility rather than outcomes. A culture of surveillance dominates, where managers prefer



employees to be physically present to ensure discipline. This mindset reflects an industrial-era approach ill-suited for today's knowledge economy.

The Knowledge Economy Reality

Modern work ecosystems thrive on cloud computing, AI, and digital collaboration tools, making location less relevant. Productivity is best measured by results and performance outcomes, not office attendance. India's rapid digitisation of payments, healthcare, and services makes workplace transformation both logical and necessary.

Generational Divide

- » Gen Z Priorities: Younger professionals value flexibility, mental health, and work-life balance.
- » Management Bias: Senior leadership often interprets remote work preferences as lack of discipline, widening the gap between generations.

Lessons from the Pandemic

COVID-19 proved that India's formal economy could function effectively through remote systems. Yet, once the crisis eased, many companies reverted to rigid office attendance, ignoring the demonstrated success of remote operations.

Benefits of Wider WFH Adoption

- » Health Gains: Reduced commuting lowers stress and burnout.
- » Urban Relief: Less congestion eases traffic and pressure on infrastructure.
- » Digital Consistency: Aligns workplace systems with India's broader digital transformation.

Barriers to Implementation

- » Evaluation Systems: Organisations lack fair frameworks to assess remote performance.
- » Security Concerns: Certain sectors require physical environments, but many roles without such constraints are still treated the same way.

Conclusion

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The debate over WFH is more than a workplace issue—it reflects India's transition from industrial-era supervision models to a digital, outcome-driven economy. The future of work will depend on whether organisations can build trust, adopt modern evaluation systems, and embrace flexibility. India's digital economy cannot thrive if its corporate mindset remains stuck in the past.

Institutions Preserved, Norms Revised: China's Strategy

China's Selective Revisionism and Its Implications for India and the Global Order

China's latest white paper on global governance signals its ambition to reshape the underlying norms of the international order while presenting itself as a defender of multilateralism. With the U.S. alienating allies through disruptive foreign policy, Beijing has seized the opportunity to project itself as a responsible great power.

China's Selective Revisionism

China is not dismantling the post-war order but selectively revising it to serve its strategic interests.

- » Institutional Continuity: It supports the UN, WTO, and multilateral forums for legitimacy.
- » Parallel Institutions: Platforms like the AIIB, NDB, and SCO expand China's influence.
- » Institutional Revisionism: Rather than revolution, China seeks incremental expansion of its authority within existing structures.

Institutional vs Normative Order

- » Institutional Order: UN system, Bretton Woods institutions, multilateral frameworks.
- » Normative Order: Principles of sovereignty, democracy, free markets, human rights, and rule of law.
- » China's Strategy: Preserve institutions but reshape norms to dilute liberal values.

China's Normative Ambitions

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Through initiatives like the Global Development Initiative (GDI), Global Security Initiative (GSI), and Global Civilization Initiative (GCI), China positions itself as a norm-setter:

- » Development: Aligns with SDGs to appeal to the Global South.
- » Security: Emphasises sovereignty but weakens sovereign choice under “legitimate security concerns.”
- » Civilisation: Promotes diversity but risks undermining universal human rights.
- » Democracy: Redefined as material outcomes rather than political participation or accountability.

Contradictions in Conduct

China's rhetoric often clashes with its actions:

- » South China Sea: Rejection of the 2016 arbitration ruling.
- » Border Disputes: Standoffs with India and Bhutan despite sovereignty claims.
- » BRI: Framed as cooperation but often a tool of influence.
- » Selective Multilateralism: Advocates openness abroad but restricts it domestically.

Risks for Global Order

- » Normative Hollowing: Institutions survive but lose liberal meaning.
- » Sovereignty Dilution: Smaller states' choices undermined.
- » Human Rights Weakening: Cultural relativism shields authoritarianism.
- » Rule of Law Erosion: Selective compliance erodes trust.
- » Civil Society Constraint: Stability rhetoric legitimises restrictions on freedoms.

Significance for India

For India, China's selective revisionism poses strategic challenges:

- » Border Security: China's actions belie its sovereignty rhetoric.
- » Indo-Pacific Stability: Assertiveness threatens freedom of navigation.



- » Global South Competition: China's development diplomacy rivals India's outreach.
- » Normative Interests: India relies on sovereignty, rule of law, and openness for strategic autonomy.

Way Forward for India

- » Support Rules-Based Order – Uphold sovereignty, territorial integrity, and peaceful dispute resolution.
- » Maintain Strategic Autonomy – Avoid alignment with either U.S. disruption or Chinese revisionism.
- » Lead the Global South – Offer transparent, sustainable, sovereignty-respecting alternatives.
- » Push Institutional Reform – Advocate UN, WTO, and financial institution reforms.
- » Defend Normative Principles – Protect equality, rule of law, accountability, and open societies.
- » Strengthen Partnerships – Use QUAD, BRICS, SCO, G20, and bilateral ties to balance China's influence.

Conclusion

China is not overthrowing the international order but reshaping its normative foundations from within—preserving institutions while revising their meaning. For India, the challenge lies in engaging with China-led initiatives cautiously while defending a rules-based, multipolar, sovereignty-respecting order that safeguards its long-term strategic interests.

Ladakh's Quest for Democratic Belonging

The conversion of Ladakh into a Union Territory has sparked debates on democracy, representation, and constitutional rights.

- » The Union government argues Ladakh's sparse population, strategic sensitivity, and financial dependence make a legislature unnecessary.
- » It has offered new districts as decentralisation.



- » But administrative convenience cannot replace political participation. The demand for a legislature and Sixth Schedule protections reflects a deeper aspiration for self-governance, dignity, and inclusion.

Administrative Decentralisation vs Political Representation

- » New Districts: Nubra, Changthang, Sham, Zaskar, and Drass improve administrative accessibility in Ladakh's harsh terrain.
- » Limits: Districts are bureaucratic units, not democratic institutions. They cannot decide on land rights, ecology, employment, education, or cultural autonomy.
- » Core Point: Democracy requires institutions where people shape decisions, not just receive them.

Colonial Echoes in the Debate

- » Paternalistic Arguments: Claims that Ladakhis are too few or dependent echo colonial logic used against India.
- » Sri Aurobindo's Response: Freedom and self-rule are essential to dignity.
- » Constitutional Right: Representation is not a privilege based on population or profitability—it is a fundamental right.

Expendable Electoral Promises

- » Post-Article 370 Assurances: BJP leaders promised Sixth Schedule protections in manifestoes.
- » Reality: Promises weakened after electoral victories, raising ethical concerns.
- » Lesson: Democracy depends on trust and accountability, especially in frontier regions.

Lessons from the Northeast

- » Strategic Sensitivity: Arunachal Pradesh, despite its border with China, was granted statehood in 1987.
- » Small Populations: Nagaland, Mizoram, and Sikkim received statehood despite dependence on the Centre.



- » Integration: Frontier regions are integrated through belonging and representation, not military presence alone.

Weakness of the Fiscal Argument

- » Centre's Objection: Ladakh's financial dependence is cited against a legislature.
- » Counterpoint: Redistribution is central to Indian federalism. States like Bihar, Assam, and Northeastern states rely heavily on central support.
- » Principle: Democracy is not a reward for profitability.

Ladakh and India's Developmental Future

- » Renewable Energy Hub: Projects in Changthang aim to generate 13 GW of power, worth thousands of crores.
- » Local Stakes: Grazing rights, mining, tourism, and sustainability demand local decision-making.
- » Need: A legislature accountable to Ladakhis, not just bureaucrats.

India's strength lies in accommodating diversity within constitutional unity.

- » The Sixth Schedule reflects the need for special protections in fragile frontier regions.
- » Administrative control cannot substitute for democratic representation.
- » Ladakh's demand is not secessionist—it is an appeal to belong more meaningfully within the Union.
- » A legislature would provide Ladakh with constitutional recognition, political participation, and the right to shape its own future.

Measuring Inflation Differently: India's Shift to PPI

Producer Price Index (PPI) Replaces WPI: Significance, Features & Economic Impact

The government has announced a five-year transition plan starting June 15 to phase out the Wholesale Price Index (WPI) in favor of the Producer Price Index (PPI), marking a structural overhaul in how India measures producer-level inflation.

Producer Price Index (PPI)



PPI tracks price changes from the producer's perspective at the initial stage of economic activity, measuring both what producers receive for their output and what they pay for inputs.

- » Output PPI: Based on basic prices received by producers, excluding net taxes, trade, and transport margins.
- » Input PPI: Based on purchasers' prices, reflecting the actual costs (including margins and taxes) that producers pay for inputs.
- » Global Alignment: Most economies have already transitioned to PPI as it aligns with the internationally accepted System of National Accounts, the standard framework used to calculate GDP.

Structural Differences – WPI vs. PPI

- » Coverage Expansion: WPI tracks only goods, while PPI includes both goods and services. Services contribute over 55% of India's GDP and employ nearly 30% of its workforce.
- » Data Granularity: WPI relies on broad-sector estimates, whereas Output PPI uses detailed national accounts supply tables.
- » Elimination of Double Counting: WPI counted intermediate goods multiple times. PPI separates input and output chains to avoid distortions.
- » Updated Basket: The commodity basket expands from 697 to 957 items, adding modern sectors like solar, wind, and nuclear energy.

Economic and Policy Significance

- » Early Warning System: Input PPI highlights cost escalations in industries like auto, pharma, and construction before they show up in retail prices.
- » Predicting Consumer Inflation: Divergences between input and output PPI reveal cost absorption trends, signaling eventual consumer price pressures.
- » Monetary Policy Calibrations: By capturing service inflation and eliminating distortions, PPI provides the RBI with a more accurate tool for interest rate decisions.
- » Contractual Smoothness: To avoid disruption in contracts linked to WPI, the government will dual-publish a revised WPI alongside PPI during the transition.

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Challenges in Implementation

- » Data Asymmetry: Services PPI will initially be quarterly, creating a lag compared to the monthly goods index.
- » Collection Bottlenecks: Gathering reliable price data across India's diverse and unorganized economy remains a challenge.

Way Forward

- » Frequency Harmonization: Transition the services index to monthly reporting for real-time relevance.
- » Data Infrastructure: Strengthen digital reporting systems across manufacturing and service hubs.
- » Contractual Renegotiation: Use the five-year window to rewrite inflation-linked clauses from WPI to PPI.

Conclusion

The shift to PPI addresses a long-standing statistical gap by including India's dominant services sector in inflation tracking. By measuring inflation at its origin point, PPI ensures that economic policy is aligned with modern realities, offering sharper insights for businesses, policymakers, and monetary authorities.

Oscar Reforms and India's Independent Cinema

The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences has introduced reforms that mark a philosophical shift in global cinema.

- » Relaxing the "one country, one film" rule in the International Feature category.
- » Allowing festival-acclaimed films to qualify independently.
- » This reduces barriers for world cinema and creates new opportunities for Indian independent films, often admired globally but sidelined institutionally.

India's Globally Resonant Films – Missed Opportunities

- » The Lunchbox (Ritesh Batra): Cannes Critics' Week success, praised for its subtle portrayal of loneliness and connection. Not chosen as India's Oscar entry. Under new rules, festival recognition alone could have secured eligibility.
- » Court (Chaitanya Tamhane): Venice Orizzonti Award winner, critiqued India's judicial system. Official submission but lacked campaign infrastructure. New guidelines enhance visibility for politically engaged films.
- » Masaan (Neeraj Ghaywan): Cannes Un Certain Regard entry, explored caste, grief, and aspiration. Globally resonant but never India's Oscar entry. Festival acclaim could have ensured contention.
- » Village Rockstars (Rima Das): Authentic rural Assam storytelling. Official submission but limited promotional support. A festival-driven system prioritises artistic merit over industrial influence.

Concerns and Opportunities for Indian Independent Cinema

- » Diversity of Indian Cinema: With multiple languages and traditions, one film cannot represent the entire nation. The reforms shift validation from national committees to global festivals, better reflecting India's cultural mosaic.
- » Cinema as Transnational Medium: Films today communicate across cultures while rooted locally. Reforms encourage co-productions, circulation, and festival participation.
- » Campaign Infrastructure: Festival acclaim alone is insufficient; visibility and sustained promotion remain crucial. Payal Kapadia's All We Imagine as Light shows how consistent global engagement builds recognition.
- » Risk of Homogenisation: Some filmmakers may tailor stories to festival tastes. Yet history shows authenticity travels farther than imitation—as proven by Bong Joon-ho's Parasite.

The Road Ahead

- » Expanding Opportunities: Reforms reduce dependence on national selection systems, opening doors for regional storytellers and independent voices.



- » Building Support Systems: Success requires stronger ecosystems for distribution, marketing, and campaigning. Without these, acclaimed films risk fading from global visibility.
- » The new Oscar guidelines are more than procedural—they represent a transformation in how cinema is validated globally.
- » For Indian independent cinema, they create space for diverse voices and regional narratives to gain recognition.
- » With institutional backing and international networks, Indian films can secure a stronger position in the global cinematic imagination while preserving their cultural identity.

Powering India's EV Future: Grid Readiness First

India's electric vehicle (EV) transition is most visible in two-wheelers, but the real challenge lies in freight transport. Heavy vehicles consume far more energy, making them the critical test for India's EV future.

Electricity Demand: If India fully electrifies its fleet, the country will need an additional 900–1,100 TWh per year. Even partial electrification—about 50% by 2047—would still require ~500 TWh annually, nearly one-third of current production.

Two-Wheelers vs Freight Vehicles: Two-wheelers, though highly visible, have a relatively small impact. Full electrification would add only 55–75 TWh per year. In contrast, just 6.26 million heavy goods vehicles (HGVs) could consume 450–565 TWh annually, showing where the real energy burden lies.

Peak Demand Risk: Most charging happens in the evening, which could destabilize the grid. India's distribution companies (discoms) already face financial stress, and unmanaged EV demand could worsen the situation.

Solutions: Smart charging and time-of-use pricing can spread demand more evenly. Battery swapping and workplace charging during solar hours would reduce evening peaks. A diversified energy mix—solar, wind, nuclear, and hydro storage—will be essential to meet rising demand sustainably.

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Policy Needs: India must integrate EV demand into national power planning. Smart-charging standards should be mandated, and freight corridors like the Golden Quadrilateral and Dedicated Freight Corridors (DFCs) should be prioritized for electrification.

EV adoption is inevitable, but its success depends on building a resilient, clean, and smart grid. Without strategic planning, India's energy transition risks becoming unsustainable.

Reforming Fertilizer Use for Food Security

Improving Fertilizer Use Efficiency in India – Challenges, Subsidy Issues & Sustainable Solutions

Geopolitical Pressures and Fertilizer Dependence

India's fertilizer security is deeply tied to global geopolitics. The ongoing Iran–USA conflict has disrupted natural gas imports from West Asia, a critical input for urea production.

- » Urea: 80% produced domestically, 20% imported, but heavily reliant on imported natural gas.
- » Phosphatic Fertilisers (DAP): India depends on imports due to limited rock phosphate reserves, with Morocco and Jordan as key suppliers.

Any disruption in supply chains directly impacts agricultural productivity and food security.

The Fertilizer Subsidy Problem

India spends heavily on fertilizer subsidies, yet efficiency remains low. Much of the fertilizer applied is lost through:

- » Leaching into groundwater.
- » Runoff into rivers and lakes.
- » Volatilisation into the atmosphere.

This not only wastes resources but also damages ecosystems.



The Fertilizer Trap

Excessive chemical fertilizer use reduces soil organic matter, which is vital for nutrient absorption.

- » Poor soil health forces farmers to apply more fertilizer.
- » This worsens soil degradation, creating a cycle of higher costs and lower productivity.

Policy Shortcomings

- » Nutrient-Based Subsidy (NBS): Urea was excluded, keeping it artificially cheap and encouraging overuse.
- » Neem-Coated Urea: Slowed nitrogen release but failed to prevent major losses.
- » Phosphatic Fertiliser Runoff: Causes eutrophication and algal blooms, harming aquatic ecosystems.
- » MSP Bias: Procurement favors rice, wheat, and sugarcane, discouraging pulses and crop diversification, increasing nitrogen dependence.

Importance of Pulses

Pulses naturally enrich soil through Rhizobium bacteria, reducing nitrogen fertilizer needs. Crop rotation with pulses improves soil fertility, lowers input costs, and enhances nutrition.

Water Stress and Rice Cultivation

India produces surplus rice, much of which is exported. But rice is highly water-intensive, meaning India is effectively exporting groundwater. Using rice for ethanol production further strains food and water security.

Government Initiatives

- » Dalhan Atmanirbharta Mission: Promotes pulse cultivation with MSP support. Progress remains limited, requiring stronger implementation.

Way Forward

- » Restore Soil Health – Encourage compost, manure, and biogas residues.
- » Focus on Crop Varieties – Invest in high-yielding, climate-resilient crops.

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- » Policy Coordination – Revive the National Nitrogen Steering Committee for inter-ministerial action.
- » Reduce Chemical Use at Basal Stage – Promote organic manure during sowing.
- » Promote Pulses & Rotation – Ensure assured procurement to encourage diversification.
- » Strengthen R&D – Develop crops requiring less water and fertilizer.

Conclusion

India's fertilizer policy must evolve from supply expansion to efficiency and sustainability. Excessive chemical use has trapped farmers in declining soil health and rising costs. A balanced approach—combining organic inputs, crop diversification, pulse promotion, and coordinated governance—can break this cycle. By focusing on soil health and sustainable fertilizer use, India can secure both agricultural productivity and long-term food security.

Resilience Over Ideology: India's Oil Challenge

The U.S. decision to end waivers on Russian seaborne oil is more than a sanctions move—it reflects the **fragility of the global energy system**, where wars, sanctions, and supply disruptions are deeply interconnected. For India, a major importer, energy security is directly tied to **growth, inflation control, and national stability**. Despite the push for renewables, hydrocarbons remain central to the global economy.

Why India Cannot Ignore Sanctions

- » Rising Demand: India imports ~90% of its crude oil and remains one of the fastest-growing energy consumers. Unlike developed nations, demand will keep rising for decades.
- » Russian Oil as Stabiliser: Since 2022, Russian crude helped India reduce fuel-price pressures, diversify sources, and strengthen flexibility.
- » Economic Impact: Affordable energy is vital for transport, food inflation, fertilizer subsidies, and household spending. Rising oil prices ripple across the economy, slowing growth.



Sanctions and Market Reality

- » **Fragile Markets:** Conflicts in West Asia, attacks on shipping, and tensions around the Strait of Hormuz—through which one-fifth of global oil trade passes—make supply highly vulnerable.
- » **Fear Factor:** Even announcements raise freight rates, insurance premiums, and price expectations. Markets react to fear as much as actual shortages.
- » **Western Contradictions:** Sanctions aim to cut Russia's revenues but risk tightening supply and raising prices, which paradoxically sustains Russian earnings. Temporary waivers reveal the tension between political goals and market realities.

Changing Nature of Energy Security

- » **Beyond Supply:** Vulnerabilities now include shipping restrictions, insurance controls, financial sanctions, and tanker blacklisting.
- » **Hydrocarbon Dependence:** Transport, aviation, agriculture, and petrochemicals remain oil-dependent despite renewable growth.
- » **India's Strategy:**
 - Expand strategic petroleum reserves.
 - Diversify import sources and strengthen domestic exploration.
 - Improve refining flexibility and gas infrastructure.
 - Accelerate renewable investments to reduce reliance on chokepoints like Hormuz.

Preserving Strategic Autonomy

- » The global order is increasingly fragmented, shaped by sanctions and geopolitical competition.
- » Excessive dependence on one bloc risks vulnerability. India's approach reflects strategic autonomy and pragmatic interest, not neutrality alone.

The world is entering an era of recurring wars, sanctions, and supply-chain disruptions.

- » Resilience matters more than ideology.
- » Energy systems operate according to physical and economic realities, not slogans.
- » For India, the challenge is not just securing cheaper oil but building a sustainable framework capable of surviving geopolitical shocks.
- » In the 21st century, national stability and economic strength depend on navigating an unstable, fragmented energy order.

Shift in US–China Geopolitics and India's Strategic Challenges

The recent meeting between the presidents of the United States and China has signaled a new phase of détente—a thaw in relations after years of confrontation. While this may ease global tensions, it raises serious questions for India, which fears being sidelined in a potential “G2” arrangement where Washington and Beijing dominate world affairs.

The Role of QUAD

For India, the QUAD grouping (India, US, Japan, Australia) remains a vital counterweight to China. It strengthens India's engagement with Indo-Pacific democracies and enhances cooperation in technology, supply chains, maritime security, and strategic dialogue. QUAD provides India with leverage, but its relevance could diminish if the US and China move closer together.

India's Strategic Concerns

- » Border Disputes: China is India's immediate neighbor, with unresolved territorial tensions.
- » Economic Dependency: India's trade deficit with China has ballooned to \$110 billion, reflecting a stark imbalance.
- » Regional Influence: China's financial outreach in Nepal and Sri Lanka undermines India's neighborhood diplomacy.
- » Global Standing: China's growing clout in institutions like the UN often sidelines India's interests.

Shifting Equations with Allies

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- » Russia's Decline: Once India's trusted partner, Russia has become increasingly dependent on China after the Ukraine war, reducing its ability to balance Beijing.
- » US Relations: Once marked by distrust—sanctions after India's 1998 nuclear tests—the relationship transformed with the 2005 Civil Nuclear Agreement. Today, the US is a major export market, source of capital, and technology partner, supported by a strong Indian diaspora.

Strategic Realism and "First Principles"

As scholar C. Raja Mohan argues, India must adopt a "First Principles" approach—prioritizing national interest over sentiment.

- » Economic Partnerships: Focus on countries that deliver tangible benefits. For instance, India exports more to the Netherlands than to Russia or China, yet the Netherlands receives little strategic attention.
- » Engagement with the West: With Russia weakened and China a direct threat, India must leverage Western markets, capital, and technology to modernize its economy and military.
- » Strategic Autonomy Reinterpreted: Aligning with Western powers or joining QUAD does not erode autonomy; rather, it equips India to avoid isolation and remain relevant in global shifts.

Conclusion

The central lesson of today's geopolitics is clear: nations have no permanent friends or enemies, only permanent interests. For India, matching China's strength requires internal self-strengthening—through R&D, education, and military modernization—while pragmatically engaging with the West to secure capital and technology. India must shed outdated ideologies and embrace a national interest-driven foreign policy, ensuring it is not left behind in a world increasingly shaped by US-China dynamics.

Synchronisation Without Solidarity: Lessons from the Cockroach Janta Party

The sudden popularity of the Cockroach Janta Party highlights the growing influence of digital politics.

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- » Within days, memes, reels, and viral campaigns built support that traditional parties take years to cultivate.
- » Similar trends in Bangladesh and Nepal show how youth mobilisation and online outrage can challenge established systems.
- » Yet, digital platforms often struggle to convert emotional unity into long-term organisation and commitment.

The Rise of Reactive Digital Politics

- » Emotional Participation: Social media enables individuals to feel collective intensity through slogans, memes, and viral campaigns.
- » Immediate Reactions: Unlike ideology-driven politics, online mobilisation thrives on symbolic enemies and outrage.
- » Synchronisation vs Solidarity:
 - Synchronisation = temporary emotional alignment.
 - Solidarity = continuity, trust, and durable relationships.
 - Digital politics excels at synchronisation but rarely sustains solidarity.

The Erosion of Collective Social Life

- » Decline of Institutions: Trade unions, campuses, and civic organisations once nurtured long-term participation.
- » Individualisation: Modern consumer societies emphasise private aspiration over collective identity.
- » Result: Citizens seek belonging online, making them vulnerable to emotionally charged mobilisation.

Cross-Country Comparisons

- » Bangladesh & Nepal: Reactive movements eventually became institutionalised or exhausted.
- » Lesson: Decentralised energy rarely remains decentralised; sustainable action requires memory, commitment, and symbolic attachment.

Lacan and the Problem of Authority



- » Insight from May 1968: Lacan warned that revolts often produce new masters.
- » Dependence on Enemies: Movements built on opposition weaken once they enter governance, as compromises dilute emotional clarity.
- » Challenge: Sustaining collective life is harder than sustaining anger.

The Contradiction of Centralisation

- » Digital Paradox: Platforms enabling decentralisation are themselves highly centralised.
- » Structural Reality: Modern societies depend on centralised systems—logistics, finance, megacities.
- » Contradiction: People desire decentralisation emotionally but live within systems built on concentration and control.

The rise of reactive digital politics shows how decentralised energy can emerge rapidly in contemporary societies.

- » Emotional synchronisation alone cannot deliver lasting transformation.
- » The real challenge is converting moments of outrage into enduring solidarity and institutions.
- » Without this, ruptures may simply reproduce new forms of authority and domination rather than genuine democratic renewal

Stalled Aspirations of Young India

Crisis of Mobility Among Indian Youth: Education, Employment & Social Mobility Challenges

Context

The issue is not a crisis of aspiration but a crisis of mobility, where hard work and education do not necessarily lead to improved social or economic positions.

Crisis of Mobility:



This occurs when individuals strive to progress but remain stuck in disadvantaged conditions. For example, a poor student may gain education yet continue to face economic hardship due to limited opportunities.

Background – LPG Reforms (1991): Economic reforms created a promise that hard work, skills, and adherence to rules would ensure a better life than the previous generation. This led to rural migration to cities, investment in education, and the rise of coaching culture. However, limited quality jobs have generated frustration.

Reasons Behind Youth Frustration:

- » Education–Employment Gap: Many youth hold degrees but lack employable skills, while delays in exams, paper leaks, and limited vacancies add uncertainty.
- » Social Mobility Factor: Government jobs are seen not just as careers but as pathways to economic security and upward mobility.

Jobless Growth:

Economic growth has not translated into sufficient job creation. Employment opportunities, income security, and stability matter more than GDP expansion. According to ILO 2024, a large share of India's unemployed are young workers, highlighting the disconnect between growth and jobs.

Institutional Integrity Crisis: Institutions are like national infrastructure, requiring transparency and trust. Declining confidence due to exam leaks, corruption, and weak recruitment systems undermines governance and youth aspirations.

Way Forward:

- » Strengthen Institutions: Transparent recruitment through digital monitoring and biometric verification.
- » Employment-Oriented Policies: Focus on MSMEs, textiles, and manufacturing to generate jobs.
- » Reduce Economic Uncertainty: Expand health insurance, crop insurance, and skill development programs.



- » Harness Demographic Dividend: Ensure quality education, skill development, healthcare, and employment opportunities to benefit from India's young population.

The Science Behind Violent Storms in UP

Thunderstorms in Uttar Pradesh – Causes, Impacts, Forecasting & NDMA Guidelines

A Deadly Storm Strikes Uttar Pradesh

A powerful thunderstorm recently swept across Uttar Pradesh, with wind speeds reaching 130 km/h and claiming more than 100 lives. Districts such as Prayagraj, Mirzapur, and Bhadohi bore the brunt of the devastation, underscoring the vulnerability of communities to sudden, violent weather events.

How Thunderstorms Form

Thunderstorms arise from a combination of factors:

- » Surface Heating & Convection: Intense summer heat warms the land, causing air to rise rapidly.
- » Moisture Supply: Humid winds from the Bay of Bengal feed the rising air.
- » Western Disturbances: Cold, dry upper-air winds collide with warm, moist currents.
- » Atmospheric Instability: This clash triggers violent storms with strong winds, lightning, and heavy rain.

Why This Storm Was So Intense

The UP thunderstorm was fueled by extreme conditions:

- » Temperatures above 45°C created severe surface heating.
- » High moisture levels from the Bay of Bengal intensified instability.
- » Strong Western Disturbances introduced cold, dry air, making the atmospheric clash unusually violent.

Impacts of the Thunderstorm

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- » Human Loss: Over 100 fatalities from collapsing structures and flying debris.
- » Infrastructure Damage: Electricity poles, power lines, and communication networks were destroyed.
- » Agricultural Losses: Farmers faced massive crop destruction.
- » Transport Disruption: Local mobility was severely affected.

IMD Forecasting Challenges

- » Thunderstorms differ from cyclones in their unpredictability.
- » Localized & Rapid: They form suddenly and intensify within hours.
- » Unpredictable Path: Unlike cyclones that follow a track, thunderstorms are like “popcorn in a pan”—erratic and scattered.
- » Forecasting Limitations: Even with advanced meteorology, pinpointing exact timing, location, and intensity remains difficult.

Solutions & Precautions

To minimize damage, experts recommend:

- » Structural Safety: Avoid loose metal sheets and large hoardings near homes.
- » Emergency Preparedness: Keep kits with torches, batteries, clean water, and first aid.
- » Personal Safety: Stay indoors, unplug appliances, and avoid metal objects or isolated trees during storms.

NDMA Guidelines

The National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) advises:

- » Report injuries immediately and seek first aid.
- » Move away from danger zones.
- » Follow official instructions and avoid unnecessary travel during alerts.

Conclusion

The tragedy in Uttar Pradesh highlights the urgent need for stronger disaster resilience. While thunderstorms remain inherently unpredictable, better local-level warnings, stricter infrastructure safety norms, and proactive district-

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level measures can save lives. Combining improved IMD forecasting with NDMA protocols is essential to reduce the human and economic toll of these sudden, violent storms.

Urban Cooling for a Hotter India

Cooling Doctrine – India's Structural Response to Extreme Heatwaves

Moving Beyond Short-Term Fixes

India's battle against extreme heat is shifting from reactive measures to a structural approach. For over a decade, recurring heatwaves have exposed the inadequacy of routine guidelines and temporary interventions. Annual advisories from the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) often replicate the same measures—water kiosks, shaded bus stops, and stay-at-home instructions—without addressing the deeper vulnerabilities of workers exposed to relentless heat.

Cooling as a Public Right

The proposed National Cooling Doctrine reframes cooling as a basic entitlement and public health necessity, not a luxury.

- » Workplace Standards: Minimum cooling requirements must be mandated for factories, warehouses, kitchens, and offices.
- » Strict Enforcement: Inspections are essential to prevent non-compliance driven by cost-cutting.
- » Biological Thresholds: Sustained body temperatures above 35°C impair human functioning, making cooling a matter of survival.

Structural and Indigenous Solutions

India must adopt both passive and technological innovations:

- » Passive Cooling: White reflective roofs and heat-resistant building designs.
- » Indigenous AC Systems: Energy-efficient models tailored to humid climates and unstable power supply.
- » District Cooling Networks: Centralised cooling systems, as seen in Singapore and Dubai, for large-scale urban efficiency.

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Policy and Financial Framework

The 16th Finance Commission, led by Arvind Panagariya, has recommended classifying heatwaves as a National Disaster. This would unlock central funding through the State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF) for heat management. Unlike floods or earthquakes, heat-related deaths often remain invisible, despite their devastating toll.

The Ahmedabad Heat Action Plan (HAP) offers a model of success. Developed after the deadly 2010 heatwave that claimed over 1,300 lives, it has since saved thousands and become a global benchmark for preparedness.

Conclusion

India must move from short-term heatwave responses to a comprehensive cooling strategy. Treating thermal safety as a matter of public health, labour rights, and urban governance is essential. With structural reforms, indigenous innovation, and dedicated funding, India can build resilience against one of its most silent yet deadly threats.

US–India Relations Strained: Trust Deficit Widens

Rubio Fails to Win India Back Amid Growing US–India Trust Deficit

During the U.S. Secretary of State's visit to India (May 23–26, 2026), bilateral ties encountered a visible roadblock. Strategic experts and think tanks caution that America's protectionist economic policies and shifting diplomatic priorities are undermining a partnership once described as the most consequential of the 21st century.

The Trust Deficit

A report by the Center for a New American Security (CNAS) titled "Repairing the Breach: Getting U.S.-India Ties Back on Track" highlights three major friction points that emerged in late 2025:

- » Post-Operation Sindoor Dynamic: After India's counter-terror campaign against Pakistan-backed infrastructure, New Delhi expected global

isolation of Islamabad. Instead, Washington praised Pakistan's role in mediating the Iran crisis, which India viewed as a betrayal.

- » Aggressive Trade Protectionism: The U.S. imposed 50% tariffs on Indian exports, followed by a 25% penalty for India's continued purchase of discounted Russian crude oil.
- » Neglect of the Quad: The absence of leadership-level summits and waning enthusiasm downgraded the Quad, raising fears that the U.S. was deprioritizing the grouping in favor of transactional ties with China.

The Marco Rubio Visit (May 2026) and Diplomatic Friction

The visit of Secretary of State Marco Rubio failed to reassure India and instead reinforced the transactional nature of U.S. policy:

- » Stalled Trade Commitments: No progress was made on the pending bilateral trade pact.
- » Public Disagreements: U.S. claims of India committing to \$500 billion in imports were swiftly rejected by Indian officials.
- » Strategic Amnesia: Upon returning to Washington, both President Trump and Rubio omitted India, Prime Minister Modi, and the Quad from official debriefs, signaling India's diminished priority.

The Enduring Foundation

Despite current strains, long-term structural realities continue to bind the two nations:

- » Indo-Pacific Balance of Power: India remains vital to counter authoritarian expansion and uphold a free, rules-based maritime order.
- » Geopolitical Tech Competition: Supply chain resilience in semiconductors, AI, defense co-production, and clean energy requires India's scale and participation.
- » Bipartisan Engagement: Track-1.5 dialogues persist, with U.S. think tanks engaging Indian leadership to preserve institutional trust.

Conclusion



The India–U.S. partnership rests on strong structural logic, but present ties are weakened by a deep trust deficit fueled by transactional and protectionist policies. Repairing the relationship will require moving beyond short-term political gains and recommitting to shared strategic and technological objectives.

Viksit Bharat: The Productivity Mandate

Productivity and Viksit Bharat – India's Growth, Manufacturing Challenges & Economic Reforms

Growth Alone Is Not Enough

India's ambition to become a *Viksit Bharat* rests not just on high GDP numbers but on the quality of growth. With real GDP expanding at 6.5% in 2024–25, supported by strong domestic demand, fiscal consolidation, and a stable financial sector, the foundations appear solid. Yet, beneath the surface lies a persistent weakness: low productivity, fragile manufacturing, and insufficient job creation.

Why Productivity Matters

Economic growth without productivity is like effort without results. Just as doubling study hours without effective learning yields little progress, GDP growth without efficiency cannot sustain prosperity. Higher productivity ensures:

- » Better wages and living standards
- » Competitive industries and innovation
- » Sustainable long-term growth
- » Greater employment generation

For India, productivity is the true measure of progress toward developed-country status.

The Missing Manufacturing Bridge

The Kaldor Principle highlights manufacturing as the critical bridge between agriculture and services. Successful economies—China, South Korea, the U.S.—followed this path. India, however, skipped manufacturing, leaping directly from agriculture to services. While services generate wealth, they demand high skills and

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cannot absorb millions leaving farms. This structural imbalance leaves rural India behind.

The Hollow Middle of Industry

India's industrial landscape suffers from a "missing middle." Unlike East Asia, which nurtured mid-sized firms capable of global exports, India is dominated by micro enterprises and large corporations.

- » Small Firms' Trap: Fear of compliance and labour laws discourages growth.
- » Lack of Innovation: Small firms rarely scale up, limiting investment in R&D. This hollow structure undermines productivity and competitiveness.

The Burden of Zombie Firms

Another drag on productivity is the persistence of "zombie firms"—unproductive companies kept alive by banks reluctant to recognize bad loans. Instead of allowing creative destruction, resources remain locked in failing enterprises. This misallocation prevents capital and labour from flowing to innovative startups and productive industries.

The Master Plan – Four Interventions

To repair structural weaknesses, India must act decisively:

- » Global Integration – Move beyond assembly to become a key node in global supply chains.
- » Ease of Exit – Strengthen the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code to allow failing firms to exit quickly.
- » Labour and Land Reforms – Simplify laws to encourage small firms to scale up.
- » Credit Reallocation – Redirect banking capital toward innovative, productive enterprises.

Conclusion

India's current growth trajectory is promising but fragile. To achieve *Viksit Bharat*, the nation must shift from headline GDP numbers to structural productivity reforms. Building a robust manufacturing base, eliminating zombie firms, and empowering

small enterprises to scale will ensure inclusive, sustainable prosperity. Only then can India's growth translate into genuine development for all its citizens.