JUNE 15TH - 30TH EDITORIALS

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Rise of Drone Warfare in the 21st Century

Introduction

- Drone technology has significantly transformed modern combat, introducing complex asymmetrical threat scenarios.
- The affordability and high-impact capability of UAVs—especially in swarm formations—have highlighted weaknesses in traditional air defence systems.
- Incidents such as Ukraine's FPV drone operation against Russia and Pakistan's drone swarm offensive during Operation Sindoor (May 2025) demonstrate the urgent need for India to rethink its air defence framework.

The Evolution of UAVs: From Early Use to Asymmetrical Tactics

- **Initial Deployment:** Drones were first used during World War II and the Korean War primarily for training purposes, simulating enemy aircraft.
- **Post-Gulf War Era:** The 1991 Gulf War marked a turning point, where UAVs were extensively employed for reconnaissance and surveillance missions.
- **Turning Point – Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict (2020):** Azerbaijan's deployment of Bayraktar TB2 and Israeli Harop drones proved decisive, neutralising Armenian air defence and armour with remarkable efficiency.

Global Examples of Drone-Based Warfare

- **Russia-Ukraine War:** Ukraine's "Operation Spider's Web" (June 2025) launched over 100 FPV drones deep into Russian territory, destroying more than 40 aircraft valued at $7 billion. Conversely, Russia has deployed Iranian Shahed-136 drones to target Ukraine's energy systems and saturate its air defences.
- **Middle East:**
  - In Yemen, Houthi rebels have used drone swarms to strike Saudi oil facilities.
  - In Gaza, Hamas employed UAVs for surveillance and strikes, while Israel countered with AI-powered precision drones.
- **Key Lesson:** Even low-tech, low-cost drones can inflict strategic and economic damage when used creatively and in coordinated operations.

Rising Challenge: Swarm Drone Attacks

What Are Swarm Drones?

- These are groups of drones that function in coordination, sharing real-time data and adjusting to threats dynamically.
- **Strengths:**

- o   Redundancy ensures mission completion even if some units are downed.
- o   AI allows for real-time decision-making and adaptability.
- **India's Experience (May 2025):** Pakistan launched a series of drone swarm attacks from Baramulla to Barmer over several days, aiming to saturate defences, deplete resources, and test India's response systems.

Obstacles in Combating Drone Threats

- **Cost Disparity:** When a drone worth $1,000 can damage or destroy a $200 million asset, the cost-benefit ratio heavily favours the attacker. Using expensive interceptors on cheap drones is economically unsustainable.
- **Geographical Vulnerability:** India's vast and porous borders, combined with dense populations, make early detection and interception difficult.
- **Strategic Coordination:** As highlighted by former Air Marshal Anil Chopra, countering drones requires seamless integration across intelligence, law enforcement, air defence, and cyber domains.

India's Anti-Drone Capabilities

1. **Technological Innovations**
   - o   **Akashteer System:** A unified command-and-control platform integrating real-time inputs with the Indian Air Force.
   - o   **Bhargavastra:** A high-speed launcher capable of releasing 64 micro-rockets to neutralise incoming drones.
   - o   **DRDO's Anti-Drone Solution:** Provides 360° coverage with a detection range of 4 km and a 1 km laser-based neutralisation zone.
   - o   **Indrajaal by Grene Robotics:** AI-powered defence network covering 4,000 sq km using a mix of radar, jammers, and spoofers—already operational in Gujarat and Karnataka.

2. **Response During Operation Sindoor (May 2025):**
   - o   India activated its Integrated Counter-UAS grid.
   - o   Deployed a combination of radar systems, missiles, and electronic warfare tools to defend 15 critical installations.
   - o   Local intelligence and law enforcement units played vital supporting roles.

Strategic Shifts: AI, Startups, and Swarm Autonomy:

- CDS General Anil Chauhan emphasized the dawn of "machine-versus-machine" warfare.
- India's drone ecosystem is expanding rapidly with:
  - o   Over 550 startups focusing on drone and anti-drone solutions.

- An emphasis on homegrown R&D and strategic collaboration.
- **AI-Enabled Swarms:**
  - Can navigate autonomously.
  - Make dynamic decisions during missions.
  - Operate effectively in GPS-denied or jammed environments.

Policy and Institutional Framework

- **Defence Industrial Corridors (DICs):** Driving the growth of drone manufacturing hubs in Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh.
- **DRDO and iDEX:** Supporting innovation through partnerships with private firms, startups, and academia.
- **Cybersecurity & Civilian Drone Regulations:** Overlap between military and civilian drone concerns necessitates tighter coordination under DGCA and MoCA.
- **Legal Measures:** India's ban on drone imports (excluding defence and R&D) reinforces self-reliance and promotes domestic production.

The Way Forward

- **Integrated Defence Framework:** Merge radar systems, jammers, directed-energy weapons, interceptor drones, and human intelligence into a unified defence grid.
- **Doctrine Revisions:** Update military doctrines to address AI-driven, asymmetric warfare.
- **Training and Public Vigilance:** Local police, and even civilians, must be trained to recognize and report drone threats.
- **Boost AI and Cyber Capabilities:** Increase R&D in AI-driven threat detection and secure networks against cyber interference.
- **Global Partnerships:** Collaborate with allies such as Israel (Iron Dome) and the U.S. (M-SHORAD) to access advanced technologies and best practices.

Conclusion

- The future battlefield is increasingly unmanned, unpredictable, and relentless.
- The rise of smart, low-cost, and mobile drones demands that India not only counter emerging threats but also reshape its strategic doctrines accordingly.
- With focused investment in indigenous technologies, AI integration, and multi-layered defence infrastructure, India has the opportunity to convert its current challenges into a foundation for long-term military superiority in drone warfare.

India's Fiscal Consolidation Journey

Context

- The article reviews the Government of India's fiscal performance for **FY 2024–25 (FY25)** based on provisional data.
- It discusses trends in deficit management, capital expenditure, revenue collection, and upcoming policy challenges relevant to macroeconomic stability and fiscal federalism.
- Also evaluates implications for the fiscal year **FY26**.

Fiscal Performance in FY25: Mixed Outcomes

- **Fiscal Deficit:**
    - Stood at **₹15.77 trillion**, slightly above the Revised Estimate (₹15.7 trillion).
    - As a percentage of GDP, contained at **4.8%**, meeting targets aided by higher nominal GDP.
- **Revenue Deficit:**
    - Reduced to **₹5.7 trillion**, below the Revised Estimate of ₹6.1 trillion.
    - At **1.7% of GDP**, this marks a 17-year low and improvement from the 1.9% target.
- **Capital Expenditure (Capex):**
    - Surpassed expectations, reflecting a stronger focus on infrastructure.
    - April 2025 saw a **61% year-on-year rise** in capex, reaching ₹1.6 trillion.

Revenue and Receipt Challenges

- **Tax Revenue Shortfall:**
    - Gross tax collections missed FY25 targets by ₹0.6 trillion.
    - For FY26, tax revenue needs to grow at **12.5%** (up from an earlier 10.8% forecast) to meet targets.
- **Higher RBI Dividend Transfer:**
    - RBI's dividend to the government exceeded budget estimates by ₹0.4 trillion, providing some relief for FY26.
- **Miscellaneous Capital Receipts:**
    - April 2025 receipts were **46% of the FY26 budget estimate**, compared to none in April 2024, signaling positive momentum.

FY26 Outlook: Optimism with Caution

- **Nominal GDP Revision:**
    - FY25 nominal GDP was 2% higher than the initial advance estimate.
    - Despite a lower nominal growth forecast of 9% for FY26 (by ICRA), the fiscal deficit can be kept at **4.4%**, helped by a larger base.
- **Capex Momentum:**

- o Capital expenditure might exceed budget estimates by ₹0.8 trillion, totaling ₹12 trillion, supporting continued public investment.
- **Expenditure Pattern:**
    - o FY26 will require faster growth in revenue expenditure but slower capex growth, due to front-loaded spending in April.

Emerging Fiscal Policy Considerations

- **Finance Commission Report:**
    - o The 16th Finance Commission's upcoming recommendations will reshape fiscal relations between Centre and States for the next five years.
- **Geopolitical & Defence Spending:**
    - o Rising global tensions may lead to increased defence budgets, potentially crowding out development spending.
- **8th Pay Commission Impact:**
    - o The timing of the Pay Commission award may strain central finances and influence State fiscal policies.
- **GST Compensation Cess:**
    - o The likely end of GST compensation cess in its current form raises concerns about future revenue sharing between Centre and States.

Serving Justices, But Not Justice

Context

- The Indian judiciary is widely regarded as the guardian of constitutional morality and a trusted institution.
- However, recent scandals have damaged its credibility, with the case of Justice Yashwant Varma— where sacks of cash were found during a fire at his official residence—highlighting deeper issues.
- The problem extends beyond allegations of corruption to the lack of transparency in the judiciary's internal accountability system, known as the **'in-house procedure'**.

Justice Varma Controversy: Indicative of a Bigger Issue

- On March 14, a fire at Justice Varma's residence led to the discovery of half-burnt sacks allegedly containing cash.
- He was swiftly transferred and relieved from the Delhi High Court; later, an impeachment recommendation was made based on a judicial inquiry.
- Key evidence like police reports and inquiry findings remain undisclosed.

- The sacks of cash mysteriously disappeared, allegedly removed by Varma's staff, raising doubts about investigation integrity.
- Questions about why evidence wasn't preserved and law enforcement's role remain unanswered, hidden behind judiciary secrecy.

'In-House Procedure': Institutionalized Lack of Transparency

- This informal judicial system handles misconduct allegations internally by judges alone, with no public insight or accountability.
- Key issues:
  - No public disclosure about whether inquiries happen or their results.
  - No adherence to legal or due process norms.
  - No external oversight or appeal mechanism.
- The judiciary demands accountability from others but shields itself, undermining its legitimacy.

Past Cases Reflecting Secrecy and Impunity

- **Justice Ramana (2020):** Serious allegations dismissed without explanation; no public inquiry records.
- **Sexual Harassment Allegations against CJI Ranjan Gogoi (2019):** Inquiry by peers cleared him without complainant's legal representation; complainant reinstated only after his retirement, implying procedural flaws.
- **Justice Surya Kant:** Despite corruption and abuse allegations, no public investigation exists, yet his career remains unaffected, showing in-house system's tendency to overlook controversies.

Legal Status of Israel's Strikes on Iran

Israel's recent military attacks on Iran raise a significant question for the international community: are these actions lawful under international law?

Legal Framework on the Use of Force:

UN Charter Restrictions:

- **Article 2(4)** prohibits the use of force in international relations.
- **Article 51** allows an exception for self-defence if an armed attack occurs, subject to necessity and proportionality.

According to international law expert Marko Milanovic, self-defence is triggered only by an actual armed attack. Since Iran or its proxies have not carried out a direct armed attack attributable to Iran, Israel's current strikes lack a clear legal basis.

Pre-emptive and Anticipatory Self-Defence:
- Israel justifies its actions by claiming pre-emptive self-defence, citing Iran's nuclear advancements as an existential threat.
- This type of self-defence is contentious and is not supported by Article 51, which requires an ongoing or imminent attack.

The Caroline Doctrine (1837) sets strict conditions for pre-emptive action:
- The threat must be instant, overwhelming, leaving no choice but to act immediately.
- The response must be proportional.

Interpretations of "Imminent" Threat:
- **Narrow (Restrictive) View:** An attack must be about to happen in the near future.
- **Broad (Expansive) View:** Imminence can include hypothetical or distant threats.

Legal consensus favors the narrow interpretation to prevent powerful states from abusing pre-emptive justifications based on speculation. The Caroline Doctrine supports this strict standard, emphasizing urgency and necessity.

Applying This to Israel's Strikes:

Israel's rationale, centered on Iran's nuclear progress, aligns with the broad and legally unsupported interpretation of imminence. Without evidence of an immediate Iranian attack, the legal criteria for anticipatory self-defence remain unmet.

Significance of International Legal Norms:
- **Accountability:** International law, despite its limits, is the essential framework to judge state actions' legitimacy.
- Ignoring these norms weakens global order and encourages unilateral aggression.
- Upholding legal principles is crucial to ensure states are held accountable, preserve international legitimacy, and avoid impunity—even in cases of violations.

The Real Challenges of Foreign University Branch Campuses in India

The arrival of foreign university branch campuses in India, spurred by the University Grants Commission's (UGC) 2023 regulations, represents a significant shift in the country's higher education landscape. With institutions like Australia's Deakin University and University of Wollongong establishing campuses in

Gujarat's GIFT City, and the University of Southampton setting up in Gurugram, India is actively welcoming global academic players. Recently, Letters of Intent have been issued to five additional foreign universities, signalling growing momentum.

The Vision Behind Transnational Education

- India's push to allow foreign branch campuses is driven by the goal of internationalizing its higher education system, bringing in global expertise, and offering students the chance to experience world-class education domestically. Ideally, this policy could raise academic standards by introducing superior curricula, teaching methods, and academic cultures. It could also spur Indian private universities to innovate and enhance quality through healthy competition.

- Yet, the initial phase of this initiative has been inconsistent. Some foreign campuses began admitting students before revealing crucial academic details such as faculty qualifications and curriculum content. This rush, possibly fueled by optimism or market forces, raises concerns about transparency, preparedness, and proper planning.

Challenges in an Already Crowded Education Sector

1. **Political and Global Uncertainties:** Transnational education worldwide is facing uncertainty. For example, political shifts in the United States have constrained international expansion in higher education, making ventures like the Illinois Institute of Technology's India campus rare exceptions rather than common practice. Additionally, many foreign institutions interested in India are not among the elite universities in their home countries. In India, where prestigious institutions like IITs and IIMs enjoy global recognition and are expanding international partnerships, foreign campuses may be perceived as second-tier unless they offer unique advantages.

2. **Struggle for Academic Identity:** A critical issue is the lack of distinctive academic identity. Many foreign campuses offer popular, market-focused courses—business, data analytics, computer science—that Indian universities already excel in. Without a comprehensive academic mission or strong research focus, these campuses risk being seen as mere diploma mills, lacking depth and rigorous scholarship. Their limited scale and often temporary setups add to this perception.

3. **Excessive Dependence on Marketing:** Another concern is the overreliance on marketing rather than academic substance. Flashy campaigns and promotional materials may draw initial interest, but Indian students and their families increasingly seek solid evidence of faculty expertise, relevant curricula, international collaborations, and job placement records. Moreover, many branch campuses operate from rented vertical buildings, missing the vibrant campus culture typical of established universities. True education institutions offer more than classes—they provide libraries, communal spaces, extracurricular opportunities, and a sense of community.

Moving Forward: Addressing the Challenges

1. **Meeting Local Needs:** India's goal should not just be to attract foreign universities, but to invite those that align with national goals and show commitment to long-term engagement.
2. **Strengthening Regulations and Academic Standards:** Each foreign campus proposal should be rigorously assessed on academic merit, faculty quality, research orientation, responsiveness to local challenges, and its ability to complement India's existing educational ecosystem. Simply being an international institution should not guarantee approval.

The Critical Minerals Age – Strategic Imperatives for India and the World

Context:
- The article discusses the growing importance of critical minerals in global geopolitics, economic strategies, climate initiatives, and technology development.
- It draws comparisons with previous historical periods named after key metals and stresses the urgent need for India to develop and secure its mineral resources for economic and strategic benefits in the 21st century.

Historical Evolution of Metal Use:
- About 7,000 years ago, humans moved from the Neolithic to the Chalcolithic Age, beginning metal use.
- Followed by the Bronze and Iron Ages, each defined by increased metal utilization.
- The 19th and 20th centuries saw coal and oil power the first two Industrial Revolutions.
- The 21st century is called the Critical Minerals Age, with rare minerals playing a crucial role in modern technologies.

Strategic Importance in Global Politics:
- Geopolitics:

- o The US under Trump prioritized control over mineral-rich areas like Canada, Greenland, and Ukraine.
  - o China uses its dominance in rare earth minerals as leverage in trade disputes.
- US domestic policy changes include opening large federal lands for mineral exploration and drastically reducing approval times for mining projects.

Climate Change and Technological Demand:

- Green technologies such as electric vehicles (EVs), solar panels, and wind turbines require large amounts of minerals.
- EVs use six times more minerals than traditional cars; offshore wind farms need nine times more minerals than fossil fuel plants.
- Technologies from the Fourth Industrial Revolution (AI, robotics, digital infrastructure) demand minerals like copper (for conductivity), lithium, cobalt, and nickel (for batteries).

Supply Chain Concentration and Risks:

- Critical minerals are concentrated in few countries:
  - o Cobalt mainly from the Democratic Republic of Congo.
  - o Indonesia controls about half of global nickel mining.
  - o China dominates rare earth mining and processing (66% mining share, over 90% processing).
  - o Lithium production is centered in Australia, Chile, and China.
- China's control over processing facilities for copper, aluminum, rare earths, and others poses risks to global supply chains, especially for EV and clean energy industries.

India's Position and Strategic Priorities:

- Challenges:
  - o Mineral reserves in India are under-explored.
  - o Heavy reliance on imports for essential minerals.
  - o Limited domestic processing capabilities.
- Strategic responses:
  - o Adopt fast-track policies for exploration and processing, similar to the US.
  - o Focus on domestic exploration to reduce import dependence and boost manufacturing self-reliance.
  - o Utilize India's geological resources to achieve mineral independence and strengthen industrial competitiveness.

Exiting Refugee Status, Getting Back Dignity

- Recent events in India and Sri Lanka have renewed debates about the long-standing presence of Sri Lankan refugees in Tamil Nadu.
- These highlight India's dilemma between repatriating refugees or integrating them permanently.
- The situation reveals legal, humanitarian tensions and inconsistencies in India's refugee policies.

Supreme Court's Stance and Judicial Shifts:

- The Supreme Court upheld the Madras High Court's decision to deport a Sri Lankan refugee who completed his sentence under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act.
- The Court remarked that India is not a "Dharamshala" (free shelter) for refugees worldwide, signaling a shift from India's historically compassionate approach.
- This reflects rising concerns about security and political priorities overshadowing humanitarian considerations.

Sri Lanka's Detention of a Returning Refugee:

- A 70-year-old Sri Lankan refugee who voluntarily returned was detained by Sri Lankan authorities for leaving without valid documents.
- The detention happened despite UNHCR facilitation and was later lifted after public outcry.
- This highlights risks and outdated laws in origin countries that criminalize returnees, pointing to the need for legal reforms.

Contrast Between Tibetan and Sri Lankan Refugee Policies in India:

- Tibetans (approx. 63,000) enjoy formal support and freedoms under the 2014 Tibetan Rehabilitation Policy, with access to education, jobs, and government schemes.
- Around 90,000 Sri Lankan refugees, mostly in Tamil Nadu, lack similar legal recognition or integration policies.
- Many Sri Lankan refugees, despite being qualified, face employment and livelihood challenges due to lack of legal status and corporate reluctance.

Policy Recommendations:

- India's default position of repatriation for Sri Lankan refugees is becoming unrealistic after 40+ years of exile.
- Many refugees were born and raised in India and view Sri Lanka as unfamiliar and unsafe due to penal laws.
- A comprehensive, inclusive policy similar to the Tibetan model should be created to allow refugees to integrate, access education, work, and live with dignity.

- Such a policy would preserve the option of repatriation for those who want it, but ensure On World Refugee Day, India faces the challenge of addressing contradictions in its refugee approach.

Revitalising UK–India Cultural Ties: A New Era of Creative Diplomacy

In May 2025, the strategic partnership between India and the United Kingdom expanded meaningfully into the cultural realm with the signing of the **Programme of Cultural Cooperation (POCC)**. While the finalisation of the Free Trade Agreement attracted widespread attention, the POCC marks a parallel commitment to fostering cultural exchange, creativity, and mutual understanding.

Programme of Cultural Cooperation (POCC): Key Features

On **2 May 2025**, the UK Secretary of State for Culture, **Lisa Nandy**, and India's Culture Minister, **Gajendra Singh Shekhawat**, formalised the POCC. This cultural pact focuses on five thematic areas:

- **Digital technologies in culture**
- **Exhibitions and heritage collections**
- **Performances and cultural events**
- **Cultural property protection**
- **Sustainability in the arts**

The agreement aligns with both countries' strategic visions: advancing the UK's creative economy and strengthening India's global cultural presence. It recognises culture as both an economic engine and a diplomatic asset.

The Creative Economy: A Global Growth Driver

The POCC comes amid a global surge in the creative economy, forecast to contribute **10% of global GDP by 2030**. This sector includes film, music, gaming, heritage tourism, and digital media—industries that blend economic output with social inclusion and identity.

At the **G20 Summit in New Delhi (2023)**, leaders endorsed the potential of creative industries. India further reinforced this agenda by hosting the **World Audio Visual & Entertainment Summit (WAVES)** in Mumbai, with strong UK participation.

India's Cultural Strength and Bilateral Synergies

1. A Unique Blend of Tradition and Innovation

India's cultural sector, valued at **$35 billion**, employs nearly **8% of the workforce**, second only to agriculture. Notably, many creative hubs lie outside metropolitan centres, highlighting India's grassroots

talent. With thousands of institutions offering degrees in arts and design, and the world's largest youth population, India is well-positioned to become a global creative leader.

2. Institutional and Technological Collaborations

The POCC facilitates partnerships with key UK cultural bodies such as the **British Library**, **British Museum**, and **Science Museum Group**, offering opportunities for collaborative digitisation, exhibitions, and academic exchange.

UK participation in India's G20 cultural events, such as **Wales in India** and contributions to the **Hornbill Festival in Nagaland**, shows the expanding depth of cultural ties. Private sector examples, like **Royal Enfield's Himalayan Project** with UNESCO, further demonstrate the synergy of business, sustainability, and heritage conservation.

Challenges and Path Forward

Despite momentum, the sector faces key challenges:

- **Lack of skilled workforce**
- **Inadequate training infrastructure**
- **Rapid technological changes (AI, AR/VR)**

To address this, the **British Council** has recommended greater integration of emerging technologies into arts education. Initiatives like the POCC can help professionals gain global competencies and adaptability.

Conclusion: A Tri-Sectoral Imperative

To transform India into a global creative hub—as envisioned by Prime Minister Modi—a collaborative effort is required:

- **Governments** must frame inclusive, forward-looking policies.
- **Industry** must develop sustainable creative business models.
- **Academic institutions** must provide interdisciplinary, tech-integrated training.

The POCC is not just a cultural pact but a catalyst for deeper, future-oriented India–UK relations.

It Is Still Not Too Late for India's Voice to Be Heard

On **June 13, 2025**, Israel launched a unilateral military strike on Iranian territory, reigniting global concerns about militarism carried out without accountability or international consensus. At a time when diplomatic progress between Iran and the United States was gaining traction, this attack has not only escalated tensions but also exposed double standards in international responses. In this context, India's role as a potential mediator becomes both a moral imperative and a strategic necessity.

A Reckless Escalation: The Israeli Strike

Israel's recent assault on Iranian soil has drawn sharp international criticism. The strike disrupted ongoing diplomatic efforts between Tehran and Washington, which had completed five rounds of negotiations in 2025, with a sixth scheduled.

What makes the attack particularly troubling is that **U.S. Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard** testified in March 2025 that Iran was not actively pursuing a nuclear weapon. Her confirmation that Supreme Leader **Ali Khamenei** had not authorised any such programme since 2003 casts serious doubt on the pretext for military action.

Understanding the Politics of Escalation

1. **Netanyahu's Calculated Aggression:** The strike reflects a broader pattern under Prime Minister **Benjamin Netanyahu,** whose government is allied with ultra-nationalist groups and has abandoned the two-state solution. Netanyahu's political record, including his indirect association with the climate that led to Prime Minister **Yitzhak Rabin's assassination** in 1995, suggests a preference for confrontation over compromise.

2. **US Complicity and Rhetorical Contradictions:** President **Donald Trump's** assertion on June 17 that Iran is nearing nuclear armament contradicts his own intelligence agencies. This dissonance echoes the misinformation campaigns of the early 2000s and undermines international credibility. Such politicised narratives often feed escalation rather than diplomacy.

3. **Nuclear Hypocrisy and Regional Double Standards:** Israel's anxieties over Iran's nuclear capacity are shadowed by its own **undeclared nuclear arsenal** and refusal to sign the **Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)**. In contrast, Iran remains an NPT signatory and was compliant with the **Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)** until the U.S. unilaterally withdrew in 2018.

   This exit reversed years of patient diplomacy and had broader economic consequences — notably for India. The **reimposed sanctions** have stalled key Indian strategic projects, including the **Chabahar Port** and the **International North-South Transport Corridor**, critical for India's connectivity and energy security.

4. **Gaza and India's Disquieting Silence:** India's muted response to Israel's ongoing campaign in **Gaza** is a notable shift from its traditionally principled foreign policy. New Delhi's reluctance to call for restraint or reiterate support for the two-state solution reflects both strategic hesitancy and moral ambiguity.

India's Diplomatic Stakes and Responsibilities

- India and Iran share long-standing civilisational and strategic ties — from Iran's support on Kashmir at the **UN in 1994** to robust energy and trade cooperation. This support is especially notable given the pro-Pakistan stance of pre-revolution Iran.
- Simultaneously, India's ties with **Israel** have flourished in areas like defence, agriculture, and innovation. This dual engagement positions India uniquely — not as a partisan actor, but as a potential **credible mediator** in West Asia.
- Moreover, the safety of the **millions of Indians living and working in the Gulf region** makes regional stability a matter of direct national interest.

The Path Forward: Reclaiming India's Moral Leadership

This crisis in West Asia is not merely a test of diplomatic dexterity but a moment to reaffirm India's historical commitment to **peace, justice, and non-alignment**. India must:

- **Condemn disproportionate military actions**, regardless of the actor.
- **Promote a return to multilateral diplomacy**, especially through forums like the UN.
- **Facilitate dialogue** between Iran and Israel, leveraging its balanced relations.
- **Uphold international law** and support frameworks like the NPT and JCPOA.
- **Reiterate support for the two-state solution** in the Israel-Palestine conflict.

India's voice still matters — but only if it chooses to speak with clarity, courage, and conscience.

For the sake of peace, at the cost of war

Iran's Nuclear Policy Trajectory: A Four-Phase Evolution

1. Phase I (1968–1979): Iran as a Model Non-Proliferation State

- Iran signed the **Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT)** on its opening day in 1968 and ratified it in 1970.

- Under **Shah Reza Pahlavi's White Revolution**, Iran actively pursued civilian nuclear energy and gained a reputation for adhering to non-proliferation principles.
- Iran's nuclear programme remained consistent with peaceful objectives, aligned with NPT obligations.

2. Phase II (1979–2002): Ambiguity Post-Islamic Revolution

- The **1979 Islamic Revolution** transformed Iran's political landscape; Ayatollah Khomeini's stance on nuclear weapons remained uncertain.
- During the **Iran-Iraq War**, Iraq's use of chemical weapons prompted a strategic reassessment in Iran, raising questions about nuclear deterrence.
- Despite accumulating technical capabilities, Iran did not overtly pursue nuclear weaponization.
- Ambiguity over Iran's nuclear intentions persisted, fostering international suspicion.

3. Phase III (2002–2015): Disclosure, Sanctions, and the JCPOA

- In 2002, the **National Council of Resistance of Iran** revealed two undeclared nuclear sites in **Natanz** and **Arak**, violating NPT transparency requirements.
- Iran's failure to declare these facilities led to increasing scrutiny by the **International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)**.
- Iran's 2003 **Additional Protocol agreement** with France, Germany, and the UK to allow expanded inspections failed due to lack of reciprocal diplomatic support.
- In 2006, Iran suspended implementation of the Protocol and the **UN Security Council** imposed sanctions (2006–2014).
- Under **President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad**, Iran asserted its right to enrich uranium for civilian purposes despite mounting economic costs.
- Diplomatic engagement resumed under **President Hassan Rouhani**, leading to the **Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)** in 2015.
    - Iran agreed to comprehensive restrictions exceeding NPT requirements.
    - In return, sanctions were lifted, and Iran briefly regained its status as a compliant state.

4. Phase IV (2018–Present): Collapse of the JCPOA and Renewed Escalation

- In 2018, the **U.S. unilaterally withdrew from the JCPOA** under President Donald Trump, reimposing sanctions under a "maximum pressure" strategy.

- Iran responded by incrementally breaching JCPOA limits, initially under dispute-resolution clauses.
- By 2022, Iran had enriched uranium close to weapons-grade levels, heightening global concern.
- Recent **Israeli airstrikes on Iranian nuclear facilities**, supported by the returning Trump administration, have further destabilized the situation.
- European powers have cautioned against unilateral military action, fearing collapse of the global non-proliferation regime.
- **Article X of the NPT** allows withdrawal under extraordinary circumstances—Israel's aggression may provide such grounds for Iran.
- Withdrawal could trigger a **regional arms race**, prompting nations like Saudi Arabia to pursue nuclear capabilities.

Institutional and International Responses

IAEA and UN Security Council Perspectives

- The IAEA and the UN Security Council have shifted from cooperative to coercive strategies in response to Iran's evolving nuclear stance.
- Their actions reflect a broader international divide between proponents of diplomatic engagement and advocates of sanctions or military deterrence.

Global Consensus and Divergence

- While major powers differ on strategy, there is a shared consensus: **Iran must not acquire nuclear weapons**.
- Iran's new President, **Masoud Pezeshkian**, has reaffirmed a policy against nuclear armament but insists that **Israeli aggression obstructs diplomacy**.
- Iran maintains one hand on the nuclear option amid escalating regional tensions.

Current Dynamics and Future Outlook

Ongoing Nuclear Advancement

- Iran has made significant technical progress in nuclear enrichment while officially denying weaponization intent.
- International negotiations, including a proposed **third-country enrichment facility**, have stalled due to Israel's recent military actions.

Risks to the NPT Framework

- The credibility of the **NPT** is at stake. Should Iran formally exit, the global nuclear order could face unprecedented strain.
- The threat of a **nuclear-armed Iran or a pre-emptive war to prevent it** looms large, both scenarios antithetical to the NPT's original purpose.

A Decade of India's Economic Transformation: Growth Trends, Equity Issues, and Policy Directions

Overview:

As Prime Minister Narendra Modi marks 11 years in office, this analysis reviews India's macroeconomic performance, comparing it to the 2004–2014 period. It highlights major achievements, lingering issues of inclusivity, and policy directions going forward — particularly in agriculture and subsidy reforms.

Macroeconomic Performance: GDP Growth – Nominal and PPP Terms: India's nominal GDP grew significantly — from $709 billion in 2004 to $2.04 trillion in 2014. It is projected to reach $4.19 trillion by 2025, putting India on track to surpass Germany and become the world's fourth-largest economy. In terms of purchasing power parity (PPP), GDP expanded from $2.75 trillion (2004) to $6.45 trillion (2014), and is expected to touch $17.65 trillion in 2025 — ranking third globally, behind only China and the United States.

Per Capita Income (PPP): India's PPP-based per capita income grew from $2,424 in 2004 to $4,936 in 2014 and is projected to reach $12,132 by 2025. The country's global ranking improved from 181st in 2004 to 149th in 2025. However, it still lags behind most G20 countries, including China, Sri Lanka, and Bhutan — though it has moved ahead of Pakistan and Bangladesh.

Inequality and Inclusion: India's Gini coefficient, a key measure of income inequality (0 = perfect equality; 1 = perfect inequality), has shown limited fluctuation. It moved from 0.34 in 2004 to 0.35 in 2014 and slightly declined to 0.33 by 2021, indicating relatively stable — though moderate — inequality levels.

Agricultural Growth and Social Welfare: Agriculture: Despite two consecutive drought years (2014–15 and 2015–16), agricultural GDP grew at an average annual rate of 4% from FY15 to FY25, surpassing the 3.5% rate recorded during FY05–FY14, which included a severe drought in 2009–10.

Welfare Programs:

- **PM-KISAN:** Direct income transfers to farmers
- **Public Distribution System:** Nearly free monthly grain rations (5 kg/person) to 800 million citizens
- **Subsidized rural housing**
- **Fertilizer price controls (especially on urea)**

Poverty Reduction: These interventions led to a sharp decline in extreme poverty.

- At the $3/day (PPP, 2021) threshold, the poverty headcount dropped from 27.1% in 2011 to 5.3% in 2022 — a 80% reduction.
- At the $4.20/day threshold (for lower-middle-income countries), poverty fell from 57.7% to 23.9% in the same period — a 60% drop.

Towards Smarter Subsidies: Food Subsidy Reform: The FY26 food subsidy budget stands at ₹2.03 lakh crore, providing nearly free grains despite declining poverty. A shift to digital food coupons — valued around ₹700/month for the poorest 15% — would allow beneficiaries to purchase nutritious food (pulses, milk, eggs) from approved outlets. This would improve diet diversity, plug system inefficiencies, and support a broader food economy.

Fertilizer Subsidy Reform: With ₹1.56 lakh crore earmarked for FY26, fertilizer subsidies also require restructuring. By distributing fertilizer coupons and deregulating prices, farmers could choose between chemical, organic, or natural fertilizers. This would encourage more balanced nutrient use (N, P, K), reduce wastage, and foster innovation.

Implementation Challenges:

- Identifying tenant farmers
- Integrating data from multiple sources
- Building trust through early and transparent communication — a politically sensitive but necessary precursor to reform

Global Lessons from Operation Sindoor: Unity, Strategy, and the Road Ahead

Projecting National Unity on the Global Stage:

- A defining strength of India's diplomatic offensive during Operation Sindoor was the striking bipartisan unity on display. The delegations included Members of Parliament from across the political spectrum, religions, and regions — a powerful image of national solidarity.
- In a world where domestic rifts often weaken a country's global credibility, India's united front projected seriousness, maturity, and purpose. This unanimity bolstered India's case in key discussions with international figures, including the U.S. Vice-President and the President of Guyana.
- Speaking with one voice gave India's messages — centered on self-defence, justice, and peace — greater credibility and resonance.

Operation Sindoor: Legitimacy and Measured Action

- India's global outreach sought to clarify the rationale and measured nature of Operation Sindoor. The operation was framed not as retaliation but as a lawful, proportionate response targeting terrorist infrastructure.
- Indian representatives emphasized the care taken to avoid civilian or Pakistani military casualties — underscoring a disciplined and ethical approach.
- This narrative paid off. For instance, Colombia, which initially raised concerns about civilian harm, reversed its stance and affirmed India's right to self-defence. The incident illustrated the impact of clear, persistent, and fact-based diplomacy in dispelling myths and correcting global misperceptions.

Counterterrorism Messaging and International Consensus

- Another critical pillar of India's diplomatic engagement was exposing Pakistan's continued backing of terrorism. Delegations presented hard evidence of cross-border terrorist operations and the involvement of groups such as Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed.
- These messages resonated, especially in Washington D.C., where U.S. officials, even while interacting with Pakistani envoys, acknowledged India's concerns.

Beyond the Crisis: Sustained Diplomatic Engagement

- Operation Sindoor also underscored the value of long-term engagement beyond emergency
- responses. Indian delegations were well received in countries like Panama, Guyana, and Colombia — all influential in the UN system.
- Panama's open support for India's permanent seat at the UN Security Council demonstrates the strategic payoff of investing in parliamentary diplomacy and soft influence.
- Engaging think tanks, legislators, and international media proved crucial. Without proactive messaging, misinformation can fill the void. Ensuring Indian perspectives are visible and heard globally is not optional — it's critical for defending national interests.

Cultural Diplomacy and Emotional Connection

The operation's name, *Sindoor*, carried symbolic weight domestically, but also sparked international curiosity. This created opportunities to share India's cultural stories.

Strategic Pathways Forward: The Three T's — Tech, Trade, Tradition

India's global ambitions can be anchored in a balanced triad:

- **Technology:** India must elevate its standing in future technologies like AI through focused diplomacy and collaboration.
- **Trade:** With growing competition, especially from China, India should expand trade relationships, highlighting its strengths as a democratic and rule-based partner.
- **Tradition:** Cultural diplomacy remains a powerful tool to project India's values and worldview.

Implementing the Delegation's Recommendations

Several actionable steps emerged from the delegation's tour:

1. **Strengthen diplomatic presence** in South and Central America through language training, expanded embassies, and regular high-level exchanges.
2. **Keep terrorism on the global agenda** by persistently raising the issue in multilateral forums, including direct engagement with UN leadership.
3. **Deepen ties with strategic partners** like Brazil, Panama, and Guyana for both political backing and economic cooperation, especially in energy and infrastructure.

Navigating the Indian Economy Through Global Turbulence

- The global economy is undergoing significant upheaval, marked by shifting trade dynamics, rising geopolitical tensions, and a growing wave of protectionism.
- As trade wars escalate and tariff frameworks are revisited, the global economic environment has become increasingly volatile — impacting not only international trade but also financial markets and long-term growth prospects.
- In this evolving scenario, India finds itself at a critical juncture: facing external pressures but also presented with strategic opportunities to reposition itself within the global economic order.

Global Trade Landscape: Key Risks and Challenges

1. **Rising Protectionism and Tariff Uncertainty:** The U.S., India's largest export market, has moved towards more protectionist trade policies across successive administrations. Frequent reviews of trade deals, new reciprocal tariffs, and a preference for bilateral over multilateral agreements have created uncertainty for Indian exporters.
2. **Legal Ambiguities in Trade Policy:** Unpredictability in U.S. trade actions is further complicated by legal hurdles. Recent rulings, like that of the U.S. Court of International Trade, have questioned the legality of certain tariff measures, leaving Indian policymakers unsure of long-term outcomes.

3. **Intensifying Global Competition:** India also faces stiff competition from countries like China, Bangladesh, and Vietnam — especially in textiles, electronics, and manufacturing. These nations may gain preferential access to major markets like the U.S. and EU, potentially disadvantaging Indian exports.

Strategic Opportunities for India

1. **Proactive Trade Diplomacy:** India's early move to negotiate a Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA) with the U.S. reflects a forward-looking strategy. Finalising such deals quickly could give India a competitive edge — particularly if they ensure zero-tariff access in key sectors, protect services exports, and address non-tariff barriers through mutual recognition agreements.

2. **Expanding Trade Partnerships:** The recently concluded Free Trade Agreement with the UK is a step in the right direction. India must now fast-track similar agreements with the EU and Australia, broadening market access and reducing reliance on any single trade partner.

Policy Roadmap for the Future

1. **Guarding Against Dumping:** India must strengthen its trade defence mechanisms, including anti-dumping duties, to protect domestic industries from cheap imports and unfair pricing.

2. **Sustaining Public Investment:** Continued public capital expenditure is vital for cushioning external shocks and catalyzing private sector investment — laying a foundation for long-term growth.

3. **Maintaining Accommodative Monetary Policy:** With inflation moderating, the Reserve Bank of India should maintain a supportive interest rate environment to encourage borrowing, production, and investment.

4. **Attracting Foreign Investment:** India should position itself as an attractive alternative to China for global firms. Strategic sectors like electronics, e-mobility, and green energy hold particular promise for securing large-scale foreign direct investment (FDI).

Structural Reforms: A Long-Term Imperative

India's economic resilience must be underpinned by continued structural reforms. Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) schemes should be expanded to include high-growth emerging areas such as IoT devices, wearables, hearables, and advanced battery components.

This will enhance domestic manufacturing capabilities, reduce reliance on imports, and elevate India's position in global value chains.

Helicopter Crash in Uttarakhand: A Wake-Up Call for Systemic Reform

On June 15, 2025, a helicopter crash near Gaurikund, Uttarakhand, claimed seven lives. This tragedy marks the **fifth such accident in six weeks**, exposing a deepening crisis in **aviation safety, tourism infrastructure, and environmental governance** in the Himalayan region. Despite persistent warnings from experts and legal authorities, **unregulated tourism expansion**, lax oversight, and **profit-driven operations** continue to endanger both lives and fragile ecosystems.

Himalayan Ecology under Strain from Mass Tourism
- **Char Dham Circuit Overdevelopment**: The aggressive promotion of religious tourism has led to rapid, often reckless, development — roads, heliports, and hotels — in a high-risk ecological zone.
- **Environmental Fragility**:
  o The Himalayas lie in a **high seismic zone**.
  o **Climate change** is intensifying hazards like **cloudbursts, landslides, and glacier melt**.
  o Unregulated construction is causing **soil erosion, deforestation, and slope destabilisation**.
- **Ignored Red Flags**: The **2013 Kedarnath disaster**, which claimed over 6,000 lives, should have been a turning point. Yet, **over-tourism and unchecked infrastructure** have only escalated since then.

Aviation Safety Challenges in Mountain Terrain
- **Complex Terrain and Weather**:
  o Pilots navigate steep gradients, narrow valleys, and volatile weather with limited visual cues.
- **Inadequate Infrastructure**:
  o Many helipads lack essential **navigation and weather-monitoring systems**.
  o Emergency response units are **under-equipped and poorly trained** for mountainous rescues.
- **Overburdened Operations**:
  o High-frequency helicopter services during peak pilgrimage seasons often **compromise safety protocols**, including **maintenance and pilot rest** norms.

Weak Regulation and Oversight

- **DGCA Limitations**:
  - While the DGCA mandates audits for mountain operations, **implementation is patchy**.
  - There's **little coordination** with state disaster management agencies.
- **Operator Violations**:
  - Reports of **cost-cutting, technical cover-ups, and SOP violations** are frequent.
  - Inexperienced staff and overworked pilots increase accident risks.
- **Tourism vs. Safety Trade-off**:
  - Local authorities often **prioritize tourism revenues** over safety, ignoring risks tied to the politically symbolic Char Dham circuit.

Warnings Ignored: Legal and Scientific Pushback

- **Court Orders Overridden**:
  - The **Supreme Court** had placed limits on Himalayan road widening; these were ignored.
  - The **National Green Tribunal (NGT)** has repeatedly highlighted violations in hill-state construction norms.
- **Scientific Expertise Dismissed**:
  - Institutions like **IIT Roorkee, G.B. Pant Institute, and Wadia Institute** have warned against ecological overstretch, slope failure, and glacial retreat — to little effect.

Broader Lessons and Implications

- **Lives at Stake**: Increasing fatalities among pilgrims and aviation personnel point to systemic neglect.
- **Climate Preparedness Gap**: The tragedy reveals **India's lack of climate resilience integration** in tourism and infrastructure planning.
- **Governance Crisis**: Repeated disasters damage **public confidence** in the state's ability to govern responsibly in high-risk zones.

Path Forward: Reform with Accountability

1. Strengthen Regulation

- Equip **DGCA regional offices** with mountain-specific expertise.

- Enforce **real-time weather monitoring**, flight caps during poor conditions, and **strict pilot rest/rotation policies**.

2. Sustainable Tourism Planning

- Implement a **carrying capacity-based model** as proposed in the **2018 NITI Aayog report**.
- Limit daily tourists and helicopter sorties during peak seasons.
- Promote **eco-tourism** and **staggered pilgrimages** to reduce environmental strain.

3. Ecological Safeguards

- Designate **no-construction zones** in ecologically vulnerable areas.
- Make **Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs)** mandatory even for religious infrastructure.
- Leverage **geospatial technology** to identify risk-prone zones before planning development.

4. Institutional Integration

- Establish a **"Himalayan Disaster Risk & Tourism Safety Authority"** under the **NDMA**, combining aviation, environment, and tourism safety mandates.
- Include **local communities** in planning, emergency preparedness, and ecological monitoring.

5. Public Awareness

- Launch campaigns targeting **tourists, operators, and pilgrims** on safety and environmental responsibility.
- Develop **mobile platforms** for real-time weather alerts, flight status, and safety tips.

India's Fall in the Global Gender Gap Index 2024

Introduction

The **Global Gender Gap Report 2024**, published by the **World Economic Forum (WEF)**, brings troubling news for India. The country has slipped to **131st position among 148 nations**, down two ranks from last year—signaling deep-rooted challenges in achieving gender equality. This downward trend underscores the urgent need to reassess India's policies and actions aimed at bridging the gender divide.

Understanding the Global Gender Gap Index

Introduced by WEF in **2006**, the **Global Gender Gap Index** evaluates countries on the level of gender-based disparities in four key areas:

- **Economic Participation and Opportunity**
- **Educational Attainment**
- **Health and Survival**
- **Political Empowerment**

Scores range from **0 (complete inequality)** to **1 (full parity)**, with a country's overall index reflecting its average performance across these categories.

India's 2024 Performance: Snapshot
- **Global Rank**: 131 out of 148
- **Gender Parity Score**: 64.1%
- **Position in South Asia**: Among the lowest
    - *Bangladesh*: Rank 24
    - *Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka*: All ahead of India

India's lag in gender parity is especially concerning given that the **global average score rose to 68.5%**, and the projected time to close the global gap dropped from **143 years (2023)** to **123 years (2024)**.

Breakdown by Indicator

1. Economic Participation & Opportunity
- Minor improvement in score by **0.9 percentage points**
- **Female labour force participation** remains low at **45.9%**
- **Women concentrated in low-wage, caregiving sectors**
- **Wage gap** persists—women earn **20–30% less** than men
- High levels of **unpaid and informal work** go unrecorded

Conclusion: Without policy reforms that recognize unpaid labour and address wage inequality, true economic empowerment remains out of reach.

2. Educational Attainment
- Consistent gains in school enrolment at primary and secondary levels
- **Female literacy** still lags at **~70%** (vs **87%** global average)
- Underrepresentation of women in **STEM fields**
- **Social norms and early marriages** restrict higher education for girls, especially in marginalized communities

3. Health and Survival
- **Sex ratio at birth** remains imbalanced (~929 girls per 1000 boys)

- Women suffer disproportionately from **maternal malnutrition**, **anaemia**, and **lack of reproductive health services**
- Gender-based neglect in healthcare is driven by **patriarchal mindsets**

4. Political Empowerment
- **Women's representation in Parliament** has dropped from **14.7% to 13.8%**
- **Female ministers** declined from **6.5% to 5.6%**
- Poor performance in this area heavily impacts India's overall rank

Despite the **Women's Reservation Bill (2023)** being passed, delays in census and delimitation are stalling its implementation.

Regional and Global Comparisons
- **Bangladesh** continues to outperform India, aided by strong female leadership and gender-focused policies
- **Nepal's constitution** mandates women's participation in governance
- Surprisingly, **lower-income countries** are closing gender gaps faster than many wealthy nations, proving that **political will matters more than economic status**

Lesson for India: Economic growth alone is not enough—gender equity must be integrated into governance, culture, and institutions.

Why Gender Parity is Critical
- **Economic Growth**: Gender parity in the workforce could **boost India's GDP by $700 billion by 2025** (McKinsey)
- **Better Outcomes**: Health, education, and governance improve with greater gender equity
- **Demographic Advantage**: A young, working-age population can only deliver results if women are empowered

Persistent Challenges
- **Cultural patriarchy** influences every life stage of a woman
- Lack of **infrastructure and safety** deters female employment
- A pronounced **digital gender divide** hampers women's access to education and employment
- **Implementation gaps** in laws and schemes restrict real progress

Recommendations and Way Forward

Focus Area	Strategic Actions
Political Representation	Speed up census/delimitation and implement Women's Reservation Bill by **2029**
Unpaid Labour	Incorporate into national accounts; expand support for caregivers
Female Workforce Participation	Promote skilling, flexible jobs, and safe workplaces
Leadership Development	Encourage quotas on boards and mentorship programs in STEM, politics
Digital Access	Provide subsidized devices/internet; scale digital literacy (e.g. PMGDISHA)
Data and Monitoring	Enforce gender-disaggregated data in surveys; develop live dashboards

Conclusion

India's slip in the Global Gender Gap Index is not merely a statistical setback but a clear reflection of **systemic and cultural obstacles** that continue to marginalize women. Gender parity is not just a **social goal**—it is a **strategic economic necessity**. The path forward is well-defined; what remains is the **political will, societal support, and effective implementation** to turn plans into progress.

The Need for Gender Equity in Urban Bureaucracy

Context

- By 2050, over 800 million people, nearly half the population, are projected to reside in cities, positioning India as the largest contributor to global urban growth.
- As urban spaces swell in size and influence, they are not merely changing skylines, but redefining the very fabric of democracy and development.
- Central to this transformation is the question of who shapes and benefits from urban growth.
- In this context, gender equity is not just a social ideal but a structural necessity.

The Rise of Women in Local Politics and Persistent Gaps

- In the last three decades, India has made significant strides in enhancing women's political representation.

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- The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments introduced a mandatory 33% reservation for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions and Urban Local Governments (ULGs).
- Several states have gone further, increasing this quota to 50%. As a result, women today account for over 46% of elected local representatives.
- This political inclusion is historic and transformative, creating a pipeline of women leaders at the grassroots.
- However, this political progress starkly contrasts with the reality of gender imbalance in urban administration.
- Women constitute just 20% of the Indian Administrative Service, and their numbers are even lower in urban planning, municipal engineering, and transport authorities.
- In policing, a critical pillar for urban safety, only 11.7% of personnel are women, often confined to desk jobs.
- This structural gap is not just numerical; it profoundly affects urban policy outcomes.
- Women engage with cities differently than men.
- They rely more on public transport, make complex, multi-stop journeys, and are more dependent on neighbourhood-level infrastructure.
- Yet, urban planning continues to favour large-scale projects over the local needs that define women's everyday lives.
- Studies show that a lack of women in decision-making roles results in public spaces that are poorly lit, unsafe, and inadequately serviced for their needs.

Gender-Responsive Budgeting: A Missed Opportunity

- An important tool for institutionalising gender equity is Gender-Responsive Budgeting (GRB).
- Recognised globally since the 1990s, GRB integrates gender considerations into public financial planning.
- India formally adopted GRB in 2005–06, and states like Delhi, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala have pioneered its implementation in urban contexts.
- Despite these efforts, most cities continue to treat GRB as a token gesture rather than a transformational tool.
- Weak monitoring, limited technical capacity, and a narrow understanding of gender needs have rendered these initiatives ineffective in many urban local bodies.
- For example, vital aspects such as pedestrian safety, street lighting, and childcare are frequently ignored.

- In contrast, countries like Rwanda, Mexico, and South Korea have embedded GRB into national and urban governance with strong oversight, participatory frameworks, and results-based budgeting.

The Way Ahead

1. **Learning from Global and Local Examples**
   - Rwanda's gender-balanced policies have led to increased investments in maternal health and education.
   - Brazil has redirected funding to improve sanitation and primary healthcare, and South Korea has reshaped transit systems through gender impact assessments.
   - The Philippines funds gender-based violence shelters via gender-tagged budgeting. These are not just policy tweaks; they are paradigmatic shifts toward citizen-centric, inclusive governance.
   - India also has successful homegrown models.
   - The Kudumbashree programme in Kerala has empowered women through participatory planning and community development, offering a replicable model for other cities.
   - These examples show that gender equity is achievable with political will, institutional support, and community engagement.

2. **Towards Truly Inclusive Urban Governance**
   - To build truly inclusive cities, India must go beyond political quotas and address the deep-rooted gender gap in urban governance.
   - This means systemic reforms in recruitment, retention, and promotion of women across bureaucratic and technical roles.
   - Affirmative action, such as scholarships and reserved positions in urban planning and engineering, is vital to dismantle structural barriers.
   - Moreover, tools like GRB must be mainstreamed, audited, and tied to performance metrics.
   - Capacity-building in smaller cities is essential, as is the establishment of local gender equity councils to ensure accountability and participatory oversight.
   - When women not only hold office but also wield real power in administration, planning, and budgeting, cities become safer, more equitable, and better governed.

West Asia Reset: A Regional Shift with Global Implications

Changing Dynamics in West Asia

- The joint airstrikes by **Israel and the United States** on Iran represent a major geopolitical shift.

- Iran's strategic influence has been significantly weakened.
- **Israel now emerges as the uncontested military power** in the region.
- The **silence of Russia and China**—despite alliances with Iran—signals:
    o A calculated strategic withdrawal.
    o A new reconfiguration of alliances and power balances.

Post-Conflict Regional Landscape

1. **Israel's Ascendancy**
   - Iran's nuclear capacity has been dismantled.
   - Israel remains the **only nuclear-armed state** in West Asia.
   - This dominance is supported by: **40,000 U.S. troops and a** broad network of American bases across the region.
   - Goals:
       o Prevent the re-emergence of military threats.
       o Consolidate a **new regional order**.
   - Gulf states' response to Iran's rise included:
       o Strengthening ties with Israel and the U.S.
       o De-emphasizing broader regional issues (e.g., Palestinian statehood).
       o Signing **Abraham Accords** to normalize relations with Israel.
2. **Iran's Desperation and Escalation**
   - Iran retaliated by:
       o Targeting U.S. bases in **Qatar and Iraq**.
       o Claiming the response was proportional to U.S. bombing.
   - However, Iran also:
       o **Violated Qatari sovereignty**, raising intra-regional tensions.
   - Perceived existential threats:
       o Regime change aimed at ending Iran's **theocratic rule**.
   - Risk of collapse:
       o No clear alternative leadership.
       o Potential for chaos similar to **Iraq and Libya**.
   - Gulf nations must:
       o Recognize their role in Iran's isolation.

o Act to **prevent regional destabilization** and extremist resurgence.

A Fragile Pause and the Return of Diplomacy

1. **Ceasefire and Its Implications**
   - The U.S. unexpectedly **called for a ceasefire** between Israel and Iran.
   - This served multiple purposes:
     o Gave Iran space to de-escalate without losing face.
     o Highlighted vulnerabilities even among powerful militaries.
   - Iran's retaliation may have pressured the U.S. into restraining Israel.
   - **Lessons for Gulf nations**:
     o Strategic alignment with power does not guarantee protection.

2. **Revival of Nuclear Diplomacy**
   - Ceasefire reopens the door for:
     o Renewed talks on the **Iran nuclear deal**.
   - Gulf states should support these efforts:
     o Not as charity, but as a **strategic imperative** for regional stability.

Emerging Crisis: Palestine and the 'Eretz Israel' Vision

1. **Netanyahu's Expansionist Agenda**
   - Israeli PM Netanyahu is now:
     o Pushing for the realization of **'Eretz Israel'**—a Greater Israel from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean.
     o Backed by far-right figures like **Itamar Ben-Gvir** and **Bezalel Smotrich**.
   - Annexation plans include:
     o **Gaza and the West Bank**.
     o Publicly presented maps at international forums (e.g., UN).

2. **Two Future Paths for Israel:**
   1. **Institutionalize apartheid** by denying Palestinians equal rights.
   2. **Transition to a binational democracy** offering equal citizenship.
   3. Historical and political realities suggest:
     o Israel is more likely to pursue the **former**, preserving Jewish majoritarianism.

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Gulf States' Strategic and Moral Crossroads

- Despite public statements, Gulf nations have:
    - **Muted their opposition** to Israeli actions in Palestinian territories.
    - Prioritized stability, peace deals, and access to Western markets.
- The humanitarian cost is steep:
    - Over **56,000 killed in Gaza**.
    - Massive displacement.
    - Ongoing settler expansion in the West Bank.
- Risk:
    - Continued disengagement may undermine their **regional credibility and domestic legitimacy**.

India's Quiet and Calculated Diplomacy

- India has adopted a **neutral, non-interventionist stance**:
    - Did not condemn Israel.
    - Avoided siding with Iran.
- Strategic interests include:
    - Strong defense ties with Israel.
    - Investments in Iran's **Chabahar Port**.
- India's call for "de-escalation":
    - Reflects a **pragmatic, interest-based diplomacy**.
    - Mirrors global trends where:
        - **Stability and transactional alliances** outweigh concerns over legality and sovereignty.
- Challenge:
    - Maintaining **strategic autonomy** in a divided and polarized West Asia.

Conclusion: Fragile Peace, Long-Term Uncertainty

- The new order:
    - **Iran weakened**,
    - **Israel empowered**,
    - **U.S. deeply entrenched**.

- Risks:
    - o Temporary military calm masking deeper **political exclusion and demographic suppression**, especially of Palestinians.
    - o A likely return of conflict if underlying injustices remain unresolved.
- Gulf states, having traded moral leadership for security, now face:
    - o The **responsibility to contain future instability**.
- A lasting solution requires:
    - o **Revived diplomacy**.
    - o **Inclusive governance**.
    - o **Strategic restraint** to avoid permanent unrest in this critical global region.

Safeguarding Legal Counsel: Implications of the ED Summons for the Rule of Law

Background and Context

- In **June 2025**, the **Enforcement Directorate (ED)** issued summons to **senior legal professionals**, including **Arvind Datar** and **Pratap Venugopal**, over legal opinions provided in a **corporate ESOP matter** involving **Religare and Care Health Insurance**.
- The ESOP (Employee Stock Ownership Plan) allows employees to gain equity ownership in the company through stock allocation.
- The ED's actions triggered **concern within the legal fraternity**, prompting debate over **advocate-client privilege**, **independence of the legal profession**, and **agency overreach**.

Core Legal Principles at Stake

1. **Attorney-Client Privilege**
    - Under the **Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam (BSA), 2023** – which supersedes the Indian Evidence Act – **Section 132** upholds the confidentiality of legal communications unless consent is given.
    - No evidence of legal misconduct was found in this case, making the ED summons **legally unfounded**.
2. **Professional Duty under the Advocates Act, 1961**
    - Advocates are obligated to offer impartial and courageous legal advice, as per **Bar Council Rules**.
    - Legal privilege is crucial for lawyers to carry out their duties **free from intimidation or state interference**.

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Broader Implications for Constitutional Democracy

1. **Threat to Legal Independence**
   - Summoning lawyers without any criminal allegations **disrupts the separation of powers**, infringing on the independence of the Bar and the legal process.
   - This sets a **concerning precedent** — what begins with corporate counsel could extend to **defence attorneys or constitutional lawyers**.

2. **Impact on Legal Practice**
   - **Psychological and professional chilling effect**:
     o Lawyers may hesitate to take on sensitive or high-profile matters.
     o Encourages **self-censorship** and **risk aversion**.
   - Potential decline in **public interest litigation**, **activist advocacy**, and **constitutional challenges**.

3. **Structural Risks to Democracy**
   - Weakening of **independent legal counsel** could lead to a **pliant, compromised legal profession**.
   - The **long-term consequences** could be deeply damaging to democratic accountability and institutional integrity.

Urgent Need for Institutional Safeguards

1. **Judicial Intervention**
   - The courts must assert that:
     o Legal professionals **cannot be summoned** for opinions rendered in good faith.
     o Legal advice is a form of **protected expression**, not criminal complicity.
     o Such protections are inherent to India's **constitutional structure**.

2. **Role of Bar Councils**
   - Proactively defend the **professional independence** of lawyers.
   - Engage constructively with enforcement agencies to **define permissible boundaries** of inquiry.

3. **Legislative Reform**
   - Enact laws to **strengthen statutory protections** for legal counsel.
   - Curb the **abuse of laws** like the **Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA, 2002)** against members of the legal profession.

Conclusion – Reasserting Constitutional Boundaries

- The ED's actions, though partially rolled back, represent a **disturbing intrusion** into the **legal profession's autonomy**.
- If lawyers begin fearing their own professional opinions may be used against them, it **threatens the foundations of the justice system**.
- There is a pressing need to **affirm constitutional safeguards** for legal counsel, not merely to protect individuals, but to uphold the **rule of law** in a democratic society.

India's Performance in QS World University Rankings 2026

Introduction

- The **QS World University Rankings 2026** highlight notable progress in **India's higher education sector**.
- This upward momentum stems from **structural reforms** and a growing emphasis on **quality education**.
- Despite these improvements, **significant challenges** remain, demanding deeper reforms and enhanced funding.

Rise of Private Higher Education

- Between **2011-12 and 2021-22**, private university enrolment **increased nearly five times**.
- In contrast, public institutions recorded a modest **20–25% rise** in enrolments.
- Many private universities have earned places in the QS rankings due to:
    o Strong **infrastructure**
    o **International partnerships**
    o **Specialized, career-oriented programs**
- **Concern:** The high cost of private education limits accessibility for economically disadvantaged students, raising **equity issues**.

Enrolment and Gender Inclusion

- The **Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER)** improved from **23.7% (2014-15)** to **28.4% (2021-22)**.
- **Female students now represent nearly 50%** of higher education enrolments.
- Indicates **progress toward gender parity**, particularly in urban and semi-urban areas.

Continuing Structural Challenges

Despite the positive trends, several systemic issues persist:

- **Faculty Shortages:** Public institutions often report **30–40% faculty vacancies**.
- **Infrastructure Deficits:** Many Tier-2 and Tier-3 colleges lack modern **labs, libraries, and digital facilities**.
- **Inadequate Funding:** Public universities operate under **constrained budgets**, hindering quality improvements.
- **Low Research Output:** Limited presence in **high-impact journals** and weak **citation-per-faculty scores** in global rankings.
- **GER Gap:** Achieving the **NEP 2020 goal** of 50% GER by 2035 appears challenging at the current pace.

Policy Initiatives and Reforms

The government has introduced key reforms to transform higher education:

- **NEP 2020** envisions a **flexible, multidisciplinary** academic ecosystem.
  - Launch of the **National Research Foundation (NRF)** to foster research.
  - Establishment of **Multidisciplinary Education and Research Universities (MERUs)**.
- Other reforms include:
  - **Academic Bank of Credits**
  - **Four-Year Undergraduate Programmes**
  - **Internationalisation** of education
- Schemes like **RUSA** and **PM-USHA** target **equity-based funding** for state universities.
- **Challenge:** The success of these initiatives depends on **timely fund disbursement**, **regulatory simplification**, and **capacity building**.

Interdependence with School Education

- Higher education quality is shaped by the **foundation laid in school education**.
- Many students lack essential skills upon entering college, affecting their **academic performance and employability**.
- Assessments like **PISA** and **NAS** reveal stark differences in **basic literacy and numeracy** across states.
- Strengthening **early learning**, **teacher training**, and **school infrastructure** is critical for sustained improvements.

Inclusion and Regional Disparities

- While top-tier institutes like **IITs and IISc** continue to excel, many **state colleges and universities lag** behind.
- **Southern states** fare better in terms of educational access and quality compared to **central and northern states**.
- The **digital divide**, intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic, remains a barrier to **equitable learning opportunities**.

The Road Ahead

To consolidate recent gains and address persistent issues, India must:

- **Raise education spending** to at least **6% of GDP**, as per NEP 2020.
- **Activate the NRF** to boost impactful, interdisciplinary research.
- Encourage **foreign faculty recruitment** and **academic exchange programs**.
- Shift towards **outcome-based education** aligned with emerging industries like **AI, sustainability, and climate science**.
- Expand global outreach through the **"Study in India"** initiative.

Conclusion

- The 2026 QS Rankings reflect India's **improved global standing**, especially due to the rising presence of **private universities** and consistent excellence from **premier institutes**.
- However, to truly become a **global knowledge leader**, India must ensure a **balanced approach** that prioritizes **access, equity, and excellence** in its higher education policies.

Enabling Voting Rights for Migrants

Context:

- Bihar, which experiences one of the highest rates of out-migration in India, is preparing for upcoming elections later this year. During the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, the voter turnout in Bihar was just 56%, significantly lower than the national average of 66%.
- One major cause for this low turnout was the large migrant population who were unable to return home to cast their votes.
- In light of this, the article explores various options to enable both inter-state and intra-state migrants to exercise their voting rights, emphasizing the necessity of a multi-faceted strategy.

Migration Patterns and Risks of Disenfranchisement:

- As of 2021, India's migration rate was 28.9%, with the majority moving due to marriage, especially among women. However, approximately 10% of migrants relocate for employment purposes, with this figure being notably higher in states like Bihar.
- The growing trend of labour migration from poorer states to wealthier regions poses a significant risk of disenfranchisement for many citizens unless voting mechanisms tailored for migrants are implemented.
- Although discussions have occurred publicly and the Election Commission of India (ECI) proposed concrete solutions in 2024, a unified system to guarantee migrant voting access has yet to be established. Different types of migrants require distinct strategies.

Proposed Solutions for Intra-State Migrants:
Intra-state migrants, who make up around 85% of the migrant population, could potentially return to their home constituencies to vote if provided with adequate support. Suggested measures include declaring polling days as statutory holidays to ensure workers don't lose wages when voting and organizing special bus services prior to and on polling days to help migrants travel back to their voting locations.

Mechanisms to Enable Voting for Inter-State Migrants:
Inter-state migrants, particularly those engaged in informal and low-paid jobs, face unique challenges in exercising their voting rights. Hence, a single, uniform approach is inadequate; instead, multiple mechanisms need to be explored and implemented.

- **Remote Electronic Voting Machines (RVMs):** In 2023, the ECI introduced RVMs as a pilot initiative, with each machine capable of serving up to 72 constituencies. These machines, developed by BEL and ECIL, allow migrants to vote remotely in a secure, non-networked manner. They feature dynamic ballots and barcode-based constituency identification. However, political parties raised concerns about transparency, voter identification, and adherence to the model code of conduct. Additionally, administrative challenges such as pre-registration of migrants, constituency-wise presence assessment, and machine deployment across cities complicate large-scale implementation, particularly during Lok Sabha elections. Despite these limitations, RVMs mark a significant initial step and could benefit many migrants with further refinement.
- **Postal Ballots:** Currently used by armed forces personnel, postal ballots could be extended to migrants. This would involve pre-registration of voters, issuing ballots, and establishing systems

for their return. While easier to implement than RVMs, this approach still demands significant logistical coordination from the ECI.

- **Changing Voting Constituency:** This option targets long-term migrants who have resided in a new location for at least six months. It empowers them to participate in local governance and advocate for inclusive policies. While there may be resistance from local residents, this method supports the democratic integration of migrants over the long term.
- **Enrolment of Women Migrants:** Many women migrate due to marriage and often remain unenrolled in electoral rolls at their new residences. Targeted voter registration campaigns are recommended to include this key demographic in local electoral lists.

Conclusion:

Due to the diverse nature of migrant populations, enabling their voting rights is a complex issue. A combined approach employing various methods—including RVMs, postal ballots, constituency switching, and focused enrolment efforts for women—is essential to promote broader electoral participation among both inter-state and intra-state migrants.

A Lofty Concept, a Governor, and Unwanted Controversy

Context:

- A recent dispute in Kerala has erupted over the Governor's decision to display a picture of Bharat Mata during official functions, sparking a major debate about constitutional propriety, symbolism, and the role of historical imagery in public institutions.
- This seemingly small incident raises important questions about whether unofficial, emotionally charged symbols can be accorded official status within a constitutional democracy.
- The controversy touches upon issues of constitutional protocol, the scope of gubernatorial power, and the risks of conflating political symbolism with national identity.

Overview of the Controversy:

- The conflict began when the Governor of Kerala installed a painting of Bharat Mata—a female figure dressed in a saffron sari, holding a spear, and accompanied by a lion—at official ceremonies in Raj Bhavan. This room, adorned with the image and a brass lamp placed in front, has become the venue for official events.

- The Governor consistently bows to the picture, offers flowers, and lights the lamp as part of the ceremonial rituals. However, the Kerala state government raised constitutional objections, arguing that this portrayal of Bharat Mata is not a nationally recognized symbol like the flag, anthem, or emblem.
- As a result, Kerala's government has boycotted official functions where this picture is displayed.

Symbolism, the Freedom Struggle, and Legal Considerations

- **Symbolism and the Freedom Movement:** The slogan 'Bharat Mata ki Jai' was a powerful emotional expression during India's struggle for independence. It was chanted passionately during the anti-colonial resistance, evoking patriotism among freedom fighters. However, this slogan was not tied to any specific or official visual depiction of Bharat Mata. The symbolism was more abstract and focused on the idea of the nation rather than any standardized image. Although the concept of India personified as a mother began gaining ground in the 19th century, the contemporary saffron-clad Bharat Mata image has clear ideological origins. Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay's novel *Anandamath* introduced the notion of a motherland but focused on Banga Mata rather than Bharat Mata. Later, Abanindranath Tagore painted a goddess-like Bharat Mata image, popularized by Sister Nivedita. Still, no single image of Bharat Mata was ever officially adopted during the independence movement.

- **Constitutional and Legal Perspective:** The Indian Constitution does not assign any official or legal status to any image of Bharat Mata. While cultural and emotional expressions are valid in a democracy, they cannot supersede constitutional norms or official protocols. The Governor's picture, despite its historical background, has never been formally endorsed by the nation. Moreover, the image has become strongly linked with ideological groups such as the RSS and BJP, politicizing the symbol. This association makes the picture's presence at official state events contentious and potentially exclusionary in a secular, pluralistic country. B.R. Ambedkar's clear statement during the Constituent Assembly that Governors have no independent functions reinforces the constitutional limits on their authority. Governors must act according to the advice of elected governments, especially regarding official functions. Using an unofficial, ideologically charged symbol breaches the impartiality and secularism expected of constitutional offices.

The Nehruvian Ideal of Bharat Mata, Nationalism, and Governance

- **Nehru's Interpretation:** Jawaharlal Nehru's view of Bharat Mata, expressed in *The Discovery of India*, is particularly enlightening. Nehru described Bharat Mata not as a deity or goddess but as a symbol of India's people—their hopes, struggles, and collective future. When explaining the slogan 'Bharat Mata ki Jai,' Nehru emphasized that it referred to "these millions of people," underscoring the nation's democratic and humanistic essence. This perspective aligns better with the secular and inclusive principles enshrined in the Constitution, contrasting with mythologized or sectarian visual representations.

- **Nationalism, Imagery, and Modern Governance:** This debate highlights a deeper divide in Indian nationalism between inclusive civic nationalism and ethno-religious symbolic nationalism. Gandhi's vision was founded on moral values, pluralism, and unity amid diversity. On the other hand, anthropomorphic images with religious or sectarian undertones tend to exclude rather than unite, reinforcing ideological divisions. The revival of such imagery in current political discourse risks regressing to a 19th-century style of nationalism that does not suit India's complex social and cultural fabric today. Given India's immense diversity, a single image—especially one resembling a particular religious archetype—cannot represent the entire nation.

Governor vs. Government: A Recurring Pattern:

The Kerala incident is not isolated; clashes between Governors and state governments have been common in Indian federal politics. The Supreme Court has issued clear guidelines limiting gubernatorial discretion, yet political tensions often arise due to differences between central and state authorities. Raj Bhavan, like Rashtrapati Bhavan, is not just a residence but an institutional space for constitutional functions. Symbols displayed there must have national legitimacy and reflect the neutrality of state institutions. Allowing personal or ideological symbols into these spaces undermines institutional impartiality and sparks avoidable political conflict.

Trump's Geopolitical Disruption and the Reordering of Eurasia
Context:
This article examines how former US President Donald Trump's foreign policy moves—ranging from military strikes in Iran to his controversial questioning of NATO's relevance—are reshaping geopolitical alignments throughout Eurasia. It highlights Germany's rise as a strategic leader in Europe, changing power dynamics in the Middle East, and the ripple effects of US disengagement from the Indo-Pacific.

Together, these developments signal the emergence of a new geopolitical order with far-reaching consequences for both global and regional players, including India.

NATO in Transition – Trump and Transatlantic Strains:

NATO currently faces significant uncertainty, exemplified by the 32-member summit in The Hague. Trump's persistent doubts about NATO's importance, along with his push for European countries to increase defense spending, are compelling Europe to reconsider its security dependencies. Amidst questions about US commitment, Germany is stepping up as a new strategic pillar within the continent.

Germany's Strategic Shift – From Hesitation to Leadership:

Historically, post-WWII Germany maintained a limited geopolitical role despite its economic power. However, 2022 marked a turning point, known as Zeitenwende, when Chancellor Olaf Scholz announced a historic shift. Russia's invasion of Ukraine forced Germany to invest €100 billion to upgrade its armed forces and commit to NATO's target of spending 2% of GDP on defense. Under Chancellor Friedrich Merz, Germany is now actively leading NATO initiatives and deploying troops to Lithuania, signaling its growing military assertiveness.

US Middle East Policy – Disruption and Normalization:

Trump's approach in the Middle East combined military actions—such as bombing Iranian nuclear facilities—with diplomatic efforts like ceasefires and proposing "Cyrus Accords" aimed at normalizing Israel-Iran relations. Building on the earlier Abraham Accords that facilitated Arab-Israel normalization, current strategies aim to expand these changes, potentially bringing Saudi Arabia and Iran closer. These shifts are recalibrating the region's security landscape as Iran's influence wanes and alliances realign.

Indo-Pacific Concerns Amid US Pullback:

Notably, key Indo-Pacific allies—Japan, South Korea, Australia, and New Zealand—were absent from the NATO summit, underscoring weakening security ties between Asia and Europe. Trump's hesitance to designate Russia as a threat and his reluctance to fully endorse NATO's Article 5 (collective defense) have unsettled these allies. As a result, countries in the region may pursue greater strategic autonomy and establish more independent security arrangements.

Rethinking Eurasian Security – Structural Change:

The evolving geopolitical environment demands more than increased defense budgets; it calls for a reimagining of regional partnerships. Events like the Ukraine war, tensions within NATO, and Iran's internal challenges reflect a broader systemic shift. New power centers are emerging, with Germany asserting itself in Europe, the Middle East realigning, and the Indo-Pacific exploring self-reliant security strategies—a threefold transformation of Eurasia.

India's Strategic Role in a Changing Eurasia:
India occupies a unique position spanning the Indo-Pacific, Middle East, and Europe, giving it considerable strategic leverage. New Delhi is broadening its European connections, engaging with the Middle East across divisions, managing ties with China, and strengthening partnerships with ASEAN countries, Japan, Australia, and South Korea. While maintaining cooperation with the US, India is simultaneously preparing to navigate an increasingly unpredictable global order marked by shifting power balances.

Conclusion:
Trump's disruptive foreign policies are accelerating a tectonic shift in the global order, forcing Eurasia into profound structural realignment. With Germany emerging as a European leader, the Middle East undergoing regional balancing, and the Indo-Pacific moving toward strategic independence, the era of US-led security assurances is being fundamentally questioned. For India, this evolving landscape presents both significant challenges and promising opportunities, demanding agile diplomacy and forward-looking strategic planning.

India's Major Advancement – Human Spaceflight and ISRO's Growing Ambitions

The involvement of Indian astronaut Shubhanshu Shukla in the Axiom-4 mission to the International Space Station (ISS) represents a landmark event in India's space exploration history. This moment signifies the beginning of India's era in human spaceflight and reflects a significant strategic advancement in ISRO's goals and its partnerships on the global stage.

A Pivotal Moment – Shubhanshu Shukla at the ISS:
Shukla's journey to the ISS stands not only as a personal accomplishment but also as a crucial national milestone in India's space endeavors. Although this mission was not launched on an Indian spacecraft, it marks the practical commencement of India's human spaceflight programme. This mission is more than just a first voyage; it acts as a key stepping stone towards ISRO's Gaganyaan project, India's maiden crewed space mission planned for 2027.

Significance of Participation in Axiom-4:

Shukla's involvement serves as a bridge to the Gaganyaan mission. Having been initially chosen for the Indian crewed flight, his participation in Axiom-4 offers ISRO valuable firsthand experience with launch operations and astronautics, helping India refine safety standards, protocols, and training programs. ISRO's deployment of a support team during the launch also highlights India's active and competent role in international space activities.

Global Human Spaceflight Scenario:

Currently, only three nations—USA, Russia, and China—possess independent human spaceflight capabilities. India is on track to join this elite group, supported by increasing collaboration with global partners such as NASA. Achieving autonomous human spaceflight capacity is critical for India to reduce reliance on foreign platforms for vital space research and exploration, especially for missions to the Moon and Mars.

Changing Space Landscape and India's Emerging Role:

Lower Earth Orbit (LEO), situated between 200 and 2,000 kilometers above Earth, is rapidly becoming crowded with commercial satellites, with private companies, primarily from the US, driving innovation. This shift allows national space agencies to focus more on deep-space missions. With the ISS expected to be retired by 2030, and India not part of the current ISS consortium, the country aims to establish its own space station by 2035, potentially positioning itself as a significant player in the next generation of global space infrastructure.

Technological and Institutional Progress:

Since Indian astronauts like Shukla received their training abroad—in Russia and the US—this has highlighted the lack of indigenous astronaut training facilities. Their experiences are now laying the foundation for India to develop its own astronaut training center, which could also serve international trainees commercially. Expanding human spaceflight capabilities will bolster India's research and development, enabling important microgravity experiments and ensuring India's role in future multinational space missions with prioritized access to space-based research.

Space Diplomacy and Geopolitical Impact:

ISRO's growing prominence has strengthened India-US cooperation, as demonstrated by India's involvement in the Axiom-4 mission. Mastery of human spaceflight will provide India with enhanced leverage in future multilateral space collaborations, boosting its geopolitical influence.

Conclusion:

Shubhanshu Shukla's mission represents more than a symbolic victory; it is the beginning of a new chapter in Indian space exploration. As India targets missions to the Moon, Mars, and plans its own space station, human spaceflight capability is becoming a vital strategic asset that fosters scientific advancement,

enhances national prestige, and promotes international collaboration. This milestone signifies a critical turning point in India's evolution from a space-faring nation to a space power.

The Israel-Iran Ceasefire — Managing the Aftermath

Context

- The ceasefire between Israel and Iran, announced by U.S. President Donald Trump, could be a turning point.
- Despite the announcement, the region remains geopolitically unstable and uncertain.
- Without strategic restraint from key players, the ceasefire's end could be as disruptive as the conflict's start.

Military Gains, Strategic Realignments & Iran's Future

- **Military Achievements and Shifts:**
  - Over 21 months, Israel, with U.S. support, achieved multiple military victories that may ultimately be costly.
  - Hamas in Gaza weakened, but some Israeli hostages remain.
  - Hezbollah in Lebanon has been neutralized.
  - Syria's al-Assad regime replaced by a weakened Islamist government.
  - Yemen's Houthi rebels subdued.
  - Israel and the U.S. claim to have dismantled Iran's nuclear ambitions through military action and assassinations.
  - These changes have shifted regional power but raised unresolved political questions.

- **Iran's Future and Strategic Importance:**
  - Iran remains a key regional player despite sanctions, economic hardship, and war.
  - It opposes Israel and the West and maintains influence via proxy forces.
  - Officially, regime change is not pursued, but the current hardline government remains an 'unfinished agenda' for Washington and Jerusalem.
  - The focus is on neutralizing Iran's WMD ambitions via sanctions and inspections.

- **The Regime Change Dilemma:**
  - Forced regime change risks failure, as seen in Iraq and Afghanistan.
  - Iran's strong political structure, nationalism, and ethnic diversity make direct intervention risky and unlikely to succeed.
  - A more subtle approach aims to internally shift the regime but faces challenges.

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- o The Revolutionary Guards and clergy hold power; Supreme Leader Khamenei favors the status quo.
- o Leadership succession between Mojtaba Khamenei (ideological continuity) and Hassan Khomeini (potential pragmatism) is critical.
- o This transition is unprecedented in over 30 years and carries major regional implications.

The Way Forward for West Asia

- This is a rare opportunity for peace if Iran, Israel, and the U.S. avoid triumphalism and choose moderation.
- Benefits include lower oil prices, stabilized trade routes, and reduced extremism.
- Failure to secure peace could result in a return to cycles of violence and fragile truces.
- The region needs statesmanship, negotiation, and long-term vision rather than conflict and revenge.

Fathoming America's Plan to Manage AI Proliferation

Context

- The U.S. has withdrawn its AI export control plan called the *Framework for AI Diffusion*.
- This withdrawal is viewed positively because the Framework was seen as detrimental to AI growth and international relations.
- Despite this, AI controls will persist, just through different methods.

AI Diffusion Framework

- Introduced in the final days of the Biden administration.
- Treated AI similarly to nuclear technology by imposing export controls and licensing.
- Favored allied countries and restricted access for adversaries like China and Russia.

Rationale Behind the Framework

- The U.S. believed computational power is the main driver of AI strength.
- To maintain superiority, it sought to limit adversaries' access to powerful compute resources and concentrate AI development among allies.

Counterproductive Impact of the Framework

- The Framework unintentionally harmed global cooperation, even among allies.
- Prompted partners to seek independence from the U.S. tech ecosystem, undermining trust and collaboration.

Mischaracterization of AI as Military Technology

- AI is fundamentally a civilian technology with military uses, unlike nuclear technology which is primarily military.
- Treating AI as defense technology restricted innovation, which thrives on international collaboration.

Innovation Driven by Restriction

- Restrictive policies spurred alternative innovations.
- Example: China's DeepSeek R1 AI system, which achieves strong performance using less compute, weakening the export controls' effectiveness.

Revocation and the Road Ahead

- The Biden administration revoked the Framework due to its flaws.
- This move benefits countries like India that were disadvantaged by the Framework.
- However, efforts to control AI diffusion—especially towards China—will continue in new forms.

The Possible Replacement

- **Continued Efforts Despite Framework Withdrawal:**
  o The U.S. is still tightening controls on Chinese access to AI chips.
- **Expansion of Export Controls:**
  o In March 2025, the U.S. expanded export restrictions and blacklisted more companies to limit AI chip access.
- **Hardware-Based Monitoring Measures:**
  o New proposals include embedding monitoring features in AI chips to restrict usage and applications.
  o Proposed laws suggest built-in location tracking in AI chips to prevent diversion to adversaries.
- **Shift from Trade to Technological Enforcement:**
  o Instead of relying on trade restrictions, the U.S. aims to embed control mechanisms directly into AI hardware.

Emerging Concerns with New Control Measures

- Technology-enforced controls raise issues about ownership, privacy, and surveillance.
- These controls might discourage legitimate users while failing to prevent misuse by malicious actors.
- They undermine user autonomy and foster distrust.
- Even allied nations may fear losing strategic independence and look for alternatives outside the U.S. ecosystem.

Tactical Shift, Not Strategic Change

- The Framework's withdrawal is a tactical move, not a change in the core U.S. strategy on AI control.
- If technology-based controls are fully adopted, they risk replicating the same negative outcomes as the original Framework, damaging global trust in U.S. leadership.

Conclusion: A Missed Opportunity for Strategic Reflection

- Persisting with control-based policies shows the U.S. has not fully learned from the Framework's failure.
- This approach could undermine America's global leadership in AI.

Practising Equality in Constitutional Courts

Context

- On **May 13, 2025**, the **Supreme Court** revisited its earlier judgments (*Indira Jaising vs Supreme Court of India*, 2017 and 2023) in a case concerning the **designation of senior advocates**.
- The new judgment (*Jitender @ Kalla vs State*) re-examined how lawyers are selected for senior status, revealing **deeper concerns about inequality** within India's legal system.

Key Issues Raised

1. Legal Profession's Public Character & Systemic Inequality

- The legal profession plays a **public, constitutional role** in delivering justice.
- Designating "senior advocates" under **Section 16 of the Advocates Act, 1961** leads to **legal elitism**, based on **ambiguous criteria** like "standing at the bar" or "special knowledge."
- This **institutionalizes privilege**, weakening democratic access to justice and undermining **Article 14 (Right to Equality).**

2. Comparative Perspective – Lessons from the U.S.

- The **Reuters 2014 "Echo Chamber"** study found that:
  - Only **66 out of 17,000 lawyers** controlled 43% of U.S. Supreme Court cases.
- Though India hasn't replicated this, the **senior advocate system risks elite capture**, allowing a few privileged lawyers to dominate high-profile cases.

3. Judicial Reform Attempts – Limited Impact

- **2017 Indira Jaising judgment** introduced a **point-based system** for senior designation, but it remained subjective.

- In **Jitender**, the Court:
  - Recognized the flaws in the earlier system.
  - Criticized its own earlier guidelines as **subjective**, yet paradoxically **endorsed the same classification**.
- **Core constitutional issues**—whether this structure passes the test of **equality**—were **sidestepped**.

4. Constitutional Challenge Ignored
- The argument: **Section 16 is arbitrary** and violates **Article 14**.
- The designation does not improve justice delivery and merely **rewards visibility and social capital**.
- The Court failed to ask whether this classification **serves any legitimate public or constitutional interest**.

5. Consequences of Hierarchical Stratification
- **"Intellectual apartheid"** is created by privileging a few "star lawyers."
- This **limits judicial perspectives**, especially on crucial constitutional matters.
- **Example:** In challenges like the **Waqf (Amendment) Act**, only elite voices are heard.

Conclusion
A **truly democratic and egalitarian legal system** must:
- Value **competence over status**.
- Encourage **diversity in representation**.
- Abandon **hierarchies** that marginalise capable, lesser-known lawyers.

India's legal profession must evolve to reflect the **Constitutional promise of justice—social, economic, and political—for all**.

Aviation Safety in India: An Overview
Introduction

The recent crash involving Air India flight AI 171 in Ahmedabad has once again underscored the pressing need to overhaul and fortify India's aviation safety mechanisms. Despite rapid expansion in the civil aviation sector, India's safety oversight, infrastructure modernisation, and regulatory autonomy have not kept pace with the industry's growth.

Current Landscape of India's Aviation Industry

- India ranks as the third-largest domestic aviation market, trailing only the United States and China.
- IATA forecasts suggest that India will handle over **520 million passengers by 2037**.
- There are over **140 operational airports**, many upgraded under the **UDAN (Ude Desh Ka Aam Nagrik)** scheme.
- Major players include **IndiGo**, **Air India (now under Tata Group)**, and **Vistara**.
- The **Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA)**, under the Ministry of Civil Aviation, serves as the sector's primary regulator.

Despite these advancements, critical safety practices in flight operations, aircraft maintenance, ground handling, and airport facilities remain insufficiently implemented.

Key Observations from DGCA Surprise Inspections

1. **Aging Safety Infrastructure**: Even major airports lack basic safety features—runway lighting is poor, markings are faded, and navigation systems are outdated. Safety gear like life vests is often unsecured, and aircraft tyres are in poor condition.
2. **Repeated Technical Failures**: Aircraft with unresolved technical issues were being cleared repeatedly. Maintenance routines and reporting standards are lax.
3. **Negligence in Ground Operations**: According to ICAO, most accidents occur during take-off or landing. However, ramp safety, towing equipment, and fueling protocols are inadequately managed.
4. **Airport Location Risks**: Older airports, such as in Ahmedabad, are surrounded by dense urban settlements, leaving no room for emergency safety buffers.
5. **Health and Hygiene Issues**: In the AI 130 incident, several passengers and crew members became ill, likely from contaminated food or cabin air issues. Weak medical screening and poor food quality checks were to blame.

Structural Challenges in Safety Regulation

1. **Limited Autonomy**: The DGCA's placement under the ministry restricts its independence, allowing political and bureaucratic interference.
2. **Manpower Shortage and Skill Deficits**: With only around **400 officers** regulating over **700 aircraft** (as of 2022), India lags far behind ICAO standards.
3. **Reactive Oversight**: The DGCA tends to respond to incidents rather than proactively auditing and maintaining safety across operations.

India's Global Safety Standing

- India scored **70.39%** in ICAO's **USOAP** audit (2022), significantly lower than countries like **Singapore (99%)** and **UAE (98%)**.
- Several Indian airlines were previously banned from EU airspace for safety concerns.
- The **US FAA downgraded India to Category 2** in 2014 for inadequate safety measures, though it was later upgraded.

Impact of Safety Failures

- **Human Tragedy**: The Ahmedabad crash is one of the deadliest in recent memory.
- **Passenger Anxiety**: Incidents such as AI 130 undermine public confidence.
- **Economic Disruption**: Delays and cancellations impact airline revenues and operations.
- **Global Image Damage**: Poor safety records can restrict India's access to international routes.
- **Higher Insurance Premiums**: Carriers face elevated costs due to safety-related risks.

Root Causes of the Safety Deficit

- **Outdated Infrastructure**: Many airports lack modern safety systems due to their age.
- **Unplanned Urban Expansion**: Encroachment around airports prevents the establishment of secure perimeters.
- **Training Deficiencies**: Shortcomings in the training of pilots, ground crew, and maintenance personnel.
- **Privatisation Without Oversight**: Efficiency gains from privatisation haven't been matched by safety regulations.
- **Neglect of R&D and Safety Tech**: Limited investment in innovation and advanced safety systems.

Initiatives Undertaken

- **UDAN Scheme** has improved regional air access but often overlooks safety integration.
- **AAI** has initiated upgrades like runway resurfacing and better lighting.
- **eGCA platform** digitises regulatory approvals and compliance tracking.
- **New surveillance systems (ADS-B)** are being phased in.

Still, these measures are fragmented and lack a comprehensive safety strategy.

Recommendations for the Future

1. **Enhance DGCA Independence**: Transform it into a fully autonomous body, modeled after the **FAA (USA)** or **EASA (EU)**.
2. **Adopt Predictive Audits**: Leverage AI and big data analytics to foresee risks. Conduct regular, unannounced safety audits.
3. **Modernise Infrastructure**: Secure dedicated funds for upgrading navigation systems, lighting, and runways. Enforce airport buffer zones in urban plans.
4. **Elevate Training and Maintenance**: Implement strict rest-hour rules and bolster certified safety training programs.
5. **Promote Transparency**: Make audit results, incident reports, and airline safety scores publicly available.
6. **Ensure Cabin Hygiene and Medical Safety**: Establish enforceable food and medical standards with oversight from **FSSAI** and DGCA.
7. **Urban Replanning**: Collaborate with states to relocate or reconfigure outdated airports like those in Kolkata, Mumbai, and Ahmedabad.
8. **Global Collaboration**: Partner with agencies like **ICAO**, **FAA**, and **EASA** to strengthen institutional capacity and adopt international best practices.

Conclusion

As India sets its sights on becoming a global aviation leader, it must recognise that sustainable growth hinges on uncompromising safety. Coordinated reforms in regulation, infrastructure, urban development, and accountability are essential. Aviation safety must evolve from a reactionary concern into a strategic, long-term national priority—ensuring that tragedies like the Ahmedabad crash never recur.

Reassessing Digital Search Powers in the Income-Tax Bill, 2025

Background

The Finance Minister's proposal in the **Income-Tax Bill, 2025**, grants tax authorities the power to search an individual's **"virtual digital space"** during investigations. While aimed at addressing growing digital financial activity, the proposal has sparked widespread concern over privacy, potential overreach, and expanded surveillance powers.

Existing Legal Provisions

Currently, **Section 132 of the Income-Tax Act, 1961**, authorizes authorities to search and seize physical assets—such as documents, cash, or property—based on concrete suspicion of undisclosed income. These powers are linked directly to a tangible location associated with the alleged offence.

Proposed Expansion to Digital Domains

The 2025 Bill broadens the scope to cover **digital environments**—including **emails, cloud storage, messaging apps, social media, and similar digital platforms**. The vague phrasing of "any other space of similar nature" leaves room for **broad and ambiguous interpretation**, raising legal and ethical questions.

Concerns Around Privacy and Scope

Digital ecosystems contain **deeply personal information**, often unrelated to any financial wrongdoing. Accessing such data can expose sensitive details about an individual's **private life, relationships, and professional communications**, risking **excessive and unjustified intrusion**.

Impact on Sensitive Professions

The implications are particularly serious for **journalists, lawyers, doctors**, and other professionals who hold **confidential information**. Granting tax authorities unchecked access to their devices could undermine **press freedom, legal privilege**, and ethical responsibilities.

Implementation Challenges

The Bill empowers authorities to **bypass access controls** on digital devices. Yet, there is little clarity on how this would be enforced, especially with **end-to-end encrypted platforms** like WhatsApp. Questions remain about feasibility, legality, and respect for encryption norms.

Judicial Context and Supreme Court Guidance

The Indian judiciary has long emphasized that **search powers must be exercised with restraint**. In 2023, the **Supreme Court issued interim guidelines** for the seizure of digital devices, calling on the government to develop detailed protocols.

Criticism of the Provision

1. **Lack of Oversight and Transparency**
    o   The proposed powers lack **judicial supervision**.

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o Authorities are not required to disclose the **"reason to believe"**, undermining **accountability and due process**.

2. **Misunderstanding Digital Complexity**
   o Digital devices store layers of information—personal, professional, and financial.
   o The proposal fails to differentiate or protect **non-relevant data**, leading to **blanket access**.

3. **Absence of Legal Safeguards**
   o Without **defined protocols or checks**, the provision could be prone to **abuse and misuse**.
   o No independent mechanism exists to **challenge or appeal** such intrusions.

Learning from International Models
- **Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms (Section 8)** mandates protection against unreasonable searches, requiring **prior authorization and judicial approval** based on reasonable cause.
- In the **United States**, the **Taxpayer Bill of Rights** ensures due process, and the landmark **Riley v. California** judgment mandates a **warrant to access digital devices**.
- These examples highlight the **need for balanced, rights-respecting enforcement**.

Violation of Constitutional Principles
The proposed provision does not adhere to the **proportionality principle** laid down in the **Justice K.S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India** ruling. The Supreme Court's **four-fold test** for privacy restrictions requires that:
- The goal must be **legitimate**
- The means must be **necessary**
- It should be the **least intrusive option**
- The action must be **proportionate.** The current proposal fails on several counts, especially in terms of **necessity and minimal intrusion**.

The Way Forward
1. **Rights-Based Digital Enforcement**
   o Digital searches should align with **constitutional rights**, ensuring **legality, necessity, and proportionality**.

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2. **Avoiding Unchecked Surveillance**
    o Granting blanket access to digital data under vague pretenses fosters **surveillance**, not lawful regulation, and erodes **public trust**.
3. **Opportunity for Legislative Reform:** The Select Committee reviewing the Bill should:
    o Clearly define what constitutes **"virtual digital space"**
    o **Mandate prior judicial warrants** before access
    o Require the disclosure of **justifiable grounds** for search
    o Create **redressal mechanisms** for aggrieved individuals

Conclusion

As India modernizes its tax enforcement tools, it must **balance efficiency with constitutional integrity**. Without clear limits and safeguards, the proposed digital search powers risk becoming a tool for **unrestrained intrusion** rather than **fair accountability**. The law must evolve in tandem with technology—**without compromising civil liberties** in the process.

A Year On — From Colonial Laws to Modern Criminal Codes

Background

In 2023, the Government of India initiated a historic overhaul of its colonial-era criminal laws by introducing **three new criminal codes**. One year into their enforcement, early signs of impact are emerging—especially in the realms of **policing, investigation, and technological adoption**. It is now timely to evaluate how these laws are functioning, assess the innovations introduced, and identify the persistent challenges.

Key Features of the New Criminal Framework

1. Major Legal Transition and Structural Shift

This legislative reform marked a sharp departure from outdated colonial legal frameworks, aiming to modernise and streamline India's criminal justice system. The transition to the new codes has been relatively smooth, aided by digital infrastructure like the **Crime and Criminal Tracking Network and Systems (CCTNS)**, which underpins the **Inter-operable Criminal Justice System (ICJS)**.

CCTNS has made it possible to file **zero FIRs across jurisdictions**, facilitating smoother inter-state operations. The **Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA)** played a central role in steering this transformation at the implementation level.

2. Tech-Driven Evidence Collection: e-Sakshya

A flagship innovation of the reform is the **e-Sakshya mobile application**, jointly developed by the **National Informatics Centre (NIC)** and the **MHA**. This app enables real-time digital collection of evidence—photos, videos—embedded with **geo-location data and timestamps**.

Complying with key provisions of the **BNSS (Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita)**, such as Sections **105, 173, 176, 180, 185, and 497**, the app ensures documentation of **searches, seizures, statements, and property handling**.

Feedback from Investigating Officers (IOs) has been largely positive. The app enhances accountability by:

- Preventing unauthorised delegation of investigative tasks
- Improving the reliability of evidence through witness presence
- Requiring mandatory selfies and leaving digital traces, which boosts transparency

3. Boosting Forensic Rigor

Another significant reform is the compulsory **crime scene visit by a Forensic Science Laboratory (FSL) expert**, as mandated by Section 176 of the BNSS. Although forensic infrastructure remains limited, this step marks a move towards more **scientific investigation**.

The government has begun addressing gaps through efforts such as:

- Expansion of the **National Forensic Science University (NFSU)**
- Plans to establish a **Central Forensic Science Laboratory (CFSL)** in Raipur

Challenges and Operational Gaps

1. e-Sakshya Implementation Hurdles

- **Courts are not yet integrated** with the ICJS to directly access digital evidence via the **National Government Cloud (NGC)**, forcing IOs to use **pen drives**, adding cost and inefficiency.
- Investigators often use **personal Android devices (Android 10+ with 1GB+ storage)** due to **insufficient official equipment**, raising issues of **data security** and officer burden.
- Device shortages—such as a limited number of tablets per station—hamper widespread adoption.
- **Software limitations** affect usability: only five Sakshya IDs can be created offline in unlinked FIRs, and errors in linked cases are not easily corrected.
- **Accused persons often hesitate** to be digitally recorded, affecting the ability to gather critical testimonial evidence.

2. **Legal Gaps and Incomplete Digitisation**

- **Section 303 of the BNS** lacks clarity on whether thefts below ₹5000 are cognizable, while **Section 112** on organized petty crimes is vague.
- Despite being legally sanctioned, tools like **video conferencing for witness testimony (Section 530, BNSS)** are rarely used.
- While **medical reports for rape survivors** are mostly submitted within the 7-day window, **post-mortem reports** still face delays.
- The **MedLEaPR system**, being piloted in Chhattisgarh, aims to digitally connect hospitals with police for faster report sharing.

Path Ahead: Policy Feedback and Infrastructure Investment

For reforms to take full effect, the following steps are essential:

- **Institutionalise feedback mechanisms** across IOs, state governments, and the judiciary to identify gaps and fine-tune procedures.
- Create a **permanent legal review board** to revise vague sections, simplify complex protocols, and close loopholes.
- **Upgrade forensic and IT infrastructure**, ensure adequate tablets and official devices for officers, and reduce reliance on personal phones.
- Expand training programs to **improve digital literacy** and professionalism among enforcement personnel.

Conclusion

A year after rollout, the **Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS)**, **BNSS**, and **Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam (BSA)** have begun transforming India's criminal justice system. Technological tools like **e-Sakshya** have already made notable contributions in improving investigative transparency and accountability.

However, the journey is far from over. **Resource constraints, legal ambiguities**, and **technological disconnects** still hinder full implementation. For these reforms to deliver lasting change, **adaptive policy, strategic investments**, and **robust feedback systems** are crucial.