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JANUARY – EDITORIALS 2026



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National Commission for Backward Classes

- The **National Commission for Backward Classes (NCBC)** is a **constitutional body** in India.
- It has been established to provide safeguards against the exploitation of the **socially and educationally Backward Classes (BCs)** as well as to protect their social, economic, educational, and cultural interests.
- The Headquarters of the **National Commission for Backward Classes (NCBC)** is in **New Delhi**.

Backward Classes (BCs)

1. The **Constitution of India** has **neither specified** Backward Classes (BCs) **nor** used a single uniform expression to **characterise** this class.
2. As per the **Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment**, the expression Backward Classes (BCs) means such **backward classes** of citizens **other than** the **SCs** and the **STs** as may be specified by the Central Government.
3. There was **no data** collected on Other Backward Classes (OBCs) during the **Census of 2011**.

- **Article 338-B of the Indian Constitution** deals with the provisions related to the National Commission for Backward Classes (NCBC).

Genesis

- The **National Commission for Backward Classes (NCBC)**, in its present form, has evolved through a series of developments as can be seen below:

Mandal Case 1992

- In the **Indira Sawhney vs. Union of India Case (1992)**, also known as the **Mandal Case (1992)**, the **Supreme Court directed** the central government to constitute a permanent statutory body to examine the complaints of non-inclusion, under-inclusion, or over-inclusion of any class of citizens in the list of Backward Classes.

Establishment as a Statutory Body

- Complying with the **Mandal Case Judgment of the Supreme Court**, the Parliament enacted

the **National Commission for Backward Classes Act, 1993**.

- The Act established the National Commission for Backward Classes (NCBC) **statutory body** under the **Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment**.

102nd Constitutional Amendment Act of 2018

- It inserted a new **Article 338-B** in the constitution, **conferring the constitutional status on the National Commission for Backward Classes (NCBC)**.
- Thus, post 102nd Constitutional Amendment, the NCBC ceased to be a statutory body and became a constitutional body.
- In order to safeguard the interests of the Backward Classes more effectively, this amendment **also enlarged the scope of functions** assigned to the Commission.

Composition of NCBC

- It consists of a **Chairperson, a Vice-Chairperson, and three other members**.
- They are appointed by **the President** by warrant under his hand and seal.
- Their conditions of service and tenure of office are determined by **the President**.

Tenure of Members of NCBC

- Under **the National Commission for Backward Classes Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson, and Members (Conditions of Service and Tenure) Rules of 2004**:
- The Chairperson, the Vice-Chairperson, and other Members of the National Commission for Backward Classes (NCBC) shall hold office for a **term of three years** from the date on which he/she assumes such office.
- The Chairperson, the Vice-Chairperson, and other Members **shall not be eligible for** appointment for **more than two terms**.

Functions of NCBC

- The major functions of the National Commission for Backward Classes (NCBC) include:
- **To investigate and monitor** all matters relating to the constitutional and other legal safeguards for the socially and educationally backward classes and to evaluate their work.
- **To inquire into specific complaints** with respect to the deprivation of rights and safeguards of the socially and educationally backward classes.
- **To participate and advise on the socio-economic development** of the socially and educationally backward classes and to evaluate the progress of their development under the Union

or a State.

- **To present to the President**, annually and at such other times as it may deem fit, reports upon the working of those safeguards.
- **To make recommendations** as to the measures that should be taken by the Union or a State for the effective implementation of those safeguards and other measures for the protection, welfare, and socio-economic development of the socially and educationally backward classes.
- **To discharge such other functions** in relation to the protection, welfare, development, and advancement of the socially and educationally backward classes **as the President may specify**.

Powers of the NCBC

- The Commission is vested with the **power to regulate its own procedure**.
- While investigating any matter or inquiring into any complaint, it **has all the powers of a Civil Court**, viz.
- Summoning and enforcing the attendance of any person from any part of India and examining him on oath,
- Requiring the discovery and production of any document,
- Receiving evidence on affidavits,
- Requisitioning any public record from any court or office,
- Issuing summons for the examination of witnesses and documents,
- Any other matter which the President may determine.
- The **Central Government** and the **State Governments** are **required to consult** the Commission on all major policy matters affecting the socially and educationally backward classes.
- However, it is to be noted that **the 105th Amendment Act of 2021 exempted the State Governments** from this consultation with the Commission with respect to the **preparation and maintenance of the list** of socially and educationally backward classes for their own purposes.

Report of the NCBC

- The Commission presents **reports to the President annually** or at such **other times** as it may deem fit.
- The **President places** all such reports **before the Parliament**, along with a memorandum explaining the action taken on the recommendations made by the Commission.
- The memorandum also contains the **reasons for the non-acceptance** of any of such recommendations.
- The **President** also **forwards** any **report** of the Commission **pertaining to a State Government to**

the concerned State Governor.

- The **Governor places it before the State Legislature**, along with a memorandum explaining the action taken on the recommendations of the Commission.
- The memorandum also contains the reasons for the non-acceptance of any of such recommendations.
- In conclusion, the **National Commission for Backward Classes (NCBC)** plays a vital role in India's ongoing pursuit of a truly inclusive society. By effectively safeguarding rights, promoting development initiatives, and advocating for policy changes, the commission can empower the Backward Classes (BCs) and create a more equitable future. As India progresses towards inclusive growth and social justice, the NCBC remains a crucial institution.

Constitutional Provisions for the Welfare of Backward Classes

- 1. Article 340:** This Article deals with the **appointment of a Commission to investigate the conditions of socially and educationally backward classes.**
- 2. Article 338B:** This Article deals with the establishment of a National Commission for Backward Classes.
- 3. Article 342A:** This Article empowers the President to specify socially and educationally backward classes in various States and Union Territories.
 - He can do this in consultation with the Governor of the concerned State.
 - However, the law enacted by the Parliament will be required if the list of backward classes is to be amended.
- 4. Article 366:** This Article was amended to include the words "socially and educationally backward classes" to define the backward classes deemed by the Central Government and the States and Union Territories of India.

Statutory Provisions for the Welfare of Backward Classes

- 1. The National Commission for Backward Classes Act, 1993** – The National Commission for Backward Classes Act, 1993, established the National Commission for Backward Classes (NCBC) as a statutory body to safeguard the interests of socially and educationally backward classes in India.
- 2. The National Backward Classes Finance and Development Corporation (NBCFDC)** – The NBCFDC focuses on providing financial assistance and developmental support to individuals and communities belonging to other backward classes.

Additional Info-

Constitutional Body	Article/ Part	First Office Holder	Composition	Appointment
Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG)	Article 148 - Part V	V. Narahari Rao	Single-member body	President
Election Commission	Article 324 - Part XV	Sukumar Sen	Chief Election Commissioner + others fixed by President	President
Union and State PSC	Articles 315-323	H. K. Kripalani	Chairman + other members fixed by President/Governor	President/Governor
Finance Commission	Article 280 - Part XII	K. C. Neogy	Chairman + four members	President
Goods and Services Tax Council	Article 279-A	-	Chairperson + members	-
National Commissions (NCSC, NCST, NCBC)	Articles 338, 338-A, 338-B	Suraj Bhan, Kunwar Singh Tekam, Bhagwa	Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson, members	President

		n Lal Sahni		
Special Officer for Linguistic Minorities	Article 350B - Part XVII	-	Single-member body	President
Attorney General of India	Article 76 - Part V	M. C. Setalvad	Single-member body	President
Advocate General of State	Article 165 - Part VI	-	Single-member body	Governor

Constitutional Body	Qualification	Tenure	Removal	Function
CAG	Senior bureaucrats	6 years or age 65	President	Audits government accounts
Election Commission	Person of integrity; election knowledge	6 years or age 65	President	Conducts elections, grants recognition
Union and State PSC	Half members with 10 years government service	6 years or age 65 (62 for SPSC)	President	Civil service recruitment
Finance Commission	Experience in public affairs or finance	As specified by President	President	Recommends distribution of financial resources

Goods and Services Tax Council	-	-	-	GST recommendations and regulations
National Commissions (NCSC, NCST, NCBC)	-	-	-	Safeguards for SC/ST/OBC
Special Officer for Linguistic Minorities	-	Not specified	-	Protects linguistic minorities
Attorney General of India	Qualified Supreme Court judge	Pleasure of President	-	Chief legal advisor to government
Advocate General of State	Qualified High Court judge	Pleasure of Governor	-	Chief legal advisor to state government

What are Lokpal and Lokayukta?

- The **Lokpal and Lokayukta Act, 2013** provided for the establishment of Lokpal for the Union and Lokayukta for States.
- These institutions are **statutory bodies** without any constitutional status.
- They perform the function of an "ombudsman" and inquire into allegations of corruption against certain public functionaries and for related matters.

Need

- Maladministration is like a termite which slowly erodes the foundation of a nation and hinders administration from completing its task. Corruption is the root cause of this problem.
- Most of the anti-corruption agencies are hardly independent. Even Supreme Court has been termed CBI as a "caged parrot" and "its master's voice".
- Many of these agencies are advisory bodies without any effective powers and their advice is rarely followed.
- There is also the problem of internal transparency and accountability. Moreover, there is not any

separate and effective mechanism to put checks on these agencies.

- In this context, an independent institution of Lokpal has been a landmark move in the history of Indian polity which offered a solution to the never-ending menace of corruption.

Genesis

- In 1809, the institution of ombudsman was **inaugurated officially in Sweden**.
- In the 20th century, Ombudsman as an institution developed and grew most significantly after the Second World War.
- **New Zealand and Norway adopted this system in the year 1962** and it proved to be of great significance in spreading the concept of the ombudsman.
- In 1967, on the recommendations of the **Whyatt Report of 1961, Great Britain adopted the institution of the ombudsman** and became the first large nation in the democratic world to have such a system.
- In 1966, Guyana became the first developing nation to adopt the concept of the ombudsman. Subsequently, it was further adopted by Mauritius, Singapore, Malaysia, and India as well.
- In India, the concept of constitutional ombudsman was **first proposed by the then law minister Ashok Kumar Sen in parliament in the early 1960s**.
- The term Lokpal and Lokayukta were **coined by Dr. L. M. Singhvi**.
- **In 1966, the First Administrative Reforms Commission recommended the setting up of two independent authorities-** at the central and state level, to look into complaints against public functionaries, including MPs.
- In 1968, Lokpal bill was passed in Lok Sabha but lapsed with the dissolution of Lok Sabha and since then it has lapsed in the Lok Sabha many times.
- Till 2011 eight attempts were made to pass the Bill, but all met with failure.
- In 2002, the Commission to **Review the Working of the Constitution headed by M.N. Venkatachaliah recommended the appointment of the Lokpal and Lokayuktas**, also recommended that the PM be kept out of the ambit of the authority.
- In 2005, the **Second Administrative Reforms Commission chaired by Veerappa Moily** recommended that the office of Lokpal should be established without delay.
- In 2011, the government formed a Group of Ministers, chaired by Pranab Mukherjee to suggest measures to tackle corruption and examine the proposal of a Lokpal Bill.
- "India Against Corruption movement" led by Anna Hazare put pressure on the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government at the Centre and resulted in the passing of the Lokpal and Lokayuktas Bill, 2013, in both the Houses of Parliament.

- It received assent from President on 1 January 2014 and came into force on 16 January 2014.

Lokpal and Lokayuktas (Amendment) Act, 2016

- It amended the Lokpal and Lokayukta Act, 2013.
- It also amended section 44 of the 2013 Act that deals with the provision of furnishing of details of assets and liabilities of public servants within 30 days of joining the government service.
- It replaces the time limit of 30 days, now the public servants will make a declaration of their assets and liabilities in the form and manner as prescribed by the government.

Structure of Lokpal

- Lokpal is a multi-member body, that consists of one chairperson and a maximum of 8 members.
- Chairperson of the Lokpal should be either the former Chief Justice of India or the former Judge of Supreme Court or an eminent person with impeccable integrity and outstanding ability, having special knowledge and expertise of minimum 25 years in the matters relating to anti-corruption policy, public administration, vigilance, finance including insurance and banking, law and management.
- Out of the maximum eight members, half will be judicial members and minimum 50% of the Members will be from SC/ ST/ OBC/ Minorities and women.
- The judicial member of the Lokpal either a former Judge of the Supreme Court or a former Chief Justice of a High Court.
- The non-judicial member should be an eminent person with impeccable integrity and outstanding ability, having special knowledge and expertise of minimum 25 years in the matters relating to anti-corruption policy, public administration, vigilance, finance including insurance and banking, law and management.
- The **term of office for Lokpal Chairman and Members is 5 years or till the age of 70 years.**
- The **members are appointed by the president** on the recommendation of a Selection Committee.
- The selection committee is composed of the Prime Minister who is the Chairperson, Speaker of Lok Sabha, Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha, Chief Justice of India or a Judge nominated by him/her and One eminent jurist.
- For selecting the chairperson and the members, the selection committee constitutes a search panel of at least eight persons.

Lokpal Search Committee

- Under the Lokpal Act of 2013, the Department of Personnel & Training (DoPT) is supposed to put

together a list of candidates interested to be the chairperson or members of the Lokpal.

- This list would then go to the proposed eight-member search committee, which would shortlist names and place them before the selection panel headed by the Prime Minister.
- The selection panel may or may not pick names suggested by the search committee.
- In September 2018, the **government had constituted a search committee headed by former Supreme Court judge Justice Ranjana Prakash Desai.**
- The 2013 Act also provides that all states should set up the office of the Lokayukta within one year from the commencement of the Act.

Jurisdiction of Lokpal and its Powers

- Jurisdiction of Lokpal **includes Prime Minister, Ministers, members of Parliament, Groups A, B, C and D officers and officials of Central Government.**
- Jurisdiction of the Lokpal included the Prime Minister except on allegations of corruption relating to international relations, security, the public order, atomic energy and space.
- The Lokpal does not have jurisdiction over Ministers and MPs in the matter of anything said in Parliament or a vote given there.
- Its jurisdiction also includes any person who is or has been in charge (director/ manager/ secretary) of anybody/ society set up by central act or any other body financed/ controlled by central government and any other person involved in act of abetting, bribe giving or bribe taking.
- The Lokpal Act mandates that all public officials should furnish the assets and liabilities of themselves as well as their respective dependents.
- **It has the powers to superintendence over, and to give direction to CBI.**
- If Lokpal has referred a case to CBI, the investigating officer in such case cannot be transferred without the approval of Lokpal.
- The Inquiry Wing of the Lokpal has been **vested with the powers of a civil court.**
- Lokpal has **powers of confiscation of assets, proceeds, receipts and benefits arisen or procured by means of corruption** in special circumstances.
- Lokpal has the **power to recommend transfer or suspension of public servant** connected with allegation of corruption.
- Lokpal has the **power to give directions to prevent the destruction of records** during the preliminary inquiry.

Limitations

- The institution of lokpal has tried to bring a much needed change in the battle against corruption

in the administrative structure of India but at the same time, there are loopholes and lacunae which need to be corrected.

- Five years have passed since the Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act 2013 was passed by parliament, but not a single Lokpal has been appointed till date indicating the **lack of political will**.
- The Lokpal act also called upon states to appoint a Lokayukta within a year of its coming to force. But only 16 states have established the Lokayukta.
- Lokpal is **not free from political influence** as the appointing committee itself consist of members from political parties.
- The appointment of Lokpal can be manipulated in a way as there is no criterion to decide who is an 'eminent jurist' or 'a person of integrity.'
- The 2013 act **did not provide concrete immunity to the whistle blowers**. The provision for initiation of inquiry against the complainant if the accused is found innocent will only discourage people from complaining.
- The biggest lacuna is the **exclusion of judiciary from the ambit of the Lokpal**.
- The Lokpal is **not given any constitutional backing** and there is no adequate provision for appeal against the Lokpal.
- The specific details in relation to the appointment of Lokayukta have been left completely on the States.
- To some extent, the need for functional independence of the CBI has been catered to by a change brought forth in the selection process of its Director, by this Act.
- The complaint against corruption cannot be registered after a period of seven years from the date on which the offence mentioned in such complaint is alleged to have been committed.

Road ahead

- In order to tackle the problem of corruption, the **institution of the ombudsman should be strengthened** both in terms of functional autonomy and availability of manpower.
- **Greater transparency, more right to information and empowerment of citizens and citizen groups** is required along with a good leadership that is willing to subject itself to public scrutiny.
- Appointment of Lokpal in itself is not enough. The government should address the issues based on which people are demanding a Lokpal. Merely adding to the strength of investigative agencies will increase the size of the government but not necessarily improve governance. The slogan adopted by the government of "less government and more governance", should be followed in letter and spirit.
- Moreover, Lokpal and Lokayukta must be financially, administratively and legally independent of

those whom they are called upon to investigate and prosecute.

- Lokpal and Lokayukta appointments must be done transparently so as to minimize the chances of the wrong sorts of people getting in.
- There is a need for a multiplicity of decentralized institutions with appropriate accountability mechanisms, to avoid the concentration of too much power, in any one institution or authority.

National Commission for Scheduled Castes

The NCSC is a **Constitutional Body** established with a view to provide safeguards against the exploitation of Scheduled Castes and to promote and protect their social, educational, economic and cultural interests.

Genesis

Special Officer:

- Initially, the constitution provided for the appointment of a Special Officer under **Article 338**. The special officer was designated as the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

65th Constitutional Amendment Act, 1990:

- It amended **Article 338 of the Constitution** and replaced the one-member system with a multi-member National Commission for Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes(ST).

89th Constitutional Amendment Act, 2003:

- Article 338 was amended, and the erstwhile National Commission for SC and ST was replaced by two separate Commissions from the year 2004 which were:
 - **National Commission for Scheduled Castes (NCSC)** under **Article 338**.
 - **National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST)** under **Article 338A**.

Composition:

- The NCSC comprises a **Chairperson, a Vice-Chairperson, and three additional Members**.
- These positions are filled through the President's appointment, indicated by a warrant under his hand and seal.
- Their conditions of service and tenure of office are also determined by the President.

Functions:

- To investigate and monitor all matters relating to the constitutional and other legal safeguards for the SCs and to evaluate their working;
- To inquire into specific complaints concerning the deprivation of rights and safeguards of the SCs;

- To participate and advise on the planning process of socio-economic development of the SCs and to evaluate the progress of their development under the Union or a state;
- To present to the President, annually and at such other times as it may deem fit, reports upon the working of those safeguards;
- To make recommendations as to the measures that should be taken by the Union or a state for the effective implementation of those safeguards and other measures for the protection, welfare and socio-economic development of the SCs.
- Till 2018, the commission was also required to discharge similar functions with regard to the **other backward classes (OBCs)**. It was relieved from this responsibility by the **102nd Amendment Act, 2018**.

Power of NCSC:

- The Commission is vested with the **power to regulate its own procedure**.
- The Commission, while investigating any matter or inquiring into any complaint, **has all the powers of a civil court** trying a suit and in particular in respect of the following matters:
 - summoning and enforcing the attendance of any person and examining him on oath;
 - receiving evidence on affidavits; and
 - requisitioning any public record from any court or office.
- The Central and state governments are required to consult the Commission on all major policy matters affecting the SCs.

Other Constitutional Provisions for the Upliftment of the SCs

- **Article 15:** The article specifically addresses the issue of discrimination based on caste, emphasising the protection and upliftment of SCs.
- **Article 17:** Article abolishes **Untouchability** and prohibits its practice in any form. It seeks to eliminate social discrimination and promote the equality and dignity of all individuals.
- **Article 46:** Article directs the State to promote the educational and economic interests of Scheduled Castes and other weaker sections of society and protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation.
- **Article 243D (4):** The provision mandates the reservation of seats for SCs in **Panchayats (local self-government institutions)** in proportion to their population in the area.
- **Article 243T (4):** The provision ensures the reservation of seats for SCs in **Municipalities (urban local bodies)** in proportion to their population in the area.
- **Article 330 and Article 332** provide for the reservation of seats in favour of the Scheduled Castes

and the Scheduled Tribes in the Lok Sabha and in the legislative assemblies of the States (respectively).

Road ahead

- Some critics argue that bureaucratic hurdles, political interference, and insufficient enforcement mechanisms have limited the NCSC's effectiveness.
- Additionally, there have been concerns about **delays in addressing complaints and inadequate representation of SC communities**.
- To address these issues, the NCSC could benefit from enhanced autonomy, increased resources, and more proactive measures to address systemic discrimination.
- Strengthening outreach programs, ensuring transparency, and fostering collaboration with civil society organisations can also contribute to its effectiveness in safeguarding the rights of SCs.

Constitutional bodies

Constitutional Bodies get their power and responsibilities directly from the Constitution. They are either set up by the Constitution or are required to be created by it. The Constitution clearly defines their structure, powers, and duties.

- From the Election Commission, which organises elections, to the Comptroller and Auditor General, who checks government spending, these bodies play a key role in keeping our democracy strong and fair.

1. Union Public Service Commission (UPSC)

- The Union Public Service Commission (UPSC), **established on 1 October 1926**, is a permanent body created by **Parliament**. Its headquarters are in New Delhi, and it serves as the government's central recruiting agency.
- The UPSC has detailed guidelines for the composition, appointment, and removal of its members, as well as for its powers, functions, and independence.

Articles	315 to 323 in Part XIV
Composition	A Chairman and other members as decided by the President of India. Generally, the UPSC is comprised of 9 to 10 members and the chairman.

Appointed	By the President of India.
Tenure	6 years or until they reach the age of 65 years, whichever comes first.
Removal	By the President of India . In the case of 'Misbehavior', the President has to refer the matter to the Supreme Court for inquiry. If the Supreme Court finds the cause for removal and advises it, the President can remove the Chairman or a member of the UPSC.
Powers and Functions	Conducts all India exams to appoint candidates to national, central, and public services. Coordinates joint recruitment schemes for which the candidates have special qualifications. Resolves recruitment method issues for civil services and posts. Assists states upon request from the Governor or as directed by the President.

2. State Public Service Commission (SPSC)

- The State Public Service Commissions are similar to the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC). **The key difference is that the UPSC operates at the national level, while each state has its own Public Service Commission for appointments to various constitutional posts within the state.**

Articles	315 to 323 in Part XIV
Composition	A Chairman and other members as decided by the President of India.
Appointed	By the Governor of the state.
Tenure	6 years or until they reach the age of 62 years, whichever comes first.
Removal	By the President of India. In the case of 'Misbehavior', the President has to refer the matter to the Supreme Court for inquiry. If the Supreme Court finds the cause for removal and advises it, the

	President can remove the Chairman or a member of the UPSC. Note: Though the Chairman and the members are appointed by the Governor, they can be removed only by the President.
Powers and Functions	Conducts the exams to appoint Civil servants for the states. Consulted by state personnel management for civil post and service recruitment.

3. Attorney General of India (AGI)

- The Attorney General of India is the **highest law officer in the country**, advising the Union government on all legal matters, and thus can be considered the Union's legal advisor. This position was **established on 28 January 1950, with M. C. Setalvad serving as the first Attorney General of India.**

Articles	76, 88 and 105
Eligibility	Must be the person who is qualified enough to be appointed as a judge of the Supreme Court.
Appointed	By the President of India.
Term and removal	No fixed tenure and grounds of dismissal are mentioned in the Constitution. He can be removed by the President at any time.
Powers and Functions	Advises the Government of India on legal matters which are referred to him by the President of India. Performs all other legal duties that are important and assigned by the President.

4. Advocate General of the State (AGS)

- The Advocate General is the **highest legal officer of the state** of India. However, they **cannot defend someone in criminal cases or be a director of any business without approval from the State Government.**

Articles	165,177 and 194
Eligibility	Must be eligible to serve as a Justice in the Supreme Court of India. This means he must be an Indian citizen who has either been a judge for ten years or a high court advocate for ten years.
Appointed	By the Governor of state.
Term and removal	No fixed tenure and grounds of dismissal are mentioned in the Constitution. He can be removed by the Governor at any time
Powers and Functions	Defends the State Government in front of the High Court and Supreme Court. At the proceedings of both the houses of the state legislature or any state legislature committee, the Advocate General can take part as a member without the right to vote.

5. Election Commission of India (ECI)

- The **Election Commission of India (ECI)** was **established on 25 January 1950, which is celebrated as National Voters' Day**. Its headquarters are in New Delhi. The ECI is responsible for conducting free and fair elections in India and has the power to supervise, direct, and control elections to Parliament, State Legislatures, and the offices of the President and Vice-President of India.

Article	324
Composition	One Chief Election Commissioner and the number of other Election Commissioners as decided by the President of India. Currently, there are 1 chief election commissioner and 2 election commissioners.
Appointed	By the President of India on the recommendation of a three-membered Selection Committee: – The Prime Minister of India – A Union Minister is chosen by the Prime Minister

	– The Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha
Tenure	6 years or until they reach the age of 65 years, whichever comes first.
Removal	The Chief Election Commissioner can be removed following the same process and for the same grounds as a Supreme Court judge. Other Election Commissioners can be removed based on the Chief Election Commissioner's recommendation.
Powers and Functions	Determines the territorial areas for elections throughout the country. Power to cancel the polls if offences like capturing violence and other irregularities are found. Advise the Governor on matters related to the disqualification of the members.

6. Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG)

- The Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India is the **supreme audit institution in the country**, overseeing the expenses of both state and union governments. The CAG is also the **statutory auditor for the Lokpal**. Ranked 9th in order of precedence, the CAG holds the same status as a sitting judge of the Supreme Court of India.

Articles	148 to 151
Appointed	By the President of India.
Tenure	6 years or up to the age of 65 years, whichever comes first.
Removal	By the President on the same grounds and in the same manner as the Supreme Court judge.
Powers and Functions	Audits the accounts related to expenditures from India's consolidated funds, contingency funds, and public accounts. Monitors the manufacturing trading balance sheet profit and loss accounts of all the central and state government departments.

7. Finance Commission of India (FCI)

- The Finance Commission, aka **Vitta Āyoga**, was set up on 22 November 1951. Its main job is to **divide revenue between the Union and State governments**. The goal of creating the Finance Commission was to keep good financial relations between the Centre and the States.

Article	280
Composition	1 Chairman and 4 other members.
Appointed	By the President of India.
Tenure	Specified by the President in his/her order.
Eligibility	Decided by the Parliament . The chairperson must have experience in public affairs and sound knowledge of financial issues.
Power and Functions	Distribute the net proceeds of taxes among the state and centre. Decides the sharing of taxes by the Centre and States. Has power equal to that of the Civil Court. Any other matter referred by the President in the interests of sound finance.

8. Goods and Services Tax Council (GST Council)

- The Goods and Services Tax (GST) was a major change **introduced by the 101st Amendment Act 2016**. For GST to work well, both the central and state governments need to work together and coordinate effectively.
- The GST Council's secretariat is located in New Delhi, and the Union Revenue Secretary serves as the ex-officio secretary.

Article	279-A
Composition	The Union Finance Minister acts as the Chairperson. The Union Minister of State is responsible for Revenue or Finance. The Finance or Taxation Minister or any other Minister appointed by each State Government.

Power and Functions

Recommends to the central and state governments on these matters:
which taxes, cesses, and surcharges by the central, state, and local governments should be included in GST.
which goods and services should be taxed under GST and which should be exempt.
standard GST laws, rules on how GST is charged, how GST collected from inter-state trade is shared, and rules on where goods and services are considered to be supplied.

9. National Commission for Scheduled Castes (NCSC)

- The National Commission for Scheduled Castes was created on 19 February 2004, replacing the earlier National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes established in 1978.
- It was set up to support and protect the Scheduled Castes in India, aiming to prevent discrimination and exploitation and to help improve their lives.

Article	338
Composition	Consists of 5 members: 1 Chairperson, 1 Vice-Chairperson, and 3 other members.
Appointed	By the President of India .
Tenure	3 years
Power and Functions	<p>Investigate and monitor all issues related to legal protections for Scheduled Castes.</p> <p>Handles specific complaints about the deprivation of rights of Scheduled Castes.</p> <p>Actively participates in planning and evaluating the social and economic development of Scheduled Castes in each state.</p> <p>Carries out similar functions for the welfare and protection of Scheduled Castes as specified by the President.</p>

- Click on the link to read about **how SC/ ST are decided in India**.

10. National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST)

- The National Commission for Scheduled Tribes **was created by the Constitution (89th Amendment) Act in 2003** and was officially formed on 19 February 2004. It was established under Article 338A after splitting from the previous National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.
- The NCST is responsible for ensuring the implementation of various protections for Scheduled Tribes provided by the Constitution.

Article	338-A
Composition	Consists of 5 members: 1 Chairperson, 1 Vice-Chairperson, and 3 other members(including one female Member)
Appointed	By the President of India.
Tenure	3 years
Power and Functions	Addresses issues related to Scheduled Tribes and resolves them at both state and national levels. Provide protections to prevent the exploitation of Scheduled Tribes and to safeguard their social, economic, educational, and cultural interests.

- The Act, which was enacted to prevent atrocities against individuals belonging to SC and ST.

11. National Commission for Backward Classes (NCBC)

- The National Commission for Backward Classes was **created in 1993 under the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment through the National Commission for Backward Classes Act**. Its purpose is to identify and address the economic and social challenges faced by backward classes and suggest solutions to overcome these issues.
- The commission resulted from **Indra Sawhney & Others v. Union of India**. In 1992, the Supreme Court of India directed the Government of India and others to create a permanent body that would handle requests and complaints about adding or removing groups from the list of Other Backward Classes (OBCs). The Court also stated that only social and educational backwardness, not economic status, should be considered for this purpose.

Article	338-B
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Composition	Consists of 5 members: 1 Chairperson, 1 Vice-Chairperson, and 3 other members.
Appointed	By the President of India.
Tenure	3 years
Power and Functions	<p>Helps economically and socially backward people by handling their complaints and taking necessary action.</p> <p>Prepares reports on the welfare and rights of socially and economically backward classes and submits them to the President.</p> <p>Protects socially and educationally backward classes from exploitation and ensures their interests in education, culture, and economics.</p>

12. Special Officer for Linguistic Minorities

- The Special Officer for Linguistic Minorities (CLM) was **established under the 7th Constitutional Amendment Act of 1956 and is part of the Ministry of Minority Affairs.**
- Linguistic minorities at the state, district, and taluka/tehsil levels are groups of people whose mother tongues differ from the principal language of the respective state, district, or taluka/tehsil.

Article	350-B
Composition	One membered body
Appointed	By the President of India.
Tenure	The Constitution does not specify qualifications, tenure, salaries, and procedures for removal.
Headquarters	<p>Headquarters – New Delhi</p> <p>Regional Offices: Belgaum, Chennai, Kolkata</p>
Power and Functions	<p>Look into issues concerning protections for language minorities.</p> <p>Send reports to the President about how well the safeguards for language minorities are followed.</p> <p>Keep an eye on the safeguards by using surveys, visits, meetings, and</p>

other methods.

- Constitutional bodies work according to specific articles in the Constitution, focusing on various aspects of the country's development and governance. India's different constitutional bodies, each with unique roles important for the nation's progress. These bodies are empowered by the constitution with special authority and responsibilities.

CBI & CVC: India's Premier Anti-Corruption and Vigilance Agencies

Central Vigilance Commission

- It is the main agency for preventing corruption in the Central government.
- It was **established in 1964 by an executive resolution of the Central government.**
- It was established based **on the recommendations by the Santhanam Committee on Prevention of Corruption (1962-64).**
- Initially, the CVC was neither a constitutional body nor a statutory body.
- In 2003, the Parliament enacted a law granting **statutory status** to the CVC.
- CVC is a multi-member body consisting of a **Central Vigilance Commissioner (chairperson) and not more than two vigilance commissioners.**
- They are **appointed by the President of India by warrant under his hand and seal on the recommendation of a three-member committee;**
- The prime minister is its head.
- The Union Minister of Home Affairs.
- The Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha.
- The President can also remove the Central Vigilance Commissioner or any vigilance commissioner on the ground of proven misbehavior or incapacity.

Functions

- Inquiry or investigation is to be conducted into any complaint against any official belonging to the below-mentioned category of officials wherein it is alleged that he has committed an offence under the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988.
- **Give directions to the Delhi Special Police Establishment** to discharge the responsibility entrusted to it under the Delhi Special Police Establishment Act, 1946.
- The Union Government is required to consult the CVC in making rules and regulations governing the vigilance and disciplinary matters relating to the members of Central Services and All-India

Services.

- The Central Vigilance Commissioner is also the Chairperson of the two Committees, on whose recommendations the Central Government appoints the Director of the Delhi Special Police Establishment and the Director of Enforcement.
- **Present annually to the President a report on its performance.**
- The President places this report before each House of Parliament.

Jurisdiction

- Members of All India Services serving in connection with the affairs of the Union and Group A officers of the Central Government.
- Officers of the rank of Scale V and above in the Public Sector Banks.
- Officers in Grade D and above in Reserve Bank of India, NABARD and SIDBI.
- Managers and above in General Insurance Companies.
- Senior Divisional Managers and above in Life Insurance Corporation.

Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI)

- The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) was **set up in 1963 by a resolution of the Ministry of Home Affairs. Later, it was transferred to the Ministry of Personnel.**
- The Special Police Establishment set up in 1941 was also merged with the CBI.
- The establishment of the CBI was **recommended by the Santhanam Committee on Prevention of Corruption (1962-1964).**
- The CBI is **not a statutory body. It derives its powers from the Delhi Special Police Establishment Act, 1946.**
- The CBI is the main investigating agency of the Central Government. It plays an important role in the prevention of corruption and maintaining integrity in administration.
- **It also assists the Central Vigilance Commission and Lokpal.**
- **The CBI investigates crimes of corruption, economic offences and serious and organized crime other than terrorism.**
- For Terrorism: The National Investigation Agency (NIA) has been constituted after the Mumbai terror attack in 2008 mainly for the investigation of incidents of terrorist attacks, funding of terrorism and other terror-related crime.
- CBI is headed by a Director. He is assisted by a special director or an additional director.
- **The Central Government appoints the Director of CBI on the recommendation of a three-member committee consisting of;**

- The Prime Minister as Chairperson.
- The Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha.
- The Chief Justice of India or Judge of the Supreme Court nominated by him.

Cases investigated by the CBI

- **Anti-Corruption Crimes** - Investigate cases under the Prevention of Corruption Act against Public officials and the employees of Central Government, Public Sector Undertakings, Corporations or Bodies owned or controlled by the Government of India.
- **Economic Crimes** - Investigate major financial scams and serious economic frauds, including crimes relating to Fake Indian Currency Notes, Bank fraud and Cyber Crime, Smuggling of narcotics, antiques, cultural property and smuggling etc.
- **Special Crimes** - Investigate seriously and organized crime under the Indian Penal Code and other laws at the requests of State Governments or on the orders of the Supreme Court and High Courts.
- **Suo Moto Cases** - CBI can suo-moto take up investigation of offences only in the Union Territories.
- The Central Government can authorize CBI to investigate a crime in a State but only with the consent of the concerned State Government.
- The Supreme Court and High Courts, however, can order CBI to investigate a crime anywhere in the country without the consent of the State.

Delimitation Process in India

- Delimitation means the **process of fixing the number of seats and boundaries** of territorial constituencies in each State for the Lok Sabha and Legislative assemblies. It also includes determining the seats to be reserved for **Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST)** in these houses.
- This 'delimitation process' is performed **by the 'Delimitation Commission'** that is set up under an act of Parliament. Delimitation Commissions have been set up four times — **1952, 1963, 1973 and 2002** under the Acts of 1952, 1962, 1972 and 2002. The first delimitation exercise was carried out by the President (with the help of the Election Commission) in 1950-51.

Genesis

- The last delimitation exercise that **changed the state-wise composition of the Lok Sabha** was completed in 1976 and done on the basis of the 1971 census.
- The **Constitution of India** mandates that the allocation of seats in the Lok Sabha should be based

on the population of each state so that the **ratio of seats to population is as close as possible to being equal across all states**. It is intended to ensure that each person's vote carries roughly the same weight, regardless of which state they live in.

- However, this provision meant that states that took little interest in population control could end up with a greater number of seats in Parliament.
- To avoid these consequences, the **Constitution was amended 42nd Amendment Act of 1976 froze the allocation of seats** in the Lok Sabha to the states and the division of each state into territorial constituencies till the year 2000 at the 1971 level.
- The **84th Amendment Act of 2001** empowered the government to **undertake readjustment** and rationalisation of territorial constituencies in the states on the basis of the population figures of 1991 census.
- The **87th Amendment Act of 2003** provided for the delimitation of constituencies **on the basis of 2001** census and not 1991 census.
- However, this can be done without altering the number of seats allotted to each state in the Lok Sabha.

Constitutional Provisions:

- Under **Article 82**, the Parliament enacts a **Delimitation Act after every Census**.
- Under **Article 170**, States also get divided into territorial constituencies as per Delimitation Act after every Census.

Delimitation Commission

- **Appointment:**
- The Commission is appointed by the **President of India and works in collaboration with the Election Commission of India**.
- **Composition:**
- Retired **Supreme Court judge**
- **Chief Election Commissioner**
- Respective **State Election Commissioners**

Functions:

- To **determine the number and boundaries of constituencies** to make the population of all constituencies nearly equal.
- To identify seats reserved for **Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes**, wherever their

population is relatively large.

Powers:

- In case of a difference of opinion among members of the Commission, the **opinion of the majority prevails**.
- The Delimitation Commission in India is a high-power body **whose orders have the force of law and cannot be called in question before any court**.



Significance of Delimitation

Representation:

- Delimitation ensures fair representation in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies by adjusting the **number of seats based on population changes**.
- This is crucial for **upholding the democratic principle of "one citizen-one vote-one value."**

Equity:

- By readjusting the **boundaries of territorial constituencies**, delimitation aims to ensure **equitable distribution of seats** among different regions, considering population shifts over time.
- This helps prevent underrepresentation or overrepresentation of specific areas.

Reserved Seats for SC/ST:

- Delimitation determines the allocation of reserved seats for **Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST)** in accordance with constitutional provisions, ensuring adequate political representation for marginalized communities.

Federalism:

- Delimitation impacts federal principles by influencing the distribution of political power among states. It is essential to **strike a balance between population-based representation and federal considerations** to maintain harmony among diverse regions.

Population Control Measures:

- Historically, the freezing of seats based on the **1971 Census aimed to incentivize population control** measures. However, the impending delimitation exercise raises questions about the effectiveness and implications of this policy in the context of changing demographics.

Concerns Related to Delimitation

Regional Disparity:

- Despite having **only 18% of the country's population**, the southern states **contribute 35% to the country's GDP**.
- Disparity in representation **between north and southern part of India** in the Lok Sabha due to population as a deciding factor.
- The delimitation based solely on population disregards the progress made by the southern states in population control and may lead to disparities in the federal structure.

- The northern states, which did not prioritise population control, are expected to benefit in the delimitation process due to their higher population growth.

Inadequate Funding:

- After the **15th Finance Commission** used the 2011 **Census** as a basis for its recommendation, concerns were raised about **southern states losing funding** and representation in parliament.
- Previously, the **1971 Census** was used as the base for funding and tax devolution **recommendations to states**.

Affecting the Reservations for SCs/ STs:

- This could potentially lead to a shift of power toward the north and away from the south.
- The scheduled delimitation and reallocation of seats may result in **not only a loss of seats for southern states** but also an increase in power for political parties with their base of support in the north.
- The exercise will also affect the division of seats reserved for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in each state (under Articles 330 and 332).

International Practices Related to Delimitation

In the US:

- For example, based on the Census of 2020, the reapportionment has resulted in no change in the number of seats for 37 States.
- The number of **seats in the House of Representatives** (the equivalent of our Lok Sabha) has been **capped at 435 since 1913**.
- The **population of the country has increased almost four times** from 9.4 crore in 1911 to an estimated 33.4 crore in 2023. The seats among the **States are redistributed after every Census through the 'method of equal proportion'**. This does not result in any significant gain or loss for any of the States.

European Union (EU):

- For example, **Denmark** with a population of around 60 lakh has 15 seats (**average population of 4 lakh per member**) as against Germany with a population of 8.3 crore having 96 seats (**average population of 8.6 lakh per member**).
- In the EU Parliament which consists of 720 members, the number of seats is **divided between 27 member** countries based on the **principle of 'degressive proportionality'**.
- Under this principle, the ratio of population to the number of seats shall increase as the population increases.
- There is a need to balance democratic representation with federal

considerations. Suggestions include capping the number of Lok Sabha seats while increasing the number of MLAs based on population, alongside empowering local bodies for grassroots democracy.

Inter-State Council

- Tamil Nadu Chief Minister **M K Stalin** wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi on 16 June 2022, asking that **at least three meetings** of the **Inter-State Council** should be held every year to **“strengthen the spirit of cooperative federalism”**.
- Stalin also suggested that bills of national importance should be placed before the Council before being tabled in Parliament. He said this was because there is no **“effective and interactive communication”** between the states and the Centre on **issues of common interest**.

What is the Inter-State Council?

- It is a mechanism that was constituted **“to support Centre-State and Inter-State coordination and cooperation in India”**. The **Inter-State Council** was established under **Article 263 of the Constitution**, which states that the President may constitute such a body if a need is felt for it. The Council is basically meant to **serve as a forum for discussions** among various governments.
- **In 1988**, the **Sarkaria Commission** suggested the Council should exist as a **permanent body**, and **in 1990 it came into existence** through a Presidential Order.
- The main functions of the Council are **inquiring into and advising on disputes** between states, investigating and discussing subjects in which two states or states and the Union have a common interest, and making recommendations for the **better coordination of policy and action**.
- The **Prime Minister is the chairman of the Council**, whose members include the **Chief Ministers of all states and UTs** with legislative assemblies, and **Administrators of other UTs**. **Six Ministers of Cabinet rank** in the Centre's Council of Ministers, nominated by the Prime Minister, are also its members.

What issues has Chief Minister Stalin raised?

- Mainly, the DMK chief has flagged the **lack of regular meetings**, saying the Council has met only once in the last six years — and that there has been **no meeting since July 2016**. Since its constitution in 1990, the body has met only 11 times, although its procedure states it should meet at least three times every year.
- Stalin appreciated the reconstitution of the Council, carried out last month. The body will now

have **10 Union Ministers as permanent invitees**, and the standing committee of the Council has been reconstituted with Home Minister Amit Shah as Chairman. Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman and the Chief Ministers of Maharashtra, UP, and Gujarat are some of the other standing committee members.

- Stalin has frequently disagreed with the central government's policies on **matters of taxation**, on the **medical examination NEET**, and often talked about the **rights of states**. Highlighting the need for the Council to meet regularly, he said, "What could be settled amicably among the executive branches is often taken to the doorsteps of the judicial branch."
- Tamil Nadu has long advocated the need for a Council. In 1969, Stalin's father, M Karunanidhi, spoke about **setting up an expert committee** to study **Centre-state relations**. Months later, his government appointed a committee headed by **P V Rajamannar**, a former Madras High Court Chief Justice, which submitted a report in 1971, recommending "the Inter-State Council should be constituted immediately".

What happened in the last meeting of the Inter State Council?

- In **2016**, the meeting included consideration of the **Punchhi Commission's recommendations** on Centre-State Relations that were published in 2010. At the time, M Karunanidhi had criticised then Chief Minister J Jayalalithaa for not personally attending the meeting.
- The meeting saw detailed discussion on the recommendations. States asked for maintaining the federal structure amid growing "**centralisation**". **Imposition of Article 356 of the Constitution**, which deals with the imposition of President's Rule in states, was a matter of concern. Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, who was then with the Opposition, demanded that the post of Governor should be abolished.

Labour Codes – Qualms and Confidence

- India's recently implemented labour codes, which consolidated **29 existing laws into four main codes** effective November 21, 2025, have introduced several significant changes aimed at modernizing the workforce and streamlining compliance.
- India has entered a decisive phase in labour reforms with the operationalisation of the four Labour Codes:
 1. **Code on Wages, 2019**
 2. **Industrial Relations Code, 2020**

3. **Social Security Code, 2020**

4. **Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions (OSH) Code, 2020**

- These codes replace 29 earlier labour laws, marking the most comprehensive restructuring since Independence.
- The codes recognise the changing world of work—**gig tasks, platform labour, fixed-term employment**—by modernising definitions and extending protections.

India's Labour Codes

- India's Labour Codes streamline 29 laws into four modern frameworks, expanding social security, improving wages, recognising gig workers, enhancing safety, and promoting formalisation for a fair, future-ready workforce.

Why Labour Reform Was Essential?

1. **Fragmented legal framework:**

- Multiple central and state laws with conflicting definitions and requirements created compliance burdens, especially for MSMEs.

2. **Persistent informality:**

- Over **90% of India's workforce remains informally employed**, lacking written contracts, statutory wages, or social security coverage.

3. **New employment structures:**

- Self-employment, platform-based work, hybrid contracts, and increased labour mobility required updated governance.

4. **Global competitiveness:**

- Outdated labour laws limited ease of doing business, formalisation, and investment inflows.

5. **Technological disruptions:**

- Automation and platform work created new vulnerabilities requiring portable protections.

Major Objectives of the Four Labour Codes

- Simplification of labour laws by consolidating definitions, reducing overlapping provisions, and enabling single registration and reporting.
- **Universalisation of protections** by ensuring minimum wages and floor wages for all categories of workers.
- Formalisation of employment through mandatory appointment letters, standardised contracts, and **digital record-keeping**.

- Expansion of social protection to include gig workers, platform workers, and migrant workers.
- Modern industrial relations aimed at balancing flexibility for employers with rights for workers.
- Encouragement of women's workforce participation through equal pay, night-shift permissions with safeguards, and creche requirements.
- Boost to ease of doing business through single-window compliance, uniformity across states, and predictable regulations.

Key Provisions That Strengthen Worker Welfare

1. **Minimum Wages and Floor Wage:**
 - Central government to fix a national floor wage; *states cannot set wages below this*.
 - Universal coverage extends minimum wages to all workers, including informal and unorganised workers.
2. **Appointment Letters and Contracts:**
 - Mandatory written appointment letters ensure transparency in employment terms, wages, hours, and benefits.
3. **Gratuity for Fixed-Term Workers:**
 - Eligibility after one year (instead of five), boosting protections for contractual employees.
4. **Annual Health Check-Ups:**
 - Free health check-ups for employees aged 40+ under the OSH Code.
5. **Safe Working Conditions:**
 - Standardised safety protocols for construction, mines, factories, and hazardous processes.
6. **Gig and Platform Worker Recognition:**
 - First-ever statutory recognition, enabling targeted social security schemes.
7. **Protection for Migrant Workers:**
 - Portable benefits, registration portals, and interstate coordination mandated.

Key Points of Concern & Discussion

- The primary qualms and discussions surrounding the new codes often **center on the balance between providing flexibility to businesses and ensuring robust protection for workers**.
1. **Higher Layoff/Retrenchment Threshold** The Industrial Relations (IR) Code raises the threshold for government approval for layoffs, retrenchment, and establishment closures from 100 to 300 workers.
 - **Qualm:** Critics argue this makes it easier for larger companies to fire workers without government oversight, potentially reducing job security.

- **Counterpoint:** Proponents, including the government, state this offers businesses greater operational flexibility to adapt to market conditions and is expected to boost formal employment and investment.
- 2. Definition of Wages The new definition of "wages" mandates that allowances cannot exceed 50% of an employee's total remuneration, which means the basic pay component will likely increase.
 - **Qualm:** This change can increase the cost of social security contributions (like PF and gratuity) for employers and may result in a higher tax burden for some employees in the short term.
 - **Counterpoint:** This ensures consistency in the calculation of social security benefits, ultimately leading to higher retirement savings and gratuity payouts for workers.
- 3. Working Hours Flexibility While the standard workday remains 8 hours, the codes allow for daily working hours to be capped at 8-12 hours per day with proper overtime compensation (at twice the normal rate) and weekly limits.
 - **Qualm:** This provision has led to concerns and some misinterpretation about a potential mandatory 12-hour workday.
 - **Counterpoint:** The government clarified that this provides flexibility and overtime is consent-based and compensated, not a mandatory extension of the standard workday.

Gig and Platform Worker Coverage For the first time, "gig" and "platform" workers are officially recognized and brought under the social security net.

- **Qualm:** The aggregation platforms are required to contribute 1-2% of their annual turnover (capped at 5% of the payout to workers) to a social security fund, which may impact business models and operational costs for aggregators.
- **Counterpoint:** This guarantees social security coverage and benefits, such as life and disability cover, for a vast section of the informal workforce that was previously excluded.

Formalization and Compliance Burden The codes introduce a single registration, single license, and single return system to simplify compliance, replacing multiple overlapping filings.

- **Qualm:** Implementation requires state governments to notify their specific rules, and a lack of uniformity across states could still pose challenges.
- **Counterpoint:** The simplification is designed to promote ease of doing business and encourage formal employment by making it easier for small businesses to comply with regulations.

Industry and International Response-

Industry bodies (CII, FICCI, ASSOCHAM):

- Welcomed the codes as a “historic milestone” for formalisation, productivity, and global alignment.
- Viewed as improving the investment climate and reducing compliance disputes.

International Perspective:

- ILO, OECD, World Bank, and WEF acknowledge India’s attempt to create a modern labour framework.
- Recognition of gig workers and portable social security seen as progressive and future-oriented.

Skills, Productivity, and Future Employment Pathways

- WEF estimates a large share of the global workforce requires **reskilling by 2030**.
- India faces significant **skill mismatches**:
- Technology-intensive sectors demand specialised training that large segments of youth lack.
- NITI Aayog identifies the job-creating potential of:
 1. Tourism
 2. Logistics
 3. Healthcare
 4. Education
 5. Business services

Labour codes complement India’s skilling ecosystem through:

1. Apprenticeship reforms
2. Modernised ITIs
3. Public-private training collaborations
4. CSR-funded skilling initiatives

A lifelong learning ecosystem is essential to enable career mobility and future readiness.

Federal Dimensions and State-Level Innovation

- Labour is a **Concurrent List subject**; states play a major role in operationalising the codes.
- Variations across states will influence:
 1. Ease of compliance
 2. Thresholds for inspections
 3. Local safety standards

4. Welfare schemes for migrant and unorganised workers
5. Inter-state coordination becomes important for migrant worker protection, especially via portable benefits.
6. States can innovate within the national framework to meet local labour market characteristics.

Challenges in Implementation

- Differences in state readiness to notify rules may create transitional uncertainty.
- MSMEs may struggle with initial compliance and technological adaptation.
- Workers need awareness of rights, entitlements, and grievance systems.
- Gig workers remain outside traditional employer–employee relationships, creating ambiguity in contributions.
- Success depends on synchronised digital infrastructure, inter-state cooperation, and continuous social dialogue.

Conclusion and Solution

- Overall, the new Indian labour codes are viewed as a significant, transformative step by the government to balance worker welfare with industry needs, though their full impact will depend on consistent implementation across the country.

India's next step must focus on:

- Enhancing quality of work, not just job quantity
- Building universal portable social protection
- Strengthening lifelong skilling and productivity
- Ensuring gender-inclusive employment
- Maintaining industry–state–worker dialogue
- If implemented effectively, the codes can shape a dignified, secure, and productive workforce suited to the 21st century economy.

Quantum Atmanirbharta

- NITI Aayog's Frontier Tech Hub has released a comprehensive roadmap titled "Transforming India into a Leading Quantum-Powered Economy."

Transforming India into a Leading Quantum-Powered Economy:

- It is a national strategic roadmap prepared by NITI Aayog (with IBM as knowledge partner) that lays out India's 2035 vision for quantum computing, communication, sensing and materials, and details actions needed to build a globally competitive quantum ecosystem.

Key Highlights of the Report

- Vision for 2035: India Among Top 3 Quantum Economies:** India aims to become a global leader with 10+ quantum startups achieving USD 100M+ revenue and capturing over 50% of the global quantum software market.
- Deployment Across Strategic Sectors:** Quantum tech should be deployed at scale across defence, healthcare, finance, mining, energy and national infrastructure by 2035.
- Full Quantum Supply-Chain Participation:** India must achieve "quantum Atmanirbharta" by contributing to quantum hardware, materials, processors, cryogenic systems, and software stacks, while becoming a net exporter.
- Two-Phase Milestone Plan (2025–30 & 2030–35):** Milestones include setting up testbeds, 50+ funded startups, sectoral pilots, PQC deployment, and later global leadership, export corridors and supply-chain dominance.
- Workforce Expansion & Talent Readiness:** The plan calls for a 10× expansion of quantum-skilled professionals within 2–3 years and making India a top-three global destination for quantum talent.
- Focus on Standards, IP and Global Quantum Diplomacy:** India will lead international standard-setting, secure market access through global partnerships, and establish quantum benchmarking consortia.
- Large-Scale Adoption of Quantum-Resilient Cryptography:** Mandatory planning for quantum-safe encryption in government systems, deployment of PQC testbeds, and integration into national cybersecurity architecture.
- Strong Emphasis on Industry Participation & Innovation-to-Market Pipeline:** The roadmap highlights quantum-HPC integration, sectoral pilots, cloud-based quantum services, accelerators and venture funding to build a strong private-sector ecosystem.

Opportunities for India

- Leapfrog Advantage:** Quantum is still nascent globally, giving India a rare chance to lead rather than catch up (greenfield trillion-dollar opportunity).

- **High-Value Job Creation:** Specialized jobs in algorithms, hardware, cryogenics, sensors, and quantum materials.
- **Sectoral Productivity Boost:** Logistics, finance, aviation, energy, pharma, and manufacturing can achieve massive optimization and cost savings through quantum advantage.
- **Strategic Autonomy:** Indigenous quantum communications, PQC and sensing will strengthen defence and national security.
- **Export Leadership:** Software, PQC libraries, cloud platforms, sensors and components for the Global South market.

High-Impact Sectors

- The roadmap focuses on integrating quantum solutions into sectors critical for national security and economic growth:
- 1. **Healthcare & Pharma:** Accelerating drug discovery and precision diagnostics.
- 2. **Finance:** Implementing quantum-safe encryption (Post-Quantum Cryptography) and fraud detection.
- 3. **National Security:** Developing GPS-free navigation and secure communication networks.
- 4. **Logistics:** Optimizing supply chains under the PM Gati Shakti framework.

Initiatives Already Taken

- **National Quantum Mission (2023–2031)** with ₹6000+ crore to build quantum hubs, testbeds, and technologies.
- Start-up support via **iDEX and NQM**, early industry pilots, and India's participation in international collaborations.
- Quantum communication trials, **QKD networks**, and sensing prototypes in strategic sectors.

Challenges Identified in the Report

- **Hardware Gaps & Import Dependence:** India lacks domestic capability in quantum processors, cryogenic systems, quantum materials, and peripherals.
- **Weak Basic Science & Low R&D Investment:** India invests only ~0.65% of GDP in R&D; research quality and IP ownership remain low.
- **Severe Skill Shortages:** Shortage of experts in cryogenics, optics, microwave engineering, hardware–software co-design and techno-business skills.
- **Risk-Averse Capital & Limited Industry Adoption:** Deep-tech capital is scarce; industry awareness is low; procurement and audit processes hinder innovation.

- **Global Geopolitical Risks:** China's dominance in materials, export controls by advanced economies, and global talent competition.

NITI Aayog Roadmap Recommendations

- Build domestic quantum hardware & materials ecosystem: manufacturing for cryo-electronics, detectors, photonics, and processors.
- Set up quantum-specific standards, testbeds, and certification systems to ensure global interoperability.
- Massively scale quantum skilling through universities, online platforms, and national quantum education programmes.
- Accelerate industry pilots in logistics, aviation, energy, pharma, finance, and defence.
- Strengthen international quantum diplomacy for market access, supply-chain security and standards leadership.
- Ensure early transition to PQC across government and critical infrastructure.
- Create a national quantum venture fund and innovation-to-market accelerators.

Conclusion:

- Quantum technology offers India a **once-in-a-century opportunity** to shape a frontier industry rather than chase it. With coordinated investment, strong R&D, global partnerships and aggressive industry adoption, India can rise as a **top-three quantum economy by 2035**. The roadmap provides a blueprint to secure technological leadership, economic competitiveness and national security in the coming quantum era.

70th Death Anniversary of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar - Mahaparinirvan Diwas

- India observed the 70th death anniversary (Mahaparinirvan Diwas) of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, commemorating his lasting contributions to constitutional governance, social justice, and economic thought.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar:

- B.R. Ambedkar (1891–1956) was a jurist, economist, social reformer, and **chief architect of the Indian Constitution**. He led pioneering movements against caste discrimination and laid the foundations of India's modern democratic and economic institutions.

Early Life & Education:

- Born on 14 April 1891 in Mhow (MP) into a socially **oppressed Mahar family**; faced severe caste discrimination since childhood.
- Completed B.A. from Bombay University; supported by a **Baroda State scholarship** for higher studies abroad.
- Earned PhD from **Columbia University**, D.Sc. from London School of Economics, Bar-at-Law in London—becoming one of India's most accomplished scholars of his time.

His early works- Castes in India, Evolution of Provincial Finance, Problem of the Rupee - established him as a global intellectual.

Contributions to India's Freedom Movement & Social Reform

- **Led Mass Movements Against Untouchability:** Ambedkar transformed the social reform landscape by leading historic civil rights agitations, most notably the **Mahad Satyagraha (1927)** where Dalits asserted their right to drink water from a public tank. This marked the **first organised anti-caste mass mobilisation** challenging notions of purity-pollution.
- **Fought for Temple Entry and Religious Equality:** He spearheaded the **Kalaram Temple Satyagraha (1930)** in Nashik to demand Dalit entry into Hindu temples. This campaign directly confronted religious exclusion and became a symbol of the struggle for dignity and the right to worship.
- **Represented Depressed Classes at Round Table Conferences:** At the **Round Table Conferences (1930–32) in London**, Ambedkar was the foremost voice for Dalits. He articulated their political grievances, demanded separate electorates for adequate representation, and successfully internationalised the issue of caste discrimination.
- **Negotiated the Poona Pact (1932):** Ambedkar's negotiations with Mahatma Gandhi led to the **Poona Pact**, replacing separate electorates with reserved seats for Dalits in legislatures. This became the basis of modern affirmative action in India and ensured political empowerment within a joint electorate.
- **Championed Labour Rights and Social Justice During Colonial Rule:** As **Labour Member in the Viceroy's Executive Council (1942–46)**, Ambedkar introduced 8-hour workdays, paid leave, maternity benefits, dispute resolution systems, and welfare funds—advancing both workers' rights and social justice during the freedom struggle.
- **Contribution to Drafting the Constitution:** B.R. Ambedkar ensured the Constitution embodied justice, liberty, equality and fraternity by designing a strong framework of fundamental rights, federalism and an independent judiciary. He introduced safeguards such as abolition of untouchability, reservations, minority protections and social welfare principles.

Contributions to India's Economic Thought

- **Father of Monetary Economics in India:** His book **The Problem of the Rupee (1923)** shaped modern monetary policy and directly influenced the creation of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) in 1934.
- **Fiscal Federalism Pioneer:** His 1921 thesis on provincial finance laid the intellectual foundation for India's Finance Commission and fiscal decentralisation.
- **Labour Reforms (as Labour Member, 1942-46):** Introduced 8-hour workday, maternity benefits, labour welfare funds, and set up Employment Exchanges across India.
- **Water & Power Resource Planning:** Spearheaded key institutions such as the Central Water Commission, Damodar Valley Project, and promoted multi-purpose river projects for national development.
- **Anti-inflation and welfare economics:** Emphasised monetary stability and warned that inflation disproportionately harms the poor-echoing principles in today's inflation-targeting framework.

Organisations Associated with Ambedkar

1. **Bahishkrit Hitkarini Sabha (1923):** Upliftment of oppressed communities.
2. **Independent Labour Party (1936):** Advocated labour rights and social justice.
3. **Scheduled Castes Federation (1942):** Political mobilisation of marginalized groups.
4. **Republican Party of India (announced 1956):** Vision for an egalitarian polity (formed after his death).

Literary Contributions

Ambedkar's works span economics, sociology, politics, religion, and law. Key texts include:

1. Annihilation of Caste
2. The Problem of the Rupee
3. Who Were the Shudras?
4. Buddha and His Dhamma
5. Essays on Untouchables and Untouchability
6. Buddha or Karl Marx
7. Critical journals: Mooknayak, Bahishkrit Bharat, Janata, Samata

These writings shaped India's intellectual, social, and constitutional landscape.

Ambedkar's Last Days

- **Declining Health (1954-56):** From 1954 onward, Ambedkar suffered from diabetes, weakened eyesight, and deteriorating physical health. Despite this, he continued his academic writing, parliamentary work, and Buddhist studies.
- **Completion of The Buddha and His Dhamma:** In the final months of his life, he worked intensely to complete his last and most profound book, "The Buddha and His Dhamma", laying the philosophical foundation of **Navayana Buddhism**. The book was published posthumously in 1957.
- **Historic Conversion to Buddhism (14 October 1956):** Ambedkar and over 5 lakh followers embraced Buddhism in **Nagpur**, marking a revolutionary social and spiritual movement. He saw conversion as the final step in rejecting caste oppression and reclaiming dignity.
- **Final Writings and Reflections:** In his last speeches and writings, Ambedkar expressed concern about rising casteism, economic inequality, and the gap between constitutional ideals and social reality. He warned that "political democracy cannot last unless there lies at the base of it social democracy."
- **Mahaparinirvan (6 December 1956):** Ambedkar passed away peacefully in his sleep at his residence, 26 Alipur Road, Delhi, at the age of 65. His death anniversary is observed as Mahaparinirvan Diwas.
- **Cremation and Memorial at Chaitya Bhoomi:** His funeral drew lakhs of followers, and his ashes were enshrined at Chaitya Bhoomi, Mumbai, which has since become an iconic pilgrimage site for Ambedkarites.
- **Bharat Ratna (1990):** Ambedkar was posthumously awarded India's highest civilian honour, the Bharat Ratna, for his monumental contributions to nation-building, constitutional design, social justice, and economic thought.

Conclusion

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's legacy extends far beyond drafting the Constitution—he laid the moral, economic, and institutional foundation of modern India. His life remains a testament to the transformative power of knowledge, courage, and constitutionalism. Seven decades after his passing, Ambedkar's ideas continue to light the path towards a more just, equitable, and dignified society.

Police Reform in India - 'Viksit Bharat: Security Dimensions'

PM Modi stressed the need for police reform while addressing the **60th All India Conference of Director Generals** in Raipur, held under the theme of 'Viksit Bharat: Security Dimensions'.

Need for Police Reforms in India

Political and Structural Inertia

- **Structural Stagnation:** Colonial-era institutional design restricts flexibility and undermines democratic policing. Ten states still use frameworks derived from the **Police Act 1861**.
- **Non-Compliance:** Supreme Court directives to create independent police boards and fixed-tenure systems remain unmet. Not a single state in India has fully complied with all **Prakash Singh directives**.
- **Political Pressure:** Political leverage over postings forces officers to prioritise political interests over the rule of law. 72% personnel faced political pressure in cases involving influential persons. (SPIR 2019).
- **Weak Oversight:** Inadequate complaint bodies render public grievance redressal ineffective. 30% of functional State Police Complaints Authorities (SPCAs) lack a judicial member (IJR 2022).

Workforce and Capacity Crisis

- **Work Fatigue:** Excessive duty hours and inconsistent weekly rest impair on-ground performance. An average police workday is 14 hours (SPIR 2019).
- **Promotion Stagnation:** Limited promotion avenues reduce motivation for the bulk of the workforce. Constables form 86% of the force, but often retire with only one promotion after 30 years.
- **Training Deficit:** Outdated training fails to prepare officers for modern forensics, cybercrime, or human-rights compliance. 64% received no in-service training in the last 5 years (IJR 2022).

Diversity & Trust Deficit

- **Gender Gap:** Low female participation restricts gender-sensitive policing in sensitive cases. **Women comprise 12% of the police force, far below the 33% target.**
- **Minority Bias:** Weak minority representation in higher ranks reduces perceived neutrality. Despite forming 14% of the population, **Muslims constitute only 3-4% of the police force.**
- **Trust Deficit:** Fear of police aggression discourages crime reporting and community cooperation. CSDS Survey shows **14% of citizens are "highly fearful" of the police**

Human Rights & Infrastructure Issues

- **Custodial Violence:** The absence of an anti-torture law allows **"third-degree"** methods to continue without consequences. **India signed the UNCAT in 1997, but has yet to ratify it.**

- **Infrastructure Deficit:** Lack of basic amenities in police stations reduces working comfort and public accessibility. In 2020, 257 police stations had no vehicles, and 638 had no telephones.
- **Modernisation Lag:** Underutilisation of modernisation funds leaves forces with shortages in weapons and vehicles. 30-40% of the **Police Modernisation Fund (MPF)** remains unspent annually (IJR 2022).

Major Recommendations by Commissions:

1. National Police Commission (1977-81)

- Create a State Security Commission in every state to prevent political misuse of police.
- Ensure minimum assured tenure for DGPs and key police officers.
- Restrict government interference and strengthen the internal authority of police leadership.

2. Ribeiro Commission (1998)

- Set up a **Police Establishment Board (PEB)** to oversee transfers, promotions, and discipline.
- Replace the colonial Police Act of 1861 with a modern statute.
- Establish an Independent Police Recruitment Board for non-gazetted officers.

3. Padmanabhaiah Committee (2000)

- Separate Investigation responsibilities from the law-and-order duties.
- Create Police Training Advisory Councils at the central and state levels.
- Retrain constables and require personnel to retire if they fail to meet updated standards.

4. Malimath Committee (2002-03)

- Reform criminal justice processes in evidence, investigation, and trials.
- Form a national-level law enforcement agency for specialised cases.
- Strengthen victim rights and witness protection systems.

5. Model Police Act Committee (2005-06)

- Replace the 1861 Act with a rights-based Police Act.
- **Create a State Police Board** for oversight and appointments.
- Enforce a mandatory two-year minimum tenure and regulate transfers by rank.

6. National Human Rights Commission (2021)

- Insert Section 114B in the Evidence Act to place the burden of explaining custodial injuries on police.

- Install CCTV cameras nationwide as directed by the Supreme Court.
- Institutionalise community policing and **implement Prakash Singh directives**.

7. Supreme Court Directions in the Prakash Singh Case (2006)

- **Tenure Protection:** Fix a minimum two-year tenure for DGPs, IGs, SPs, and SHOs; later prohibited the appointment of temporary or “acting” DGPs.
- **Transfer Insulation:** Shift all postings, transfers, promotions, and service matters to Police Establishment Boards (PEBs).
- **Accountability Mechanisms:** Establish State Police Complaints Authorities for public grievances and State Security Commissions to prevent political interference.
- **Functional Separation:** Separate **investigation from law-and-order duties** and constitute a National Security Commission for appointment and oversight of central police chiefs.

Conclusion

- India stands at a critical juncture where its police system must evolve from an instrument of state control to a robust, accountable, and citizen-centric public service. Meaningful transformation requires a multi-pronged approach encompassing legislative changes, an end to political interference, significant investment in resources and training, and the implementation of community-oriented policing models to rebuild public trust. Only through sustained political will and a commitment to democratic values can India build a police force that not only enforces the law effectively but also earns the respect and confidence of its diverse population.

Care as Disability Justice & Mental Health Reform

- A recent article co-linked with the **M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF)** and practitioner accounts argues for reimagining mental health care in India as disability justice, centered on dignity, equity, and contextual understanding. This approach is in response to rising psychosocial distress, abuse within systems, and disengagement from existing mental health services.

Trends in Current Mental Health

- **Rising psychosocial distress:** Increased trauma, family conflict and economic strain drive mental ill-health; e.g., NCRB 2023 shows one-third suicides due to family problems.

- **High treatment gaps:** 70–90% mental-health treatment gap persists, especially in rural and marginalised groups.
- **Over-medicalisation:** Focus on symptoms and medication overshadows relational healing and trauma processing.
- **Intersectional vulnerabilities:** Women, Dalit communities, LGBTQIA+ individuals face layered discrimination; e.g., high suicide attempts among queer youth.
- **Growing peer-support models:** Recovery-led models like **The Banyan's inclusive housing** show survivor-led approaches are gaining recognition.

Need for Strong Mental-Health Care

- **Human dignity:** Survivors of homelessness and coercive care require systems that restore agency and basic rights. **E.g.** In 2023, the **NHRC inspected the Gwalior Mansik Arogyashala** and found patients living in “animal-like conditions” without beds or hygiene, prompting a Supreme Court inquiry into state-run facilities.
- **Disability justice:** Psychosocial disability demands support centered on “legal capacity” rather than guardianship. **E.g.** In **Ravindra Kumar vs. Union of India (2019)**, the Supreme Court ruled that a past diagnosis of mental illness cannot be a ground for disqualification from public employment, upholding rights under MHCA 2017.
- **Complex nature of distress:** Distress is often situational (academic, financial) rather than purely biological. **E.g.** The **Kota student suicide crisis (2023)** saw 29 deaths linked primarily to academic pressure and isolation, forcing the administration to mandate “anti-suicide fans” rather than addressing the root psychosocial stress.
- **Prevention of chronic spirals:** Community-based interventions prevent minor distress from becoming psychiatric disability. **E.g.** The **‘Atmiyata’ model in Gujarat trains** community volunteers to identify distress early; an impact evaluation showed it significantly reduced depression and anxiety scores in rural Mehsana without hospitalisation.
- **Socio-economic productivity:** Poor mental health drives massive economic loss through “presenteeism” (working while unwell). **E.g.** A Deloitte 2022 report estimates that poor employee mental health costs Indian companies ~₹1.1 lakh crore annually due to absenteeism and attrition.

Reimagining Care as Disability Justice

- The proposed model seeks to move beyond the "deficit lens"—which focuses solely on symptoms and productivity—toward a system centered on:
- **Dignity and Equity:** Prioritizing the person's inherent worth and right to a meaningful life over clinical "recovery" or "normalcy".
- **Contextual Understanding:** Recognizing that mental health is shaped by intersecting vulnerabilities, including caste, class, gender, and queer identities.
- **Relational Justice:** Viewing care as a collective moral obligation. This involves "staying with" people through non-linear recovery and addressing the social conditions that create suffering.
- **Transformed Education and Research:** Reorienting training to help practitioners handle uncertainty and recognizing those with lived experience as expert practitioners who provide community wisdom.

Challenges Associated

- **Severe resource shortage:** The gap in trained professionals forces reliance on general physicians who may lack specific training. **E.g.** A Parliamentary Standing Committee report (2023) highlighted a 96% shortage of clinical psychologists and psychiatric social workers in the government sector against the sanctioned strength.
- **Stigma and discrimination:** Social prejudice leads to exclusion from family and community life **E.g.** The **LiveLoveLaugh Foundation survey** (2018) revealed that 47% of Indians believe that people with mental illnesses should not be given any responsibility.
- **Fragmented service ecosystem:** "Cured" patients often remain stuck in hospitals because welfare and housing support are missing. **E.g.** In 2021, the Supreme Court pulled up the Maharashtra government for keeping hundreds of patients in mental hospitals for decades simply because the state lacked "Halfway Homes" for their rehabilitation.
- **Poor continuity of care:** High costs and lack of follow-up mechanisms lead to massive treatment dropouts. **E.g.** The **National Mental Health Survey (2016)** identified a treatment gap of nearly 83% for mental disorders, largely because medication costs often exceed 15% of a poor household's monthly income.
- **Under-addressed determinants:** Economic precarity acts as a constant trigger for mental collapse. **E.g.** **NCRB 2022** data showed that daily wage earners accounted for the largest share (26.4%) of total suicides, directly linking financial instability to fatal mental distress.

Initiatives Taken

- **Mental Healthcare Act (2017):** Guarantees rights, bans inhuman practices like chaining, mandates community-based care.
- **National Mental Health Programme (NMHP):** Expands services to districts; DMHP operational in 700+ districts.
- **Tele-MANAS (2022):** 24×7 helpline offering psychological support; 5 million calls since launch (example of scale).
- **NGO-led models:** *The Banyan's Home Again* model offers supported housing for women recovering from distress.
- **WHO mhGAP framework:** Helps integrate mental healthcare into primary health services.

Way Ahead

Scale community-based ecosystems:

- Supported housing, crisis response teams and peer-led fellowships ensure continuous, localised care and reduce dependence on institutional facilities.
- Models like Scotland's Open Dialogue show that relational, family-inclusive interventions significantly cut relapse and hospitalisation rates.

Train multidisciplinary & non-specialist workforce:

- ASHAs, ANMs and social workers trained in trauma-informed and culturally attuned care can bridge India's 70–90% treatment gap.
- Task-sharing evidence from the District Mental Health Programme (DMHP) shows frontline workers can deliver early detection and follow-up effectively.

Integrate social determinants into care:

- Mental health interventions must link with livelihood missions, **SWAYAM**, domestic-violence cells, housing schemes and disability pensions.
- Addressing unemployment, violence or homelessness improves long-term recovery far more than medication alone, especially for women and urban poor.

Promote real-world, implementation research:

- Implementation science can evaluate what works in PHCs, urban clinics and community shelters rather than relying on lab-style trials.
- This generates context-sensitive evidence needed to scale effective models across diverse socio-economic and cultural settings.

Institutionalise lived-experience leadership:

- Embedding trained peer navigators in PHCs and district hospitals improves trust, engagement and adherence to treatment plans.
- Global studies show peer-led support significantly increases continuity of care, especially for survivors of homelessness or addiction.

Ensure dignity, autonomy & rights-based care:

- Strict enforcement of MHCA 2017—consent, advance directives, least-restrictive care—prevents coercion and restores user trust.
- Prioritising dignity and relational support shifts focus from symptom control to enabling individuals to live meaningful, self-directed lives.

Conclusion

- India's mental-health crisis cannot be solved through medicine alone — it requires confronting social injustice, trauma, and structural deprivation. Building a rights-based, relational, community-rooted system can restore dignity and trust. Care as disability justice is the pathway to a humane, inclusive mental-health future.

GPU chips and Semiconductor Geopolitics

- In December 2025, a landmark shift in U.S. technology policy **allowed Nvidia to resume selling its high-end H200 GPU chips to "vetted" Chinese buyers**. This decision by the Trump administration marks a transition from a **"containment" strategy to a "transactional" one**, with profound geopolitical implications for the global AI race, domestic industry, and international alliances.

1. The Strategy of "Enforced Dependency"

- The central geopolitical gamble is that by providing China with advanced—but not cutting-edge—U.S. chips, the U.S. *can slow China's pursuit of technological self-reliance*.
- **Starving Local Competitors:** U.S. officials and Nvidia CEO Jensen Huang argue that if Chinese tech giants like **Alibaba, ByteDance, and Tencent** can buy superior Nvidia hardware, they will have less incentive to invest billions in local alternatives like **Huawei's Ascend line**.
- **The Technology Gap:** The H200 is significantly more powerful than the previously permitted **H20 chip** (roughly six times more capable), yet it remains a generation behind **Nvidia's flagship Blackwell** and upcoming **Rubin architectures**. By keeping the most advanced chips restricted,

the U.S. seeks to maintain a permanent 18-to-24-month lead in **AI capabilities**.

2. Transactional Diplomacy: The "Rare Earths" Exchange

- The deal is not merely about semiconductors; it is part of a broader "trade truce" and strategic resource swap.
- **Rare Earth Access:** In exchange for loosening chip curbs, the U.S. secured a commitment from Beijing to lift its own export controls on critical minerals like **gallium, germanium, antimony, and graphite**. These are essential for U.S. defense manufacturing and high-tech industries where China currently holds a near-monopoly.
- **The 25% "Transaction Fee":** In a move described as a hallmark of his administration's transactional approach, President Trump mandated that the U.S. government receive a **25% fee on the revenue from every Nvidia chip** sold to China. This effectively turns national security policy into a significant source of federal revenue.

3. Impact on the Global AI Arms Race

- The resumption of sales has immediate consequences for the **"AI arms race"** between the two superpowers:
- **Military Parity Risks:** Critics argue that the H200 is powerful enough to drive sophisticated military applications, including autonomous drone swarms and battlefield targeting algorithms.
- **Algorithmic Efficiency:** Before the ban was lifted, Chinese firms like **DeepSeek** demonstrated they could achieve breakthroughs even with restricted hardware. The availability of H200-level compute power is expected to drastically accelerate their development timelines for next-generation **Large Language Models (LLMs)**.

4. Geopolitical Friction with Allies

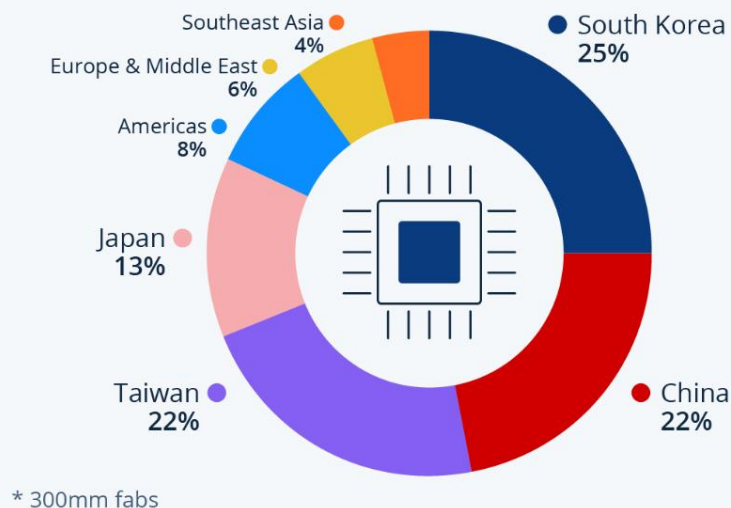
- The sudden policy reversal has created tension with U.S. allies in the **Netherlands (ASML) and Japan**, who were pressured to restrict their own exports to China under the previous U.S. regime.
- **Trust and Consistency:** Allies now face a "hard choice" as they see the U.S. prioritizing its own commercial interests and revenue over the collective security framework they were asked to support.
- **A "Turnstile" for Technology:** Security analysts warn that this deal transforms the "high fence" around sensitive technologies into a "turnstile" that can be opened for the right price, potentially undermining future international cooperation on technology controls.

Comparison of Key Chips in the Deal

Chip Model	Status in China (Dec 2025)	Performance Context
Nvidia H20	Previously allowed; now being phased out.	Redesigned for China; roughly 700x less powerful than the flagship H100.
Nvidia H200	Newly Approved for vetted buyers.	Roughly 6x more powerful than the H20; supports massive AI training.
Nvidia Blackwell	Strictly Banned.	Current cutting-edge architecture; restricted to U.S. and allied markets.

Where Can the Most Chips Be Manufactured?

Distribution of global semiconductor fabricating capacity in 2022, by location*



What is Semiconductor Chip in GPU ?

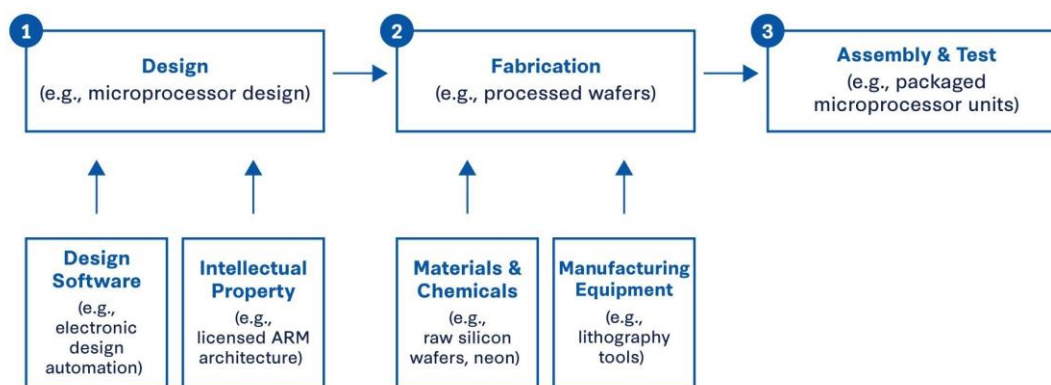
- A semiconductor chip in a **GPU (Graphics Processing Unit)** is a tiny complex integrated circuit (IC) or microchip made from a single **piece of silicon** with **billions of transistors**, acting as the brain for rendering visuals and performing massive parallel computations, essentially an **integrated circuit** designed for complex, simultaneous calculations, making it crucial

for **gaming, AI, and video processing** by handling tasks in parallel unlike a CPU.

- Transistors serving as the building blocks of semiconductor chips **fabricated on wafers** using specific technologies, enabling the creation of complex devices powering modern technology.

Semiconductor: Semiconductors possess electrical conductivity properties intermediate between conductors and insulators, which can be modified by introducing dopants.

Simplified Depiction of the Semiconductor Value Chain



Semiconductor Chips:

- It is a tiny electronic device made of semiconductor material (usually silicon or germanium) which serves as the basic building block of most electronic circuits.
- These chips can contain **billions of microscopic switches** on a chip smaller than a fingernail.
- The basic component of a semiconductor chip is a **silicon wafer etched with tiny transistors** that control the flow of electricity according to various computational instructions.
- It performs various functions, such as processing data, storing information, or controlling electronic devices.
- They are a critical part of almost every modern electronic device, including smartphones, computers, and integrated circuits.

Transistor:

- Transistors are fundamental components of semiconductor devices that amplify or switch electronic signals and electrical power.
- They are the building blocks of modern electronic devices and are used in various applications, including amplifiers, switches, and digital circuits.

Fabrication Technology

- Fabrication technology refers to the process of **creating semiconductor devices like chips and**

transistors. It involves several key steps, including wafer preparation, photolithography, etching, doping, and packaging.

Wafer:

- A **wafer (also called a slice or substrate)** is a thin slice of semiconductor material, such as crystalline silicon, used for the fabrication of integrated circuits.
- A semiconductor chip is produced by **printing an array of chips on a circular semiconductor wafer**, similar to how postage stamps are printed on a sheet and then cut out individually.
- Larger wafer sizes in the industry enable more chips to be printed on a single wafer, accelerating and reducing the cost of chip production, despite the technical challenges and initial capital expenses involved.

What is the Status of India's Semiconductor Ecosystem?

- India is actively pursuing the development of a robust semiconductor ecosystem. With its large market potential, talent pool, and government support. India aims to reduce dependence on imports and establish domestic manufacturing capabilities.
- India's established chip design industry since the 1990s will aid its semiconductor manufacturing efforts, offering opportunities for various professionals beyond electronics and computer engineers.
- The Government of India has implemented several strategic initiatives through **the India Semiconductor Mission (ISM), supported by a total outlay of ₹76,000 crore.** These programs aim to build a self-reliant ecosystem covering design, fabrication, and testing.

1. India Semiconductor Mission (ISM) Schemes

The ISM serves as the nodal agency for implementing four major fiscal support schemes:

1. **Semiconductor Fabs Scheme:** Provides 50% fiscal support on a pari-passu basis for setting up Silicon CMOS-based wafer fabrication plants in India.
2. **Display Fabs Scheme:** Offers 50% financial assistance for the project cost of setting up display fabrication units (e.g., AMOLED and LCD).
3. **Compound Semiconductors and ATMP/OSAT Scheme:** Extends 50% fiscal support on capital expenditure for compound semiconductor fabs, sensors, and Outsourced Semiconductor Assembly and Test (OSAT) facilities.
4. **Design Linked Incentive (DLI) Scheme:** Supports domestic startups and MSMEs with incentives up to ₹15 crore for product design and 6%–4% of net sales over five years as a deployment incentive.

2. Manufacturing & Infrastructure Support

- **Production Linked Incentive (PLI):** Incentivizes domestic manufacturing of large-scale electronics and IT hardware, offering 3% to 6% on incremental sales.
- **Scheme for Promotion of Manufacturing of Electronic Components and Semiconductors (SPECS):** Provides a 25% financial incentive on capital expenditure for manufacturing electronic components and semiconductors.
- **Modernization of Semi-Conductor Laboratory (SCL):** The government approved the modernization of the SCL in Mohali as a brownfield fab to improve efficiency and cycle time.
- **Electronics Manufacturing Clusters (EMC 2.0):** Offers financial assistance (up to 50% of project cost) to develop shared infrastructure and common facilities for electronics manufacturers.

3. Talent and Workforce Development

To meet the projected requirement of one million skilled workers by 2030, the government has launched several talent-focused programs:

- **Chips to Startup (C2S) Programme:** Aimed at training 85,000 engineers at over 113 academic institutions in VLSI and embedded system design.
- **AICTE New Curriculum:** Introduced specialized B.Tech, Diploma, and *Minor degrees in VLSI Design & Technology and IC Manufacturing.*
- **SMART Lab:** Established at NIELIT Calicut with a target to train one lakh engineers nationwide.
- **Industry Collaborations:** MoUs signed with global leaders like Lam Research (to train 60,000 engineers via the Semiverse platform), IBM, and Purdue University for R&D and skill building.

4. Major Approved Projects (2025 Status)

By late 2025, 10 units have been approved under the **Semicon India** program with a cumulative investment of approximately ₹1.6 lakh crore.

1. **Tata-PSMC Fab: India's first commercial silicon fab in Dholera, Gujarat.**
2. **Micron Technology:** A major ATMP facility in Sanand, Gujarat, expected to roll out "Made in India" chips by late 2025.
3. **Tata Semiconductor Assembly and Test (TSAT):** A large-scale facility in Morigaon, Assam.
4. **CG Power-Renesas:** An OSAT facility in Sanand, Gujarat, featuring an end-to-end pilot line.
5. **HCL-Foxconn JV:** Approved to manufacture display driver chips in Uttar Pradesh.

Key Advantages

- **Market Potential:** India's rapidly growing population and burgeoning middle class create a strong demand for semiconductor products.
- India's semiconductor market is projected to reach **\$55 billion by 2026**, reflecting its focus on domestic manufacturing.
- **Talent Pool:** India emphasises skill development and innovation, encouraging domestic chip design skills.

Conclusion

- In 2025, the geopolitics of semiconductors and GPUs have reached a transformative conclusion: **computing power is now the definitive metric of national sovereignty**. The shift from a policy of pure denial to one of "**transactional dependency**"—exemplified by the **Nvidia H200 sales to China**—signals that the U.S. and its allies are now prioritizing long-term economic leverage and software ecosystem dominance over immediate hardware containment. As 2026 approaches, the "**Silicon Curtain**" is **no longer a solid wall**, but a monetized filter designed to extract maximum economic value for the U.S. while attempting to manage China's rise through controlled technological dependency.

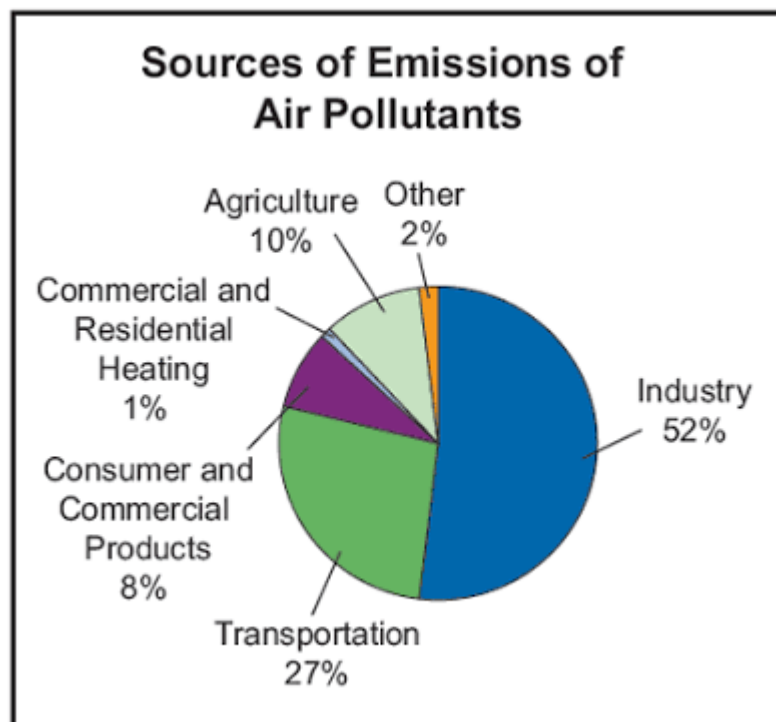
Air Pollution in India an Invisible Epidemic

- Globally, air pollution is a silent killer. The air pollution levels in India are among the highest in the world, posing a heavy threat to the country's health and economy. All of India's 1.4 billion people are exposed to unhealthy levels of ambient **PM 2.5 – the most harmful pollutant** - emanating from multiple sources. These small particulates with a diameter of **less than 2.5 microns**, is about one-thirtieth the width of a human hair. Exposure to PM 2.5 can cause such deadly illnesses as lung cancer, stroke, and heart disease. **1.67 million deaths were attributable to air pollution in India in 2019**, accounting for 17.8% of the total deaths in the country. The health impacts of pollution also represent a heavy cost to the economy. Lost output from premature deaths and morbidity attributable to air pollution accounted for **economic losses of US\$28.8 billion and \$8 billion, respectively, in India in 2019**. This total loss of \$36.8 billion was 1.36% of India's gross domestic product (GDP).
- A new assessment shows that air pollution is now India's largest health threat, cutting life expectancy, worsening disease burdens, and affecting vulnerable groups nationwide.

Invisible Epidemic?

Trends in India's Air Pollution:

- Air pollution is no longer a seasonal winter issue, but a **perennial national health crisis** affecting rural and urban regions alike.
- Of 256 cities monitored in 2025, **150 exceeded PM2.5 limits**, indicating widespread non-compliance.
- **Delhi's seasonal PM2.5 levels reached 107–130 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$** , far above India's limit (60 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$) and WHO guideline (15 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$).
- India's AQI system still caps readings at **500**, masking extreme pollution that often crosses 600–1,000.
- Long-term exposure now reduces life expectancy by 3.5–8 years across northern India.



Causes of Air Pollution in India

1. **Structural issues:**
 - **Vehicular emissions:** Rapid motorisation, old diesel fleets, traffic congestion, and poor public transport lead to continuous NO_x, PM_{2.5} and ozone formation, especially in metros.
 - **Industrial pollution:** Coal-based power plants, refineries, brick kilns, and chemical units release sulphur dioxide, nitrogen oxides, heavy metals and particulate matter throughout the year.
 - **Construction and demolition dust:** Unregulated digging, material loading, concrete mixing, and

demolition generate large amounts of PM10/PM2.5, worsening air quality in expanding urban corridors.

- **Household biomass use:** Firewood, dung cakes and crop residues burned in rural and peri-urban kitchens produce indoor and outdoor smoke, contributing heavily to PM2.5 levels.

2. Seasonal Amplifiers:

- **Stubble burning:** post-harvest crop burning in Punjab-Haryana adds massive but short-term particulate spikes, worsening air quality in Delhi and the Indo-Gangetic Plains.
- **Winter inversion layers:** Cold, stagnant air traps pollutants near the surface, preventing dispersion and causing PM2.5 to accumulate for days or weeks in northern India.
- **Fireworks and festival combustion:** Diwali and New Year fireworks, combined with low wind speeds, create sudden surges in toxic gases and particulates, amplifying existing pollution loads.

Impacts of Air Pollution on the Human Body

Cardiovascular System:

- PM2.5 enters bloodstream, causing inflammation, hypertension, heart attacks, strokes.
- Every 10 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ increase leads to 8% rise in annual mortality.

Respiratory System:

- Rising cases of asthma (6% of Indian children), COPD, chronic bronchitis.
- PM2.5 increases paediatric emergency visits by 20–40%; lung capacity drops 10–15% in exposed children.

Neurological System:

- PM2.5 crosses the blood–brain barrier → neuroinflammation, cognitive decline, dementia risk (+35–49%).
- Linked to reduced academic performance in polluted Indian cities.

Maternal & Child Health:

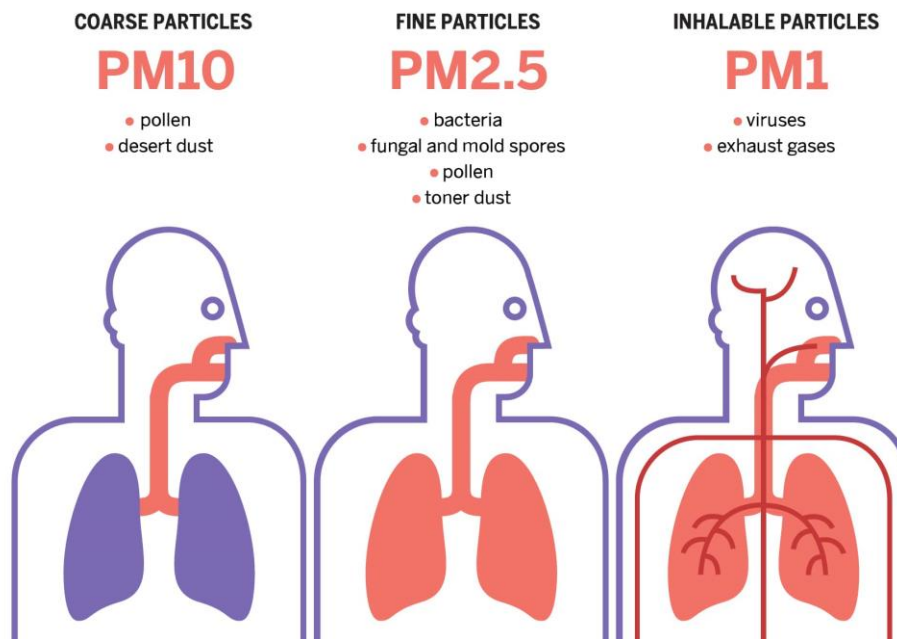
- Higher risks of preterm birth, low birth weight, stillbirths, and neonatal mortality.
- Worsens intergenerational health inequities.

Social & Economic Inequalities:

- The poor live closest to roads, industrial belts, landfills, suffering disproportionate exposure and healthcare burdens.

PENETRATION OF PARTICLES INTO THE BODY

The smaller the particles, the more dangerous they are



Initiatives Taken by India

To combat air pollution, the Government of India has implemented several national and regional strategies focused on vehicular, industrial, and agricultural emissions.

Major National Initiatives

- **National Clean Air Programme (NCAP):** Launched in 2019, this flagship initiative originally aimed for a **20–30% reduction in PM** concentrations by **2024**. In 2022, the target was revised to achieve a 40% reduction in PM10 levels by 2025–26 across 131 "non-attainment" cities.
- **National Air Quality Index (AQI):** Launched in 2015, the AQI categorizes air quality into six levels (**Good, Satisfactory, Moderate, Poor, Very Poor, Severe**) to provide easy-to-understand real-time information to the public.
- **PRANA Portal:** The PRANA (Portal for Regulation of Air Pollution in Non-Attainment Cities) dashboard was launched to monitor the progress of NCAP implementation across cities.

Sector-Specific Measures

1. Vehicular Emissions:

- **BS-VI Norms:** India leapfrogged from **BS-IV to BS-VI** fuel and vehicle standards nationwide in April 2020 to reduce harmful exhaust.
- **FAME-II Scheme:** Provides subsidies to promote the adoption of electric and hybrid vehicles.

- **Ethanol Blending:** The government is promoting a **10% to 20% ethanol blend** in petrol to lower emissions.

2. Industrial Emissions:

- **Continuous Monitoring:** High-polluting "red category" industries are mandated to install **Online Continuous Emission Monitoring Systems (OCEMS)**.
- **Fuel Shifts:** Major industrial units in the National Capital Region (NCR) have been shifted to cleaner fuels like **Piped Natural Gas (PNG) or biomass**.

3. Agricultural Stubble Burning:

- **Subsidies:** Farmers in Punjab, Haryana, and Uttar Pradesh receive 50% to 80% subsidies for crop residue management machinery (**e.g., Happy Seeders**).
- **Bio-decomposers:** The use of "**Pusa Bio-decomposer**" capsules is promoted to decompose stubble in-situ, turning it into manure instead of burning it.

Regional Emergency Measures (Delhi-NCR)

- **Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP):** An emergency response mechanism that triggers specific restrictions (e.g., banning construction, restricting truck entry) based on deteriorating AQI levels.
- **Following a recent deterioration in air quality, GRAP Stage 3 was most recently invoked on December 13, 2025.**
- **Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM):** A statutory body established in 2021 specifically to coordinate and oversee air quality management in Delhi and adjoining states.
- **Technological Interventions:** Implementation of smog towers, anti-smog guns at construction sites, and pilot cloud-seeding experiments (conducted in late 2025) to provide temporary relief during peak pollution periods.

Policy & Regulatory Measures:

- **Judicial Interventions:** Supreme Court and NGT directives on stubble burning, fireworks, and industrial emissions.
- **Technological Steps:** Real-time monitoring, satellite-based assessments, low-emission zones (pilot), and EV incentives.

Way Ahead

- **Modernise Air Quality Governance:** Reform the AQI system by removing the 500 cap, aligning thresholds with WHO norms, and making PM2.5 the central regulatory metric for all clean-air planning.

- **Strengthen Environmental Institutions:** Increase staffing, funding, and technical capacity of pollution control boards, ensure independent oversight, and enforce real-time, science-based compliance monitoring.
- **Transform Transport and Industry:** Accelerate electrification of buses, autos and two-wheelers; shift freight to rail; and mandate strict industrial emission standards while phasing down coal-heavy processes.
- **Regulate Construction and Waste Burning:** Implement compulsory dust suppression, enclosure norms and mechanised sweeping, while reforming municipal waste systems to end open burning in all urban clusters.
- **Integrate Health & Community Action:** Embed AQI advisories in healthcare, expand lung-function testing and COPD screening, and promote citizen-led air monitoring and localised clean-air interventions.

Conclusion

- India's air pollution is an invisible epidemic—silent, chronic, and the largest threat to public health. The evidence is unequivocal: it shortens lives, harms the unborn, weakens the brain, and deepens inequity. Clean air must now be recognised as a fundamental right and national priority, anchored in science, backed by political will, and implemented with urgency to secure a healthier, equitable future.

Right to Disconnect Bill, 2025: Re-defining Work-Life Boundaries

- The Right to Disconnect Bill, 2025, a Private Member's Bill introduced by NCP MP Supriya Sule, has reignited debate on work-life balance and employee well-being in India's digital work culture.

Right to Disconnect Bill, 2025

- The Right to Disconnect Bill, 2025 seeks to grant employees a statutory right to disengage from work-related communications outside agreed working hours, protecting personal time in an era of constant digital connectivity and remote work.

Key Features of the Bill

- **Legal right to disconnect:** Section 7 guarantees every employee the right to ignore work-related calls, emails, or messages after contractual work hours without fear of disciplinary action.
- **Defined 'out-of-work hours':** Clearly defines time beyond agreed work schedules, reducing ambiguity and employer overreach.
- **Employees' Welfare Authority:** Establishes a central authority to oversee implementation, protect employee dignity, and promote work-life balance.
- **Negotiation charter:** Mandates employer-employee charters specifying out-of-work communication protocols and mutually agreed exceptions.
- **Overtime compensation:** Section 11 provides overtime pay at normal wage rates if employees voluntarily respond after hours.
- **Digital well-being measures:** Requires awareness programmes, counselling services, and Digital Detox Centres, especially for remote work environments.
- **Penalties for non-compliance:** Imposes a financial penalty of 1% of total employee remuneration on violating organisations, acting as a strong deterrent.

Need for Such a Law in India

- **Always-on work culture:** The spread of smartphones, remote work, and digital platforms has dissolved fixed work hours, making employees perpetually accessible and eroding clear boundaries between professional and personal life.
- **Mental health concerns:** Extended digital availability has led to rising cases of burnout, anxiety, and work-induced stress, particularly among young professionals and gig workers lacking institutional safeguards.
- **Power asymmetry at workplaces:** Employees often hesitate to ignore after-hours communication due to hierarchical pressures, performance appraisals, and job insecurity, resulting in involuntary overtime and silent exploitation.
- **Global legislative precedent:** Countries such as France, Belgium, Ireland, and Australia have legally recognised the right to disconnect, demonstrating its feasibility as a labour-rights protection in modern economies.
- **Productivity over presenteeism:** The law encourages a shift from measuring work by hours logged to outcomes delivered, improving efficiency, innovation, and long-term employee engagement.

Challenges Associated

- **Diverse work models:** India's economy spans manufacturing, IT, gig work, and global services,

making uniform regulation difficult for sectors requiring time-zone coordination or emergency responsiveness.

- **Enforcement difficulties:** Monitoring informal digital communications such as WhatsApp messages or late-night calls poses practical and evidentiary challenges for regulators.
- **SME compliance burden:** Small and medium enterprises may face difficulties in framing charters, maintaining compliance records, and absorbing potential financial penalties.
- **Risk of regulatory rigidity:** Overly strict provisions could limit operational flexibility during peak business cycles, emergencies, or client-driven deadlines.
- **Private Member's Bill limitation:** Without government sponsorship, private member's bills rarely become law, restricting immediate legislative impact despite policy relevance.

Way Ahead

- **Phased and sector-specific adoption:** Introduce differentiated norms based on sectoral needs, allowing flexibility for global teams while protecting routine employees from digital overreach.
- **Tripartite dialogue mechanism:** Structured consultations among government, employers, and worker representatives can help create balanced, enforceable, and context-sensitive norms.
- **Soft-law approach initially:** Guidelines under existing labour codes can test feasibility and acceptance before formal statutory backing.
- **Behavioural and cultural change:** Awareness campaigns must promote responsible digital communication norms among managers and employees alike.
- **Integration with labour and health policies:** Link the right to disconnect with occupational health, mental well-being, and productivity frameworks for holistic workforce protection.

Conclusion

- The Right to Disconnect Bill, 2025 reflects the evolving realities of India's digital workforce and the growing need to protect mental well-being. While legislative and practical challenges remain, the Bill has sparked a vital conversation on humane, sustainable work cultures. Balancing flexibility with dignity at work will be key to future labour governance in India.

The Indian Ocean as the Cradle of a New Blue Economy

- The Indian Ocean is increasingly recognized as the "**cradle of a new blue economy**," serving as a critical global laboratory where **sustainable economic development, climate resilience, and maritime security intersect**. Home to **one-third of humanity and vital sea lanes**, the region is

shifting from traditional resource extraction toward a model of ecosystem stewardship.

India's Historical Leadership in Ocean Governance

- **Championing "Common Heritage of Mankind":** India aligned with **Small Island Developing States (SIDS)** during UNCLOS, advocating that seabed resources beyond national jurisdiction be treated as a global common, strengthening its moral leadership.
- **Early Vision of Maritime Centrality:** Nehru asserted that India's future prosperity and security are tied to ocean freedom and resources, embedding oceans into India's strategic imagination from the 1950s.
- **Environmental Justice at Global Forums:** Indira Gandhi's Stockholm (1972) stance on balancing poverty eradication with environmental protection positioned India as a credible advocate of equitable ocean governance.
- **Consistent Support for Multilateral Ocean Regimes:** India's engagement in IORA, IONS, and Indian Ocean Commission reflects a long-standing commitment to cooperative maritime governance instead of great-power rivalry.
- **Leadership in Sustainable Use Norms:** India has consistently supported biodiversity protection, including readiness to ratify the **BBNJ Agreement**, reinforcing its reputation as a responsible ocean steward.

Emerging Challenges in the Indian Ocean

- **Intensifying Climate Vulnerability:** The Indian Ocean is warming faster than the global average, driving thermal expansion, sea-level rise, and more frequent extreme cyclones impacting coastal populations.
- **Ocean Acidification & Coral Collapse:** Rising CO₂ levels are degrading **coral reefs such as the Lakshadweep and Chagos systems**, undermining biodiversity, fisheries productivity, and tourism incomes.
- **Illegal, Unreported & Unregulated (IUU) Fishing:** IUU fleets deplete fish stocks, harm artisanal livelihoods, and fuel regional tensions, particularly near East Africa and the Bay of Bengal.
- **Declining Marine Productivity:** Overfishing and altered monsoon patterns reduce nutrient upwelling, weakening the marine food chain and posing food-security risks for littoral nations.
- **Socio-Economic Instability:** Ecosystem decline triggers migration, loss of coastal employment, and community vulnerability, creating a security challenge beyond traditional naval threats.

Rationale for a Blue Ocean Strategy for India

Stewardship of the Commons:

- **Promote Cooperative Ocean Governance:** Position the Indian Ocean as a shared space through rules-based management, biodiversity protection, and joint marine scientific research.
- **Restore Degraded Ecosystems:** Lead regional coral-restoration, mangrove recovery, and sustainable fisheries initiatives to rebuild ecological resilience.
- **Strengthen Marine Protected Areas (MPAs):** Support expansion of MPAs—including high-seas areas under BBNJ—to safeguard critical habitats and spawning grounds.

Climate and Disaster Resilience:

- **Regional Resilience & Innovation Hub:** India can host a hub integrating ocean observation, modelling, and technology transfer for SIDS and African nations to strengthen early-warning capacities.
- **Enhance Ocean Observation Infrastructure:** Scale up INCOIS, MoES, and satellite systems for better cyclone prediction, monsoon modelling, and tsunami risk tracking.
- **Build Climate-Ready Coastal Infrastructure:** Support nature-based solutions—mangrove belts, dune restoration, artificial reefs—to protect vulnerable coasts from storm surges.

Inclusive Blue Growth:

- **Green Shipping Corridors:** Develop low-emission maritime routes with major ports, reducing freight emissions and aligning with IMO decarbonisation goals.
- **Offshore Renewable Energy Expansion:** Leverage India's vast EEZ for offshore wind, wave, and tidal energy projects, enabling clean growth for coastal states.
- **Sustainable Aquaculture Systems:** Promote mariculture, seaweed farming, and hatchery upgrades to boost rural incomes while reducing pressure on wild stocks.

Global Momentum for Ocean Finance:

- **Rising Global Commitments for Ocean Action:** New international pledges indicate a rapid shift in global priorities, with countries and institutions recognising oceans as critical to climate resilience, biodiversity protection, and sustainable development.
- **€25 Billion Existing Ocean Investments + €8.7 Billion New Pledges (BEFF 2025):** At the **Blue Economy & Finance Forum 2025**, governments, development banks, and private investors showcased a €25 billion pipeline of ongoing ocean projects and announced €8.7 billion fresh commitments, signalling confidence in blue-economy returns.
- **\$20 Billion Ocean Finance Target Under the One Ocean Partnership (COP30, Belém):** COP30 launched the One Ocean Partnership committing to mobilise \$20 billion by 2030, integrating oceans into mainstream climate finance and supporting conservation, resilience, and sustainable blue-economy pathways.

Way Ahead

- **Establish an Indian Ocean Blue Fund:** Create a financing mechanism seeded by India and open to global partners to convert pledges into implementable regional projects.
- **Operationalise "Security Through Sustainability":** Integrate anti-IUU patrols, coral monitoring, and pollution tracking with maritime domain awareness to align ecology with security.
- **Lead Ocean Norm-Setting Platforms:** Use IORA, IOC-UNESCO, and G20 forums to standardise practices on green shipping, blue bonds, and responsible marine resource extraction.
- **Accelerate BBNJ Ratification & Implementation:** Demonstrate leadership in high-seas biodiversity governance by championing MPAs, ABS mechanisms, and marine technology sharing.
- **Promote Science-Diplomacy Networks:** Strengthen collaboration among INCOIS, CSIR-NIO, WHOI, and regional institutes to jointly advance ocean science, modelling, and innovation.

Conclusion

- The Indian Ocean—home to ancient civilizations and modern vulnerabilities—can become the cradle of a new blue economy that blends prosperity with sustainability. By aligning vision with finance and stewardship, India can show that cooperation, not rivalry, must define the future of ocean governance, living up to the principle: "From the Indian Ocean, for the World."

India-Oman Bilateral Relations

- PM Narendra Modi's Oman visit during his West Asia-Africa tour coincides with **70 years of India-Oman diplomatic ties** and rising regional churn.

India-Oman Bilateral Relations

History and evolution:

- **Civilisational maritime bridge:** India-Oman ties run through the Indian Ocean trading system, where the Arabian Sea acted as a connector for commerce, culture and navigation traditions.
- **People-to-people and diaspora depth:** Long-standing movement of traders, seafarers and workers created trust that outlasted modern geopolitics.
- **Early strategic comfort in a sensitive region:** When parts of the region were ambivalent about India, Oman maintained steady engagement based on moderation and neutrality.
- **Institutionalisation of partnership (2005-2008 onwards):** Defence MoU (2005) and Strategic Partnership (2008) gave the relationship a formal security and political spine.
- **2018-2025 phase:** Strategic + digital + connectivity: The relationship expanded into Duqm access, fintech linkages and corridor conversations (IMEC). Eg: RuPay launch in Oman (2022)

shows India's DPI diplomacy moving beyond rhetoric.

Sectors of cooperation

1. Defence and maritime security:-

- **Duqm as a strategic enabler:** Duqm logistics access supports Indian naval turnaround, replenishment and operational flexibility in the western IOR.
- **Joint exercises and interoperability:** Regular tri-service engagement builds habits of cooperation for contingencies and HADR missions.
- **Overflight and transit support:** Operational access enhances India's reach for evacuation, disaster response and crisis-time movement.

2. Trade, investment and business:-

- **Growing trade and JV ecosystem:** Beyond trade value, the relationship has a JV backbone that anchors continuity even during political shocks. Eg: Over 6,000 India-Oman joint ventures in Oman with estimated investment ~\$776 mn.
- **Manufacturing and logistics linkages:** Free zones and port-led projects can integrate Indian firms into Gulf-Africa supply chains. Eg: Indian companies are major investors in Sohar and Salalah Free Zones.

3. Fintech and digital public infrastructure:-

- **Payment connectivity:** Linked payment systems reduce transaction friction for diaspora remittances, tourism and SMEs. Eg: Central Bank of Oman-NPCI MoU (Oct 2022) and RuPay in Oman created a visible DPI milestone.

4. Energy transition and future fuels:-

- **Beyond oil:** green energy convergence: Both sides can align on green hydrogen, renewables, and critical minerals to future-proof energy security.

5. Education and health:-

- **Knowledge corridor potential:** Offshore campuses and skill partnerships can create long-term influence and workforce linkages.

Challenges associated

- **Regional volatility risk:** West Asia's conflict cycles can disrupt trade routes, investor confidence, and diaspora safety planning.
- **Trade concentration and limited diversification:** High dependence on a few commodities

reduces resilience and limits CEPA's early "headline gains". Eg: Without value-chain expansion, trade growth can remain price-driven instead of productivity-driven.



- **Great power competition in the IOR:** Strategic space is contested, and every logistics/port arrangement attracts geopolitical signalling. Eg: Oman's location enables monitoring of PLA Navy activity, but also raises competitive sensitivities.
- **Implementation gap in agreements:** Announcements can outpace execution due to standards, customs processes, and regulatory alignment issues.
- **Diaspora welfare and labour market shifts:** Economic slowdowns or policy changes can affect Indian workers, remittances and community stability.

Way ahead:

- **Fast-track CEPA with sectoral "early harvest" wins:** Prioritise services, MSME market access, standards harmonisation, and logistics facilitation for quick impact.
- **Deepen Duqm-centric maritime cooperation:** Expand joint patrol coordination, HADR drills,

and anti-piracy information sharing in the Gulf of Oman.

- **Build a green energy partnership roadmap:** Create joint pilots on green hydrogen value chains and renewable-linked industrial clusters.
- **Scale fintech interoperability beyond RuPay:** Move from card presence to wider acceptance, cross-border UPI-like rails, and SME payment solutions.
- **People-first cooperation:** skills, healthcare, and mobility: Use education/health partnerships to build trust that survives geopolitical swings.

Conclusion:

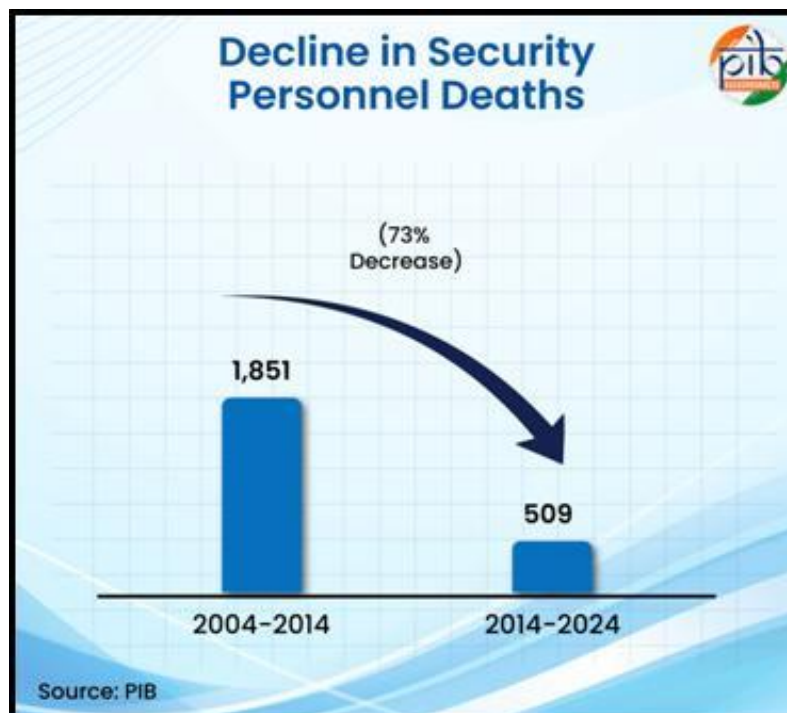
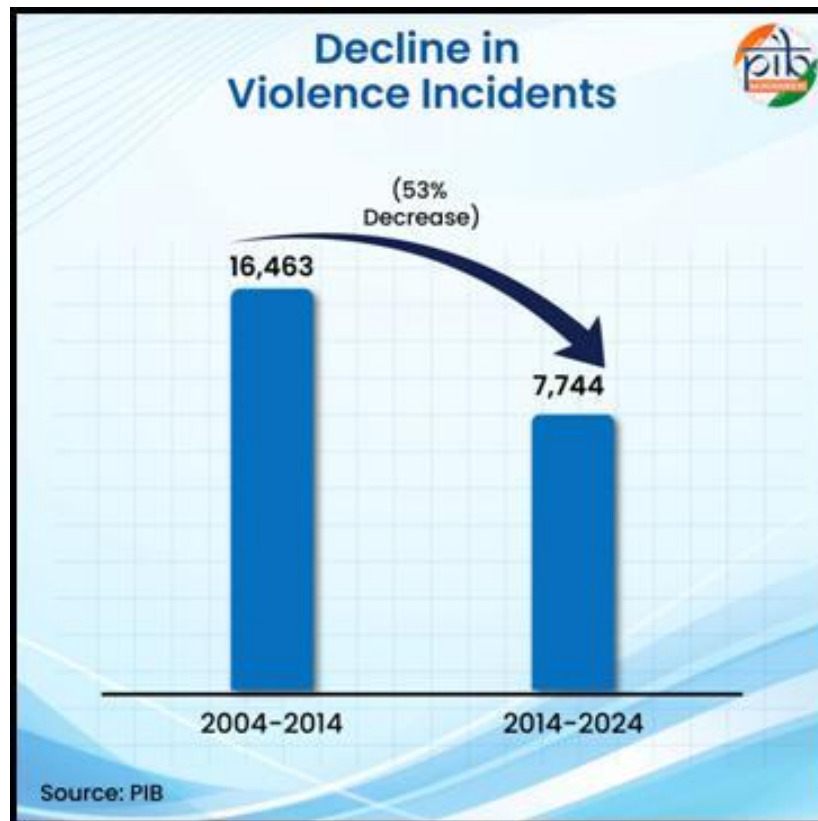
- The newly signed India-Oman Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) is poised to transform a strong civilisational and strategic relationship into a more productive economic engine. By leveraging key initiatives in trade, maritime security via the Duqm Port, green energy, and fintech innovation, the partnership aims to enhance economic growth and regional resilience. Sustained delivery, diversification, and people-centric outcomes in a volatile region will ultimately determine the full scale of this strategic partnership.
- The proposed CEPA can turn a strong relationship into a more productive economic engine. Sustained delivery, diversification and people-centric outcomes will decide how far this partnership scales in a volatile region.

From Red Corridor to Naxal-Free Bharat

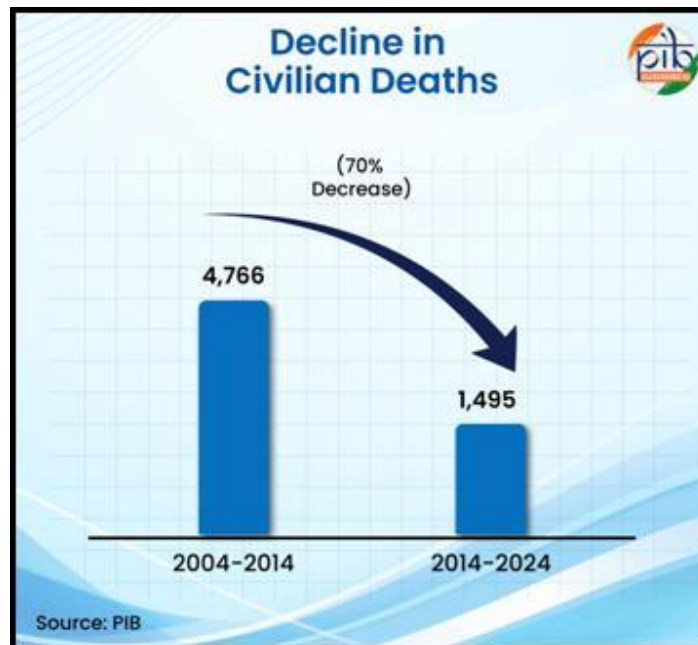
- India is close to achieving a Naxal-free Bharat, with **Left-Wing Extremism (LWE) districts** reduced from 126 (2014) to 11 (2025) and only 3 most-affected districts remaining.

Reducing the Red Corridor

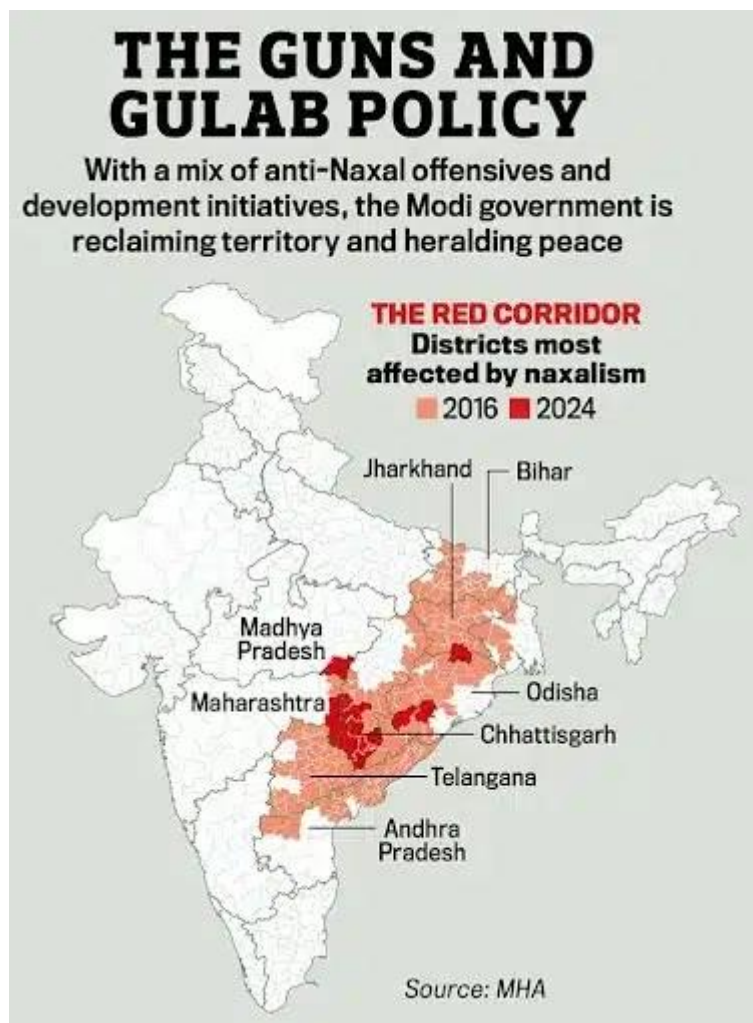
- **Trends in Naxalism in India (2014-2025):**
- **Sharp territorial contraction:** Maoist influence shrank from 126 to 11 districts, with **core Red Corridor areas dismantled**. Eg: Most-affected districts reduced from 36 to 3 by 2025.
- **Steep fall in violence and casualties:** Sustained decline in incidents and deaths. Eg: Violent incidents down 53%, civilian deaths down 70%, and security force deaths down 73% compared to 2004-14.



- **High cadre attrition:** Arrests, surrenders and neutralisation peaked. Eg: 2025 alone saw 317 neutralised, 800+ arrested, ~2,000 surrendered.



- **Collapse of Maoist parallel governance:** Roads, telecom and policing broke jungle sanctuaries.



History of Naxalism in India

- **Origin (1967):** The Naxalbari uprising in West Bengal emerged from landlessness and exploitative agrarian relations, turning class conflict into armed mobilisation. Eg: Charu Mazumdar's line popularised "**land to the tiller**" through Maoist-inspired revolutionary politics.
- **Expansion (1980s–2000s):** The movement spread into **tribal Fifth Schedule belts where weak administration**, land alienation and forest control created deep state-society distrust. Eg: The 2004 formation of CPI (Maoist) unified factions and intensified LWE across central India.
- **Peak and decline (2005–2014):** Maoists built "**liberated zones**" and parallel systems, but coordinated state action gradually increased pressure through policing and development. Eg: The Red Corridor expanded from AP to Jharkhand, yet large operations began shrinking safe havens.
- **Decisive rollback (2014 onwards):** A unified security-development approach with permanent camps, roads and telecom broke Maoist mobility and recruitment networks in core areas. Eg: Strongholds like Bastar and Dandakaranya saw sustained clearance and governance footprint expansion.

Naxalism refers to the militant left-wing movement in India rooted in communist ideologies. It aims to address social and economic inequalities through armed struggle. Naxalism operates under various organisational frameworks across India and remains a persistent internal security challenge



Initiatives taken to counter Naxalism

1. Constitutional & governance measures:-

- **Fifth Schedule framework:** It provides special governance for Scheduled Areas via Governor powers and Tribal Advisory Councils, aiming to prevent exploitation and land alienation.
- **PESA Act, 1996:** It empowers Gram Sabhas to control local resources and consent processes, intended to deepen self-rule and reduce outsider domination.
- **Forest Rights Act, 2006:** FRA recognises individual and community forest rights, correcting historical injustice and strengthening livelihood security for forest dwellers.

2. Development & welfare schemes:-

- **Infrastructure saturation:** Roads, electricity and telecom reduce isolation, expand service delivery, and allow faster security response in remote interiors.
- **Financial inclusion:** Banking access cuts cash dependence, enables DBT delivery, and reduces extortion and shadow-economy influence in affected blocks.
- **Skill and education push:** Training and local employability reduce the recruitment pool by giving youth credible alternatives to insurgent networks.

3. Security & enforcement:-

- **Fortified policing:** Permanent forward presence prevents Maoist re-occupation, improves area domination, and protects development works from disruption.
- **Financial choking:** Seizures and attachments disrupt extortion channels, arms procurement and urban networks that sustain the insurgency ecosystem.
- **Surrender-cum-rehabilitation policy:** Incentives, security guarantees and livelihoods convert cadres into stakeholders of peace and weaken local Maoist manpower.

Challenges to complete eradication:-

- **Governance deficits persist:** Courts, policing, health and schools remain thin in interiors, making the state visible mainly through coercion, not services. Eg: **Low tribal representation in permanent bureaucracy** sustains “outsider rule” perceptions.
- **Weak implementation of rights laws:** If FRA/PESA protections look negotiable, new displacement and distrust can re-create conditions for mobilisation. Eg: Gram Sabha consent bypass in mining belts becomes a recurring grievance trigger.
- **Socio-economic vulnerability:** Poverty, land disputes and insecure livelihoods keep communities susceptible to coercion, promises of justice, or rent-seeking networks. Eg: Displacement around mineral corridors fuels long-term anger and instability.
- **Ideological residue and urban support:** Even with territorial losses, propaganda, recruitment

narratives and digital influence can persist and re-organise. Eg: Online information warfare can revive legitimacy even when armed capability declines.

Way ahead

- **Governance-led consolidation:** After security gains, the state must win trust through justice delivery, primary health, schools and grievance redress, not only patrols. Eg: Fast-track courts and tribal health cadres can reduce everyday exploitation.
- **Deepen local self-rule:** Real devolution of funds/functions to Gram Sabhas makes democracy meaningful and blocks the space for parallel "people's courts." Eg: Adopt selective features of Sixth Schedule autonomy where contextually suitable.
- **Administrative indigenisation:** Recruiting locals into police, revenue and frontline services improves legitimacy, language access and cultural sensitivity in governance. Eg: Scaling **the Bastariya Battalion model** strengthens ownership of peace.
- **Protect rights-based laws:** Enforceable consent, CFR recognition and transparent land processes prevent fresh alienation and pre-empt insurgent narratives. Eg: Make Gram Sabha consent mandatory, time-bound, and auditable for projects.

Conclusion:

- India has decisively broken the territorial and military backbone of Naxalism through a calibrated mix of security, development and rehabilitation. The next phase demands governance reform, justice delivery and tribal empowerment to prevent relapse. A post-Maoist India will succeed only when constitutional promises translate into lived realities in Fifth Schedule areas.

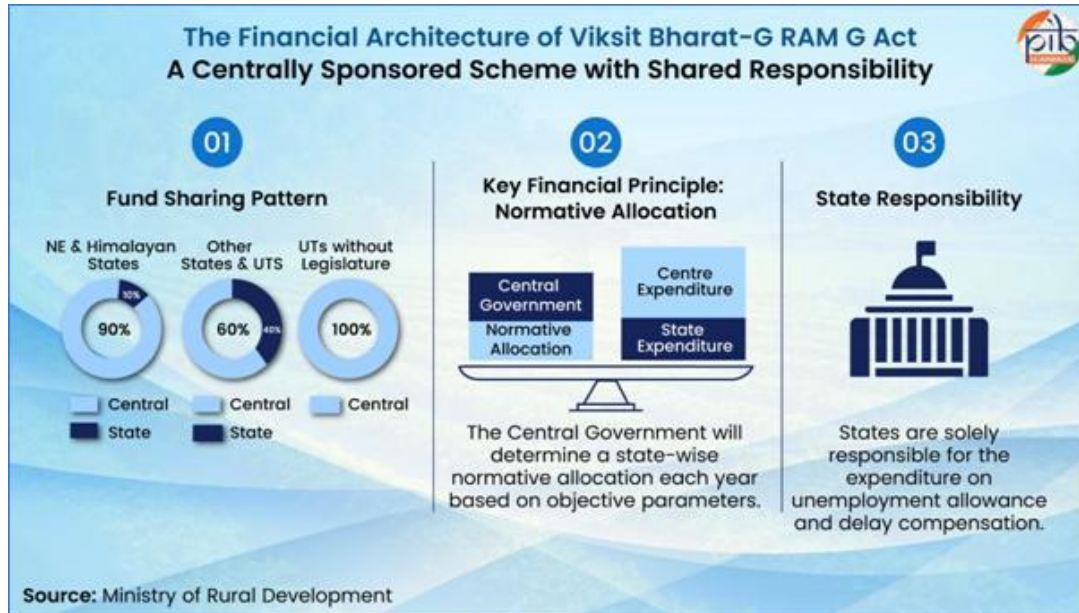
From MGNREGA to VB-G RAM G

- In December 2025, the Government of India introduced a major overhaul of its rural employment policy, replacing the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (**MGNREGA**) with a new statutory framework called Viksit Bharat – Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin), or **VB-G RAM G**.

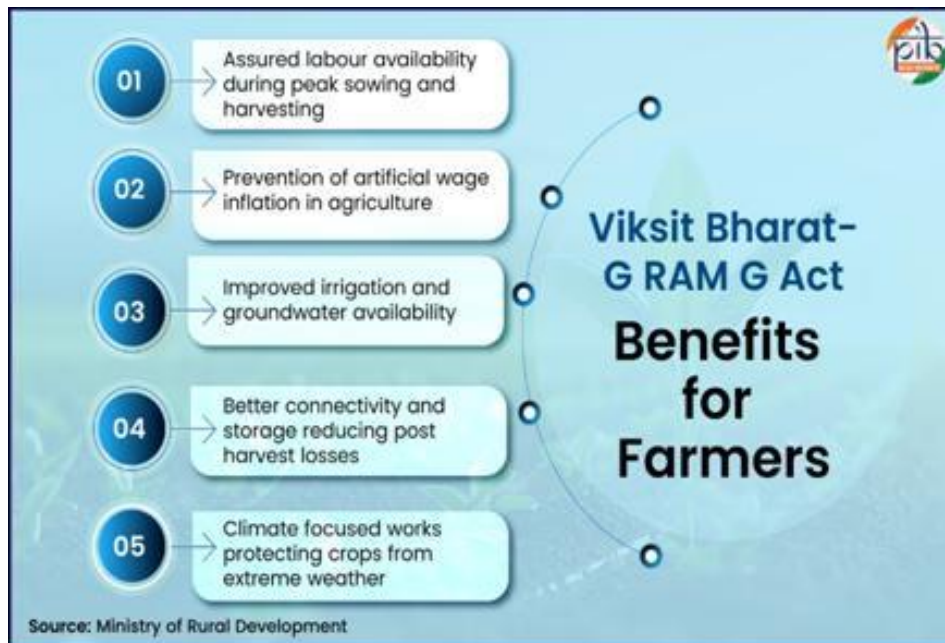
Key Changes from MGNREGA to VB-G RAM G

- The new Act, which received Presidential assent on December 21, 2025, introduces several structural and operational shifts:-
- **Increased Employment Days:** The statutory guarantee for wage employment has been raised to

125 days per rural household per year, up from the 100 days previously provided under MGNREGA.



- **Funding Structure:** The scheme has moved from a **central sector model** to a **centrally sponsored framework**. The cost-sharing ratio between the Centre and States is now 60:40 for most states (previously, the Centre bore 100% of unskilled wages), 90:10 for Northeastern/Himalayan states, and 100% for Union Territories.
- **Seasonal "No-Work" Period:** To ensure the availability of agricultural labor during peak seasons, the Act includes an aggregated 60-day no-work period during sowing and harvesting times.
- **Decentralized Planning:** Projects are now driven by **Viksit Gram Panchayat Plans**, which are integrated into the **PM Gati Shakti National Master Plan** for better infrastructure alignment.



Priority Verticals: Employment is linked to creating durable assets in four specific areas

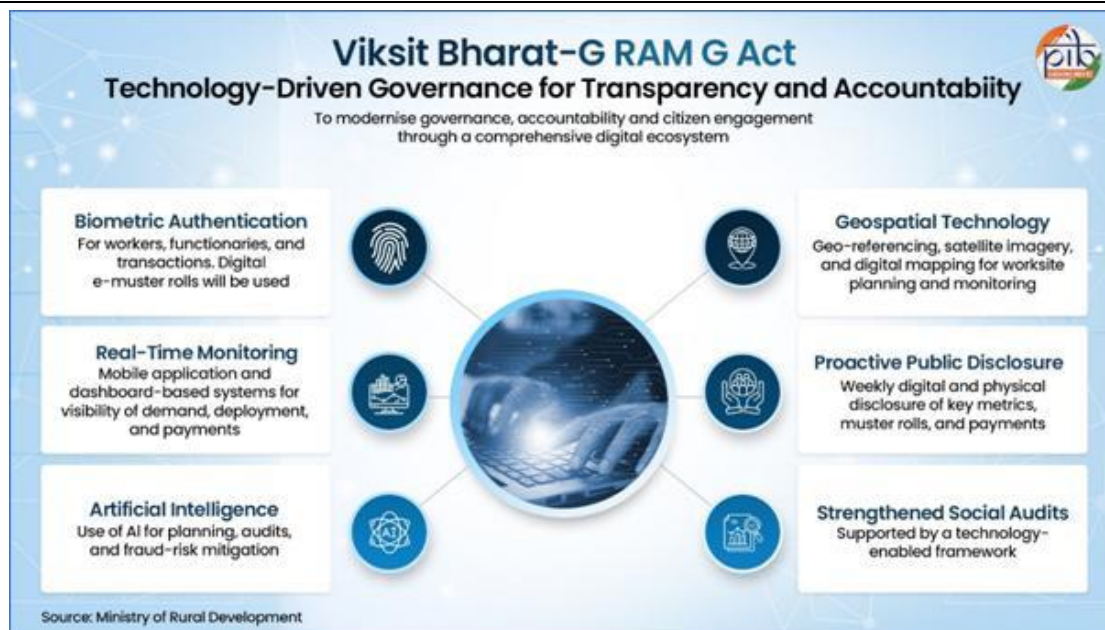
- Water Security (e.g., lakes, micro-irrigation).
- Rural Infrastructure.
- Livelihood Infrastructure.
- Climate and Disaster Resilience.
- **Digital Governance:** The new system mandates biometric authentication, geotagging, and artificial intelligence for audits and fraud risk mitigation.

CRITICISMS

Major criticisms include:

Erosion of the "Right to Work"

- Critics contend the scheme shifts from a **demand-driven model** (where work must be provided whenever requested) to a **supply-driven model**.
- **Budget Caps:** The Centre now determines "**normative allocations**" for each state annually. If demand exceeds this cap, states must fund the difference, which critics fear will lead to officials denying work to stay within budget.
- **Loss of Universality:** Employment is no longer guaranteed across all rural areas; it **may be restricted to "notified areas,"** potentially excluding vulnerable households in non-notified regions.



Fiscal Burden on States

- The shift from 100% Central funding for unskilled wages to a 60:40 Centre-State split (for most states) is a **major point of contention**.
- **State Finances:** Economically weaker states like Bihar, Jharkhand, and Chhattisgarh may struggle to mobilize these funds, leading to uneven implementation.
- **Federalism Concerns:** Critics, including leaders from Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and West Bengal, argue this forces states to bear a significant financial burden without a corresponding increase in decision-making power.

Impact of the 60-Day "No-Work" Period

- The Act allows states to pause work for up to 60 days during peak agricultural seasons to ensure labor availability for farmers.
- **Loss of Bargaining Power:** Activists argue this removes a worker's alternative source of income, forcing landless laborers into potentially exploitative or lower-paying agricultural work.
- **Liquidity Stress:** Vulnerable households may face severe income gaps during these "blackout periods" if private farm work is unavailable or insufficient.

Centralization and Governance

- **Top-Down Planning:** Critics claim the new "National Rural Infrastructure Stack" overrides local priorities, shifting power away from Gram Sabhas and Panchayats to central technocratic control.
- **Digital Barriers:** Mandatory biometric authentication and AI-based monitoring are seen as

potential hurdles for illiterate or digitally unconnected workers, which could lead to "exclusion errors".

Comparison Summary

Feature	MGNREGA (2005)	VB-G RAM G (2025)
Guaranteed Days	100 days	125 days
Funding (Unskilled)	100% Central	60% Central / 40% State (General)
Planning Model	Demand-driven	Supply-driven via Panchayat Plans
Agricultural Sync	Year-round availability	60-day pause during peak farming
Infrastructure	Basic assets	Aligned with PM Gati Shakti

Symbolic and Political Criticism

- **The removal of Mahatma Gandhi's name from the scheme** has been called an "ideological shift" and a "political statement" by opposition leaders. They argue the renaming seeks to claim credit for a revamped version of a scheme the current government previously criticized.

Way Forward

Strengthening Local Implementation Capacity

- The success of the new Mission hinges on the efficiency of Gram Panchayats, which now have enhanced planning powers.
- **Administrative Support:** The administrative expenditure ceiling has been **increased from 6% to 9%** to fund better staffing, training, and technical support at the field level.
- **Panchayat-led Planning:** Works must originate from local Viksit Gram Panchayat Plans, which are then integrated with national geospatial systems like PM Gati Shakti.

Ensuring Fiscal Sustainability & Cooperative Federalism

- The shift to a 60:40 cost-sharing pattern requires deep coordination between the Centre and States to prevent financial bottlenecks.
- **Normative Allocations:** States must manage their budgets within Central "normative allocations".
- **State Responsibility:** States are now legally liable for unemployment allowances and any expenditure exceeding their normative cap, creating stronger incentives for efficient fund management.

Bridging the Digital Divide

- To mitigate the risk of technology-driven exclusion, the framework includes specific safeguards:
- **Exception Handling:** Technology is intended as an enabling tool with "exception handling" for those facing biometric or connectivity issues.
- **Last-Mile Connectivity:** Expanding the **Common Services Centres (CSCs)** network—currently at 4.41 lakh rural centres—and the **BharatNet project** (linking 2.14 lakh Gram Panchayats) will be critical for digital wage payments.

Balancing Agriculture and Wage Employment

- The 60-day "no-work" period must be precisely tailored to local cropping patterns.
- **Dynamic Notifications:** States can notify specific pauses for different districts or blocks rather than a blanket statewide ban, ensuring work remains available in non-peak areas.
- **Higher Potential Earnings:** This period allows workers to earn higher private farm wages while still retaining their 125-day statutory guarantee for the rest of the year.

Focused Asset Creation

- The Mission moves away from fragmented work toward saturation-based infrastructure across four verticals:
- Water Security (Irrigation and groundwater recharge).
- Core Infrastructure (Roads and connectivity).
- Livelihood Support (Storage, warehouses, and markets).
- Climate Resilience (Disaster mitigation and soil conservation).

Conclusion

- In summary, The Viksit Bharat- Guarantee for Rozgar and Aajeevika Mission (Gramin) Act, 2025, represents a decisive shift in India's rural employment policy. While MGNREGA achieved significant gains in participation, digitisation, and transparency over time, persistent structural weaknesses limited its effectiveness. The new Act builds on past improvements while addressing their shortcomings through a modern, accountable, and infrastructure-focused framework.
- By expanding guaranteed employment, aligning work with national development priorities, and embedding strong digital governance, the Act repositions rural employment as a strategic instrument for sustainable growth and resilient livelihoods, fully aligned with the **vision of Viksit Bharat @ 2047**.

Unlocking the potential of India-Africa economicities

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visits to **Namibia and Ghana**, as part of a five-nation tour **(including Trinidad and Tobago, Argentina and Brazil) in July 2025**, focused the spotlight again on India-Africa economic relations — just as his recent visit to **Ethiopia (December 16-17, 2025) did**. The recent decade has witnessed a fresh momentum in India's relations with various African countries. A testament to this is the entry of the **African Union as a full-time member of the G-20 during India's presidency term in 2023**.
- India and Africa share a deep historical relationship shaped by **anti-colonial solidarity, South-South cooperation**, and strong people-to-people ties. In the contemporary phase, Africa has become a central pillar of India's foreign policy owing to its strategic location, demographic dividend, resource potential, and rising geopolitical importance. India-Africa bilateral trade has crossed **USD 100 billion**, though it remains significantly lower than China-Africa trade of over USD 200 billion, highlighting both the gap and the opportunity. Guided by principles of mutual respect, non-interference, capacity building, and development partnership, India aims to double trade with Africa by 2030, positioning itself as a long-term, people-centric partner rather than a purely extractive or transactional actor.

India-Africa Relations Evolution Over Time

1. Ancient and Early Historical Contacts: India-Africa relations date back to ancient times, primarily through maritime trade across the Indian Ocean.

- Indian traders from the western coast, especially Gujarat and the Konkan region, had regular commercial links with the eastern coast of Africa (present-day Kenya, Tanzania, and Mozambique).
- Using the monsoon wind system, they exchanged Indian textiles, spices, and beads for African goods such as gold, ivory, and timber.
- These interactions were largely peaceful and based on mutual benefit, leading to cultural exchanges that influenced the **Swahili civilization** in language, architecture, and social practices.
- Importantly, these early contacts were commercial and cultural in nature, not driven by conquest or territorial control.

2. During the Colonial Period: During this period, India and Africa came under European domination, creating a shared experience of exploitation and racial discrimination.

- Large numbers of Indians were taken to **Africa as indentured labourers**, traders, and clerks,

especially to South and East Africa, forming lasting diaspora communities.

- This phase also marked a deep political connection, as Mahatma Gandhi's struggle against racial discrimination in South Africa (1893–1914) shaped both *Indian nationalism and African resistance movements*.
- The colonial experience fostered a common political consciousness based on **anti-imperialism**, equality, and self-respect, laying the foundation for post-independence solidarity between India and African nations.

3. Post Colonial Engagement: India and newly independent African nations forged close ties based on shared anti-imperialist struggles and common developmental challenges. India emerged as a strong supporter of African decolonisation, extending diplomatic and moral backing to liberation movements across the continent.

- Platforms such as the **Asian–African Conference at Bandung (1955)** and the **Non-Aligned Movement (NAM)** brought India and African states together in pursuit of strategic autonomy, peace, and cooperation outside Cold War power blocs.
- In the early post-independence period, India–Africa relations focused on capacity building and people-centric cooperation rather than trade. India provided technical assistance, scholarships, and professional support in areas such as agriculture, healthcare, and administration.
- Though economic exchange was limited, this phase built lasting trust that later enabled deeper economic and strategic engagement.

Key Areas of Convergence in India-Africa Relations

1. Trade and Economic Cooperation:

- India-Africa trade has grown significantly, with bilateral trade crossing USD 100 billion in 2024–25, and India becoming one of the top five investors in Africa.
- India aims to **double trade by 2030** by focusing on value addition, technology-driven agriculture, renewable energy, healthcare, and services.
- India's exports include *pharmaceuticals, machinery, textiles, and automobiles*, while Africa supplies crude oil, minerals, and agricultural commodities.

2. Development Partnerships and Capacity Building:

- Development cooperation remains a core area of convergence.
- India has extended **concessional Lines of Credit (LoCs)** to African countries for infrastructure, water supply, and industrial projects.
- For instance, India offered a US\$170 Million Line of Credit (LoC) for the **Conakry Water Supply Project** to the **Republic of Guinea**.

- At the **India–Africa Forum Summits**, India committed significant financial and technical support, including vocational training centres and support for SMEs.

3. Education and Human Resource Development:

- Educational and skill development cooperation is central to India-Africa ties.
- Programs like the **Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC)** and scholarship schemes have trained thousands of African professionals in areas such as agriculture, healthcare, and administration.
- Initiatives like establishment of Indian institutes in Africa (e.g., *IIT Madras campus in Zanzibar*) strengthen people-to-people and institutional links.

4. Technology and Digital Cooperation:

- India has promoted digital cooperation through projects like the Pan-African e-Network for tele-education and tele-medicine, and is exploring wider digital public infrastructure collaboration.
- For example, **Namibia** is the **first African country** officially adopting **India's UPI** to build its own sovereign payment system.
- Also, recently, India agreed to set up a new **State-of-the-Art Data Centre** for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in **Ethiopia**.
- Such initiatives foster shared technology solutions in governance, connectivity and innovation.

5. Health and Pharmaceuticals:

- India's pharmaceutical industry is a major supplier of affordable medicines and vaccines to African countries.
- During the COVID-19 pandemic, India supplied vaccines under initiatives like "**One Earth One Health**", strengthening health diplomacy and building goodwill in public health cooperation.
- With about 20% of India's pharma exports going to African countries, Indian pharma companies become crucial for medical upliftment in Africa.

6. Strategic and Maritime Security Cooperation:

- Strategic convergence has grown through joint defence engagements and maritime exercises like the **Africa-India Key Maritime Engagement (AIKEYME)** involving several African navies, enhancing interoperability and regional security in the Indian Ocean.

7. Energy, Clean Technology, and Sustainable Development:

- Both India and Africa are working together on energy security and renewable energy initiatives, including cooperation under the International Solar Alliance and shared goals in green hydrogen and clean technologies. Such cooperation aligns with sustainable development goals and mutual growth strategies.

8. Global Advocacy and Multilateral Cooperation:

- India and Africa often align on global issues such as UN reforms, climate negotiations, and representation of the Global South. India has supported greater African participation in global institutions, including advocacy around the African Union's voice in forums like the G20.

Major Frictions Limiting the Potential of India-Africa Relations

1. Trade Imbalance and Limited Market Penetration:

- India's exports are concentrated in a few sectors like pharmaceuticals and refined petroleum, while value-added manufacturing and services penetration remains limited.
- African markets often perceive Indian firms as less competitive in terms of scale, speed, and financing compared to Chinese companies.
- Despite India being a global IT powerhouse, its digital services penetration in Africa is still in its infancy compared to its potential.
- While India has signed recent agreements (e.g., the Strategic Partnership with Ethiopia in December 2025), the export of high-end machinery and processed foods remains low.

2. Slow Implementation of Development Projects:

- India's Lines of Credit (LoCs) focus on infrastructure and capacity building, but many projects face delays due to procedural complexity, land issues, and weak local capacity.
- Slow execution reduces visibility and impact, sometimes leading to frustration among African partners despite goodwill.
- India's \$250 million Line of Credit for the Maputo electricity project in Mozambique, first offered in 2012, stalled in bureaucratic limbo for years without significant progress, necessitating a complete re-tendering process.
- On the other hand, the **Addis Ababa-Djibouti railway** was built with large China Eximbank buyer's-credit loans and Chinese contractors, cited as an example of China delivering big, fast, financed infrastructure.

3. Weak Institutional Momentum:

- Institutional frameworks such as the **India-Africa Forum Summit (IAFS)** have not been held regularly since 2015, weakening continuity and high-level political engagement.
- This gap contrasts with more frequent institutionalised engagements by other partners and reduces strategic focus on Africa in India's foreign policy calendar.

4. Logistic and Connectivity Constraints:

- Persistent logistical challenges such as limited direct shipping routes, high freight costs, and weak air connectivity increase transaction costs and hinder trade, investment, and people-to-people exchanges between India and Africa.

- These structural costs make Indian goods and services less competitive in many African markets.
- The ongoing conflict in the Red Sea has significantly disrupted the logistics of India-Africa trade throughout 2024 and 2025, primarily by forcing vessels to abandon the shortest route through the Suez Canal in favor of the Cape of Good Hope.
- A typical 20–22 day voyage from India to African markets now takes 30 to 35 days, representing a 50% increase in lead times.

5. Security and Political Instability in Parts of Africa:

- Ongoing conflicts, coups, and security challenges in regions such as the Sahel and Horn of Africa create risks for Indian investments, project continuity, and the safety of the Indian diaspora.
- For instance, India had to launch **Operation Kaveri** to evacuate over 3,000 Indians from Sudan due to conflict in the region.
- These unstable environments deter deeper private sector participation and slow implementation.

6. Underrepresentation in Global Governance Frameworks:

- While India supports Africa's voice in global institutions, African nations remain underrepresented in **UN Security Council** reform discussions and other decision-making bodies.
- Differences over the model of reform prevent a common negotiating position. While India (as part of the G4) seeks permanent seats with the veto, the **Ezulwini Consensus** (the African Union's common position) demands at least two permanent seats for Africa with full veto rights and two additional non-permanent seats.
- This generates a joint but unresolved diplomatic priority where both regions seek greater global voice yet struggle to overcome structural barriers.

5 Pillars of Strategic Reforms

1. Removing Trade Barriers and Deepening Institutional Trade Engagement:

- India should focus on removing tariff and non-tariff barriers by actively pursuing preferential trade agreements (PTAs) and comprehensive economic partnership agreements (CEPAs) with major African economies and regional groupings.
- Engaging deeply with African regional economic communities and the **African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)** can provide Indian exporters access to a unified market of over 1.4 billion people.
- This aligns with the call for India to “connect, build and revive” its trade engagement with Africa through institutionalised economic frameworks rather than ad-hoc bilateralism.

2. Shifting from Commodity Trade to Value-Added Manufacturing Partnerships:

- The second pillar must focus on transitioning from low-value commodity exports (such as

petroleum products) to **two-way value-added trade and joint manufacturing**.

- Despite incentives offered by African governments, Indian firms have underutilised opportunities to set up manufacturing units in Africa.
- Establishing production facilities offers a dual strategic advantage, preferential access to the U.S. market through favourable tariff regimes and direct entry into Africa's expanding consumer and industrial markets.
- Moving into pharmaceuticals, automobiles, agro-processing, textiles, and light manufacturing is essential to elevate India-Africa economic ties to the next phase.

3. Unlocking Africa's Potential for Indian MSMEs through Trade Finance:

- The third pillar should prioritise MSME-led engagement, where Africa offers greater opportunities than saturated Western markets.
- However, limited access to trade finance, insurance, and risk-mitigation tools constrains MSME participation.
- India must scale up Lines of Credit, simplify procedures, and improve accessibility for smaller firms.
- Measures such as local-currency trade, creation of a joint India-Africa insurance pool, and blended finance mechanisms can reduce political and commercial risks, encouraging banks and MSMEs to engage more actively.

4. Reducing Logistics and Connectivity Costs:

- The fourth pillar should address high freight and logistics costs, which undermine competitiveness.
- India needs to invest in port modernisation, hinterland connectivity, and dedicated India-Africa maritime corridors, supported by public-private partnerships. Improving shipping lines and air connectivity will reduce transaction costs, facilitate trade, and enhance business mobility—areas where India currently lags behind other global partners.

5. Scaling Services Trade and People-to-People Linkages:

- The final pillar must focus on services, digital trade, and human capital exchange. India should leverage its strengths in information technology, healthcare, education, professional services, and skill development to expand services exports to Africa.
- Services act as high-value trade multipliers, stimulating demand for goods and strengthening long-term economic integration. Current policy frameworks remain insufficient to unlock this potential and require targeted reforms to enable smoother movement of professionals, digital services, and institutional partnerships.

Conclusion:

- India–Africa relations are at a crucial juncture, driven by shared growth aspirations and strong political goodwill. As External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar has noted, **“Africa’s goals and agenda are India’s priority”** doubling trade by 2030 will require a shift from commodity exports to value-added manufacturing, services, and MSME-led engagement. Reducing trade barriers, improving logistics, and expanding trade finance are vital, alongside leveraging India’s strengths in digital services, healthcare, and skill development. A coherent, multi-pillar approach can convert this partnership into a durable engine of inclusive growth.

India–New Zealand FTA

- India and New Zealand have concluded talks on a **free trade agreement**, granting India tariff-free access to New Zealand’s market, attracting \$20 billion in investment over 15 years, and aiming to double bilateral trade to \$5 billion within five years.
- The FTA will be formally signed in the first half of 2026.

India–New Zealand Bilateral Relations

- India and New Zealand established diplomatic relations in **1952** and share enduring ties rooted in Commonwealth membership, common law traditions, and democratic governance.
- Sporting links—especially cricket, hockey, and mountaineering—and tourism have long fostered goodwill between the two societies.

1. Strategic Vision and Policy Frameworks

- New Zealand has identified India as a **priority partner** through initiatives such as **“Opening Doors to India”** (2011) and the NZ Inc. India Strategy.
- This was further deepened by the **“India–NZ 2025: Investing in the Relationship”** strategy, envisioning a more enduring strategic partnership across political, economic, and people-centric domains.

2. Trade and Economic Ties

- New Zealand is **India’s 11th largest two-way trading partner**.
- India–New Zealand total trade in 2023–24 was valued at US\$ 1.75 billion.
- Key trade sectors:** Education, tourism, dairy, food processing, pharmaceuticals, renewable energy, and critical minerals.
- Indian exports to NZ:** Pharmaceuticals, precious metals & gems, textiles, motor vehicles, and non-knitted apparel.

- **Indian imports from NZ:** Logs, forestry products, wool, edible fruit & nuts.

3. Defence and Maritime Cooperation

Defence ties are expanding steadily:

- Regular naval visits and port calls by Indian Navy ships.
- High-level naval leadership exchanges.
- Cooperation under Combined Task Force-150, with Indian Navy personnel contributing while NZ leads the task force.
- These engagements support maritime security and Indo-Pacific stability.

4. Education and Knowledge Partnerships

- India is the second-largest source of international students in NZ (~8,000 students).

Collaboration through:

1. *NZ Centre at IIT Delhi*
2. *Joint research projects in cancer, robotics, cybersecurity, waste management, and medical technology*
3. *Education cooperation agreements with GIFT City and IIM Ahmedabad*

5. People-to-People and Cultural Ties

- **Indian-origin population in NZ:** ~292,000, with Hindi as the fifth most spoken language.
- Vibrant celebration of Indian festivals and strong presence of Indian cultural institutions.
- Deep sporting connections, including shared mountaineering heritage linked to **Sir Edmund Hillary**.

India-New Zealand Free Trade Agreement: A New Phase in Bilateral Ties

- India and New Zealand have concluded a Free Trade Agreement (FTA), ending negotiations that began in March 2025.
- FTA talks were launched during **Luxon's** visit to India, and the deal was finalised in a record nine months, reflecting strong political commitment and a shared goal of deepening bilateral relations.

Key Trade & Investment Highlights

The FTA is expected to double bilateral trade within five years, deepen economic engagement, and strengthen cooperation beyond trade—covering defence, education, sports, innovation, and people-to-people ties.

- **Zero-Duty Market Access:** New Zealand will grant 100% duty-free access (across 8,284 tariff

lines) for Indian exports from the date the agreement enters into force.

- **India's Tariff Liberalization:** India will liberalize duties on approximately 70% of its tariff lines, covering about 95% of bilateral trade by value.
- **Investment Commitment:** New Zealand has committed to facilitating \$20 billion in investment into India over the next 15 years, targeting manufacturing, infrastructure, and innovation.
- **Trade Growth Target:** The agreement aims to double bilateral trade from the current ~\$2.4 billion to nearly \$5 billion within five years.
- 5,000 temporary employment visas annually for Indian professionals, valid up to three years.
- India gains market access across 118 services sectors and MFN status in 139 sectors, expanding opportunities for Indian professionals.



- **Most Favoured Nation (MFN) status is a key WTO principle** that requires countries to treat all WTO members equally in trade.

- Coverage includes IT, engineering, healthcare, education, construction, and niche roles like AYUSH practitioners, yoga instructors, chefs, and music teachers—strengthening services trade and workforce mobility

Sensitive Sector Safeguards

- **Dairy Protection:** India successfully excluded the dairy sector (milk, cream, cheese, etc.) from tariff concessions to protect domestic farmers.
- **Agricultural Exclusions:** Other sensitive products kept in exclusion include sugar, onions, almonds, and several vegetable products.
- **Tariff-Rate Quotas (TRQs):** For some agricultural products like apples, kiwifruit, and honey, India will allow managed access through a TRQ system linked to productivity-enhancing "Action Plans".

Conclusion of the Agreement

- The agreement serves as a strategic milestone in India's engagement with the Indo-Pacific, marking its third major trade deal in 2025 following pacts with the **UK and Oman**. By finalizing this agreement, both nations have signaled a reset in their economic relationship, moving toward a future-ready partnership focused on high-skill mobility, integrated supply chains, and investment-led growth.
- **Next Phase:** The agreement is expected to be formally signed in early 2026, with implementation anticipated to begin later that year after parliamentary ratification.

Lightning an understated disaster in India

- Experts at the **9th National Lightning Conference** warned that lightning remains India's deadliest yet underestimated natural disaster, despite a sharp rise in strikes due to climate change.

Lightning an understated disaster in India:

- Lightning is a rapid electrostatic discharge between clouds or between cloud and ground, accompanied by thunderstorms, intense rainfall, winds and sometimes hail. It is sudden, highly localised and instantly lethal, making mitigation challenging compared to slow-onset disasters.

Trends in India

- Lightning is the single largest killer natural hazard in India, causing over 2,000 deaths annually.
- India has witnessed a ~400% rise in lightning strikes (2019–2025), with a 7–14% annual increase

linked to warming.

- New hotspots have emerged in Rajasthan, Gujarat, Haryana, Punjab and Delhi, alongside persistent vulnerability in Madhya Pradesh, Bihar and Odisha.

Why lightning remains ignored as a disaster?

- **Dispersed nature:** Lightning fatalities occur as scattered, single-event incidents across villages and fields, preventing media visibility and policy recognition that usually follows large, concentrated disasters.
- **Low visibility of damage:** Unlike floods or cyclones, lightning rarely leaves large-scale structural destruction, leading to underestimation of its cumulative human and economic toll.
- **Data and research gaps:** Inadequate ground-based sensors, electric-field meters and testing laboratories limit precise mapping, forecasting and scientific understanding of lightning behaviour.
- **Last-mile communication failures:** Although forecasts exist, warnings often fail to trigger timely behavioural change at the village level due to language, access and institutional gaps.
- **Perception bias:** Lightning is widely viewed as an unavoidable “act of nature” rather than a disaster that can be mitigated through science, planning and awareness.

Implications of rising lightning risk

- **Human loss:** Farmers, labourers, fishermen and pastoral communities working outdoors face disproportionate mortality, making lightning a livelihood-linked hazard.
- **Economic damage:** Lightning damages crops, livestock, power lines, telecom towers and buildings, imposing recurring but underreported economic losses.
- **Climate linkage:** Rising atmospheric electricity correlates with cloudbursts, extreme rainfall and floods, amplifying compound climate risks.
- **Regional vulnerability:** Semi-arid, plateau and hilly regions with limited shelters and warning infrastructure face increasing exposure and fatalities.

NDMA guidelines and initiatives on lightning

- **Early warning systems:** IMD provides location-specific lightning forecasts up to 48 hours through Damini, Mausam and Sachet apps for timely alerts.
- **Public advisories:** NDMA has issued standardised do's and don'ts to reduce risky behaviour during thunderstorms and lightning events.
- **Community-centric approach:** Training programmes for disaster managers, volunteers and panchayats aim to convert warnings into early action.

- **Lightning Resilient India Campaign:** Focuses on nationwide awareness, education, capacity-building and local mitigation strategies.
- **Mitigation Project on Lightning Safety (MPLS):** Targets high-risk states and districts with risk mapping, electric-field meters, alert poles and lightning protection in schools and anganwadis.

Why lightning must be formally recognised as a disaster?

- **Highest mortality hazard:** Lightning kills more people annually than any other natural hazard in India, warranting priority disaster status.
- **Climate change amplifier:** Rising temperatures directly increase lightning frequency, making future risks systemic rather than episodic.
- **Preventable deaths:** Evidence shows that early warnings combined with behavioural change can sharply reduce fatalities.
- **Localised governance need:** Formal recognition enables funding, district-level action plans and Gram Panchayat integration.
- **Disaster risk reduction alignment:** Inclusion aligns India's policy framework with the Sendai Framework's emphasis on early warning and resilience.

Conclusion

- Lightning is no longer a sporadic weather hazard but a climate-driven, nationwide disaster with severe human costs. Treating it as a mainstream disaster can unlock better science, funding and local preparedness. Integrating lightning risk into disaster management plans is essential to save lives in a warming India.

What is Black Diamond?

- The conventional growth model, driven Cryptocurrency, once seen as a symbol of financial innovation, has increasingly emerged as a tool for global money laundering.
- **Makhana**, also known as a **gorgon nut** or **fox nut**, is a type of **dried edible seed** of the prickly water lily (*Euryale ferox*).
- Known as '**Black Diamond**' due to its small, round **black/brown seeds**, which turn white when processed.
- It is considered a **native of Southeast Asia and China**, but is distributed to almost every part of the world.

- 'Mithila Makhana' was granted a GI tag in 2022.
- Makhana is approved under the Union government's One District One Product **scheme**.
- It is mainly found and grown in **tropical and subtropical climates**.

Climatic conditions

Temperature: 20-35 degrees Celsius

Relative humidity: 50%-90%

Annual rainfall: 100-250 cm

Soil type: Smooth loamy soil

It is grown in **stagnant perennial water bodies** like ponds, oxbow lakes, swamps and ditches.

Other Food Items Considered Diamonds

Red Diamond: Saffron, known for its rich color and distinct flavor, is sometimes referred to as the **red diamond** because of its rarity and high price.

Black Diamond of the Sea: Caviar, the roe of sturgeon fish, is considered the black diamond of the sea due to its luxurious nature and high cost.

Golden Diamond: Alphonso mango is called the golden diamond for its rich taste, high quality, and rarity in certain regions.

Black Diamond of the Kitchen: Truffles, a type of fungi, are known as the black diamond of the kitchen due to their rarity, unique flavor, and high cost.

Black Diamond of the Culinary World: Vanilla, especially the **Bourbon variety**, is sometimes called the black diamond because of its labor-intensive cultivation process and premium value.

Seed Diamond: Due to their delicate flavor and rarity, **pine nuts** are sometimes referred to as seed diamonds.

Major Production Regions

- The global Makhana market, valued at \$43.56 million in 2023, is projected to reach \$100 million by 2033.
- India contributes to **80% of the world's demand** for Foxnuts.
- **Bihar** accounts for **90% of India's Makhana production**.
- **Key producing districts:** Darbhanga, Madhubani, Purnea, Katihar, Saharsa, Supaul, Araria, Kishanganj, and Sitamarhi.
- **Darbhanga, Madhubani, Purnea, and Katihar** contribute 80% of Bihar's total output.

- **Producing states:** Bihar, West Bengal, Manipur, Tripura, Assam, Jammu & Kashmir, Odisha, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh & Uttar Pradesh.
- Also cultivated in neighboring countries like **Nepal, Bangladesh, China, Japan, and Korea.**

Health benefits of Makhana

- It has **high fibre content, low glycemic index** and **phytochemical constituents**. It contains an insignificant amount of fat and is **rich in protein**.
- It prevents **high blood pressure** and sugar.
- Makhana in the regular diet **prevents early ageing** and **stops the greying of hair** and wrinkles.
- The **high calcium content** with nominal saturated fat of makhana strengthens bones and muscles.
- Makhana contains a **low amount of sodium** and a **high amount of potassium**, which is good for cardiac health. It also has a healthy amount of minerals like magnesium, manganese, and phosphorus.
- Used in **traditional medicine** and as a **healthy snack**.
- It has a growing global demand as a '**superfood**' among fitness enthusiasts.

Economic Significance of Makhana

- Makhana farming supports over **5 lakh** farmers, particularly small & marginal farmers and fishermen communities.
- It provides **employment opportunities**, especially for women-led microenterprises in processing and value addition.
- The demand for Makhana is rising in **India & international markets** such as USA, UK, Japan, & Australia.
- Bihar Makhana received a **GI tag in 2022**, enhancing its branding and global recognition.
- **Value-added products** like Makhana snacks, protein powders, & cosmetics are expanding its market.
- Government initiatives like the **Makhana Board** in Bihar and the **National Makhana Research Centre** aim to enhance productivity and exports.

Nutritional and Medicinal Value

- Makhana is rich in **protein, fiber, low calories**, and **healthy carbohydrates**, making it a **superfood**.
- It contains **kaempferol**, known for its anti-aging, anti-inflammatory, and antioxidant properties.
- It strengthens heart health, improves kidney function, and helps in detoxification.
- It is widely used in **Ayurveda** and **Unani** medicine for treating hypertension, insomnia, and arthritis.

Challenges in Makhana Production

- **High Labor Dependency:** Makhana harvesting involves manual collection, drying, and roasting, making it **labor-intensive** and **costly**.
- **Lack of Mechanization:** Traditional farming methods dominate, with minimal adoption of modern equipment, leading to **low efficiency** and **high post-harvest losses**.
- **Market Exploitation:** Middlemen dictate prices, reducing farmers' earnings and causing price fluctuations in domestic and export markets.
- **Climate Sensitivity:** Requires specific **water levels** and **temperature conditions**, making it vulnerable to erratic monsoons, declining wetland ecosystems, and pollution.
- **Declining Skilled Labor:** The **Mallah community (2.5% of Bihar's population)** specialises in Makhana harvesting, but **youth migration** to other jobs is creating a labor crisis.
- **Lack of Standardization:** The absence of an **HSN code** affects traceability, export certification, and international market credibility, limiting India's competitiveness.

Government Initiatives for Promoting Makhana Cultivation

- **Formation of Makhana Board:** Announced in Budget 2025-26, the Makhana Board in Bihar aims to organise farming, provide technical support, stabilise prices, promote marketing, and enhance exports.
- **National Makhana Research Centre:** To be established in **Darbhanga, Bihar**, focusing on high-yielding varieties, mechanized processing, sustainable water management, and farmer training.
- **Financial Support & Subsidies:** Kisan Credit Card (KCC) loans, discussions on Minimum Support Price (MSP), and NABARD assistance for Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) in Makhana-growing regions.
- **Inclusion in Government Schemes**
- **Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (PMKSY)** provides irrigation support.
- **National Mission on Sustainable Agriculture (NMSA)** promotes climate-resilient water-based farming.
- **Operation Greens** supports post-harvest processing and value-chain development.
- **Makhana Vikas Yojana** (Bihar) boosts cultivation and productivity in 10 districts through training and equipment grants.
- **Export Promotion & Global Branding**
- **GI Tag for Mithila Makhana** enhances international market recognition.
- Trade agreements and export facilitation improve global market access.
- APEDA (Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority) promotes Makhana exports.
- Participation in global food exhibitions and trade fairs increases international demand.

Makhana Board & Its Significance

- **Rs 100 crore budget allocation** to boost production, processing, and export.
- Aims to **enhance food processing capabilities** and **market reach**.
- Provides **training and handholding support** to farmers and helps organize farmers into Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs).
- Integrates Makhana farming with government schemes.
- Supports branding, marketing, & infrastructure development under **One District One Product** scheme.

Makhananomics: Bihar's Makhana Push

- **Why Makhana?:** Bihar produces more than **80%** of India's makhana; **Mithila Makhana** GI tag (2022); market projected to grow from \$43.56M (2023) to \$100M (2033).
- **Challenges:** Low processing & export infra (**Punjab dominates in export**); low yield (1.7-1.9 t/ha vs. 3-3.5 t/ha potential); middlemen exploitation & unorganised market.
- **Makhana Board Impact:** ₹100 Cr investment for processing, exports, market linkages; HYV seed adoption, FPOs for better pricing; new cargo infra in Patna, Darbhanga, Purnea.
- **Economic & Political Significance:** Supports 10L families, esp. Mallah community; electoral impact in Bihar; aligns with Atmanirbhar Bharat & agri-growth.
- **Way Forward:** MSP for makhana, processing hubs, cooperative models, direct exports, and branding.

Economic and Political Implications

- **Economic Boost:** Strengthening the **food processing industry** in Bihar can create jobs and improve farmers' income.
- **Market Expansion:** Global Makhana market, valued at **\$43.56 million in 2023**, expected to reach **\$100 million by 2033** (CAGR 8.31%).
- **Political Impact:** Supports **Mallah (fishermen) community**, which is heavily involved in Makhana farming, ahead of Bihar elections.
- **Impact of Government Initiatives on Makhana Production and Rural Livelihoods**
- **Enhanced Farmer Income and Employment:** Government support has made Makhana farming more profitable, creating jobs in cultivation and processing.

- **Women Empowerment:** Women's involvement in Makhana processing and skill programs has boosted their financial independence.
- **Reduction in Seasonal Migration:** Increased local employment in Makhana farming has reduced rural-to-urban migration.
- **Strengthening of Farmer Cooperatives and FPOs:** The formation of FPOs and cooperatives has improved bargaining power, ensuring fair prices.
- **Crop Diversification and Sustainable Agriculture:** Makhana's low water requirement and integration with fish farming enhance sustainability and productivity.
- **Growth of Agro-Processing Industries:** Support for processing units and cold storage has boosted Makhana-based industries and job creation.
- **Contribution to India's Agricultural Exports:** GI-tagged **Mithila Makhana** has increased India's global market share and export value.
- **Future Opportunities and Export Challenges:** Infrastructure gaps and processing limitations hinder exports, but government initiatives can enhance global competitiveness.

Road ahead

- **Strengthening Research and Development:** Develop high-yield, climate-resilient Makhana varieties and improve mechanisation in harvesting and processing to reduce labor dependency.
- **Expanding Domestic and International Markets:** Promote Makhana-based startups, support food processing industries, and strengthen export facilitation through APEDA and global trade partnerships.
- **Ensuring Price Stability for Farmers:** Implement Minimum Support Price (MSP) for Makhana and strengthen Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) to improve market access and bargaining power.
- **Enhancing Infrastructure and Logistics:** Invest in modern processing units, packaging, and cold storage facilities while improving transportation networks to expand global reach.
- **Maximizing the Benefits of GI Tag:** Expand registration of genuine Makhana producers under the GI-tag system, ensuring small farmers in key regions like Darbhanga, Madhubani, and Sitamarhi benefit from its premium market value.

Supriya Sahu - Inspiration for IAS Aspirants - Ethics & Integrity

- Supriya Sahu is a senior IAS officer of the 1991 batch (Tamil Nadu cadre) who has earned global recognition for her pioneering work in environmental protection. In 2025, she was awarded

the **United Nations Champions of the Earth Award**, UNEP's highest environmental honor, for her leadership in reducing plastic pollution, protecting wildlife, and advancing climate solutions.

- The UNEP story highlights an Indian public servant, likely an IAS officer, who exemplifies ethical public service by aiding disadvantaged communities in adapting to rising heat through innovative, community-focused interventions.

Supriya Sahu, IAS

- Belongs to the **1991 batch of IAS**, Tamil Nadu cadre.
- Currently serves as **Additional Chief Secretary, Environment, Climate Change & Forest Department, Government of Tamil Nadu**.
- **Major Contributions:**
 - **Plastic-Free Initiative:** Spearheaded campaigns to reduce single-use plastics in Tamil Nadu.
 - **Wildlife Protection:** Advocated for conservation of elephants and other species, often sharing awareness through public platforms.
 - **Climate Action:** Designed and implemented state-level climate adaptation and sustainability programs.
 - **Community Engagement:** Promoted eco-friendly practices by involving local communities.
- **Global Recognition:**
 - Honored with the **2025 UNEP Champions of the Earth Award** in the *Inspiration and Action* category.
 - This award is the **UN's highest environmental recognition**, highlighting her three decades of commitment to sustainability.

Ethical Leadership:

- Embodies values of **integrity, empathy, and environmental stewardship**, making her a role model for public servants.
- Demonstrates how IAS officers can integrate **administrative efficiency with ethical responsibility** to address global challenges like climate change.

Ethical Dimensions

- **Empathy & Compassion**
 - Recognized the suffering of marginalized groups exposed to extreme heat.
 - Prioritized human dignity and welfare over bureaucratic convenience.
- **Social Justice & Equity**

- Focused on disadvantaged communities who lack resources to adapt.
- Ensured inclusivity in climate adaptation measures.
- **Integrity & Public Service Orientation**
 - Used administrative authority transparently to implement sustainable solutions.
 - Reflected commitment to probity in governance.
- **Environmental Ethics**
 - Promoted adaptation strategies that respect ecological balance.
 - Linked governance with stewardship of natural resources.
- **Innovation & Problem-Solving**
 - Designed community-based solutions like awareness campaigns, cooling interventions, and local participation.
 - Demonstrated creativity in tackling complex challenges.

Lessons for IAS Officers

- **Policy Implementation:** Translate national climate policies into local action with fairness.
- **Community Engagement:** Build trust and involve citizens in decision-making.
- **Balancing Development & Sustainability:** Ensure economic growth does not compromise resilience.
- **Leadership in Crisis:** Ethical leadership means prioritizing vulnerable groups during climate emergencies.

Vande Mataram: A Song, a Symbol, a Struggle

- Vande Mataram is a work that was published by a nationalist called **Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay**. It was adopted as the national song by the Indian National Congress, and it is credited with its contribution to the revival of agitations towards freedom, but it chose **Jana Gana Mana** as the anthem to represent inclusiveness. The Muslim League, though, abrogated its mythopoetic representation at the cost of being exclusionary. This debate itself covered the tension between culture and secularism.
- Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay wrote Vande Mataram in his work **Anandamath (1882)**, which denotes devotion to the motherland.
- It was a call to nationalism, and a song they sang in Congress sessions and demonstrations during the battle for freedom.
- The Congress view incorporated the song as a historic one, though only the first two stanzas were

used, so that there was no controversy about it being a religious song.

- Congress has made Vande Mataram the national song and has made Jana Gana Mana the national anthem to ensure inclusiveness.
- The reservations brought out by the Muslim League focused on the objections to goddess representations, which were considered to be isolating and against pluralism.
- The controversy has emphasized the conflicts between cultural heritage and a secular representation in nation-building.
- The compromise depicts the pluralist spirit in India, between tradition and inclusiveness in national symbols.
- The controversy of Vande Mataram takes center stage in the intellectual and political history of modern India. The composition was created by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay in **1882** in his novel, *Anandamath*, but quickly went beyond the literary origin as a symbolic representation of anti-colonial action. Its appeal to the mother country, in the devotional heroic terms, appealed to the nationalistic feeling and was borrowed by the Indian National Congress to act as a call to arms in the fight against British colonialism. However, the **theological connotations** of the song, especially the description of the country as a goddess, caused dissent among various groups of people. The Congress has tried to ensure that Vande Mataram remains the national song, as its historical impact of citing collective action, and tried, at the same time, to institutionalize Jana Gana Mana as the national anthem to ensure inclusiveness and secularism. Contrarily, the Muslim League made strong reservations and argued that the religious mythical imagery in the song was discriminatory against Muslim identity and undermined the cultural pluralism principle. The conflicting positions of these two main political actors help shed light on the wider conflicts in the process of establishing what national symbols entail: between the past and the present, whether neutral or emotive, devotion and secularism. A review of these arguments reveals a fundamental understanding of the issues surrounding the process of nation-building and negotiation of cultural identity in colonial India.

Origin and Literary Significance

- India has a cultural and political imagination that is centred on Vande Mataram. It started in Bengal in the nineteenth century, combining the qualities of literary art with the spirit of nationalism, thus posing as a hymn of devotion, and at the same time serving as a revolutionary anthem, a call to arms. Vande Mataram evolved from a 19th century literary work into a powerful symbol of Indian nationalism abroad. Its use by revolutionaries and students **at India House London** highlights the global nature of India's freedom struggle and continuing cultural relevance.

Historical Origin

- Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay wrote this song, Vande Mataram, in the 1870s, and it was published in a literary periodical, **Bangadarshan, in 1875**. It was later integrated into his classic novel Anandamath (1882), which tells the plight of ascetics rebelling under colonial rule. It is in a Sanskritized version of the Bengali language, which refers to the motherland as a deity, a combination of spiritual respect and national symbolism. In its refrain, which says I bow to thee, Mother, it expresses a vision of India as a sacred place, hence requires reverence and sacrifice.

Literary Significance

- In Literature, Vande Mataram is an example of romantic nationalism mixed with devotional poetics. Chattopadhyay uses striking language, descriptive imagery, a green field, rivers, and forests to create an attractive picture of India, both nurturing and divine. The rhythmic cadence and the diction push the motherland above the geographic coordinates, transforming it into a spiritual one. This literary element appealed to the reader as it connected the feeling of patriotism to the vernacular religious phraseology, therefore, instilling the sense of nationalism into the greater cultural subconscious.

Role in the Nationalist Movement

- The political mobilization of the song was due to its literary influence. It was used in the late nineteenth and the first part of the twentieth centuries **when it was sung during congress meetings and demonstrations**, and it effectively served as a counter-cry against colonialists. Its songs united rulers and common people, as the spirit of unity and opposition. The expressive nature of the work was used to bridge the gap between literature and activism, and it clearly showed how the cultural writings could energize political movements.

Enduring Legacy

- What made the impact of the song unforgettable in terms of its enduring importance is the fact that it doubles up as both a masterpiece of literature and a national icon. Even though the goddess images in it have been ridiculed with questions of inclusiveness later, one cannot deny its contribution to the growth of the nationalist consciousness. To reconcile between heritage and secular representation in 1950, the independent India adopted the work as a national song, but in doing so, recognized its historical significance without mirroring the national anthem.

The View and Takeover by Congress

- The Indian National Congress became one of the central participants in the nationalisation of the symbolic value of Vande Mataram, both acknowledging the inspirational power of the concept in the freedom struggle and attempting to balance the cultural legacy with an ideology of cultural inclusivity. ***The Indian National Congress (INC) adopted an abridged version of Vande Mataram as the national song in 1937*** to balance its historical significance in the freedom struggle with the need for religious inclusivity. This decision, made after objections from the Muslim League, remains a subject of modern political debate.

Nationalist Sentiment

- At the end of the nineteenth century, Vande Mataram was adopted by the Congress and served as a symbol of resistance and unity. The song was sung at party meetings and mass meetings and was, thus, a form of agitprop against the power of the colonialists. It was seen by leaders as a cultural expression of patriotism across the regional borders, thus giving it ground in the wider nationalist expression of the Congress.

Concerns of Inclusivity

- Despite the popularity of the hymn, Congress officials admitted to the fact of religious iconography depicted in the hymn, the deity of the motherland, in the forefront of which could have been pushed aside by some groups of people. By the 1930s, in-party wrangling highlighted the need to reconcile the nationalistic diligence with communal solidarity, and the Congress began to make a distinction between the emotional appeal of the piece and its realistic applicability as a national symbol.

Adoption as National Song

- The Congress came up with a decree in 1937 that limited public recitation of Vande Mataram to the first two verses, which were regarded to be quite secular. The move resulted in this compromise, which showed that the party was making an effort to keep the anthem relevant to history without causing anxiety among the minority groups. After the constitution was prepared on the basis of the future post-industrial India, the Congress adopted Vande Mataram as the national song, alongside making Jana Gana Mana the national anthem; this divided recognition was the perfect compromise between tradition and demonstrative inclusiveness.

Position of Congress Legacy

- The position of the Congress is a good example of objective mediation of signifiers of culture in a pluralistic polity. The party would make its role in the mobilisation against colonialism by promulgating Vande Mataram as the national song, and in doing so, by the choice of Jana Gana Mana as an anthem; it strengthened the position of the secular representation within a federated state. This policy has had a long-term impact on the modern discourses of national identity, as it reflects the attempt of the Congress to walk the fine line between affective heritage and democratic inclusivity.

Reservations by the Muslim League

- The Muslim League's protests against Vande Mataram were indicative of general concerns about cultural representation in nationalist discourse. The piece was a call to arms of many followers, yet at the same time, the use of religious imagery raised questions relative to inclusiveness and belonging. The Muslim League, led by M.A. Jinnah, strongly opposed Vande Mataram in the 1930s, deeming it idolatrous and anti-Islamic due to its devotional language towards "**Bharat Mata**" (**Mother India**), which conflicted with Islamic monotheism, especially the later verses describing India as Goddess Durga. This opposition intensified in 1937, leading the Congress, under Nehru's influence, to compromise by accepting only the first two stanzas for national gatherings, sparking debate over appeasement and the song's nationalist spirit.

Exclusions

- The League also disliked that the song recognizes the motherland as a Hindu goddess, especially in the subsequent stanzas of the Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay song. This symbolism was in conflict with **Islamic monotheism** and was considered a threat to Muslim citizens among Muslim leaders. They argued that national symbols must avoid making reference to theology; therefore, all communities should contribute equally in the national struggle of gaining independence.
- Even Mahatma Gandhi, who was initially enthusiastic about the song, later reconsidered his position. In July 1939, Gandhi wrote in Harijan: "It had never occurred to me that it was a Hindu song or meant only for Hindus. Unfortunately, now we have fallen on evil days." Gandhi reportedly advised local boards and Legislative Assemblies not to sing the song.

Opposition

- The Muslim League more and more established itself as an advocate of the Muslim interests in colonial India in the 1930s and 1940s. In this context, Vande Mataram was understood to be the symbol of Hindu-majoritarianism in the Congress. The League argued that putting the song as a

national anthem would discriminate against Muslims and, instead of encouraging unity, consolidate the cultural stratifications. This resistance was not simply literary but very much political, and it was connected to the issues of identity and representation.

Call for Alternative

- The reservations of the League reached alternative demands of national symbols themselves, which might represent the ideals of secular and inclusive values. Those in power highlighted that though Muslims honoured the nationalistic movement, they needed some symbols free from religious connotations. This assertion highlighted the wider plan of the League of Cultural Pluralism, in which one national identity could no longer be absorbed into the single religious practice.

Impact

- The criticism of the League greatly informed the ultimate compromise in the Congress of designating the name of Vande Mataram as the national song and making it the national anthem of adherence to Jana Gana Mana. This two-fold recognition was an effort to combine the historical heritage with inclusivity. Accordingly, the League's reservations were incredibly relevant in the formation of the symbolic structure of independent India and, hence, the significance of the minority standpoints to the nation-building process.

National Song vs. National Anthem

- The controversy over the inclusion of Vande Mataram in the list of national songs and Jana Gana Mana in the list of national anthems is a boundary demarcation of the attempts by India to move forward to unite the cultural heritage and secular inclusivity in the freedom struggle and the constitutional draft. The composition consisting of the words and music known as Jana Gana Mana is the National Anthem of India, subject to such alterations in the words as the Government may authorise as occasion arises; and the song Vande Mataram, which has played a historic part in the struggle for Indian freedom, shall be honoured.

Background of the Discussion

- As early as the first half of the twentieth century, Vande Mataram was turning into a powerful nationalistic emblem, being regularly sung during Congress conferences and anti-protest demonstrations. However, its religious overtures, especially the motherland as a deity, provoked fears among the Muslim leaders and other minority constituencies. This tension led to a greater

discussion on what cultural figures would represent the Indian population without creating a sense of exclusion.

Congress's Compromise

- Through these efforts, the Indian National Congress tried to make use of the emotional heritage of Vande Mataram and, at the same time, soothe the minorities. In 1937, the party ruled that only the first and second stanzas, which do not show any direct references to religion, would be used in official events. Later discussions of the constitution supported Vande Mataram as the national song; thus, accepting its historic value, but decided Jana Gana Mana as the national anthem, because of its secular and inclusive qualities.

Muslim League

- The Muslim League opposed the raising of Vande Mataram as an anthem, contending that its theological icon was a marginalization of Muslims. In the case of the League, national symbols were needed to manifest cultural pluralism, not to be reminiscent of one religious tradition. Their criticism had a conclusive effect on prompting the Congress to differentiate the song and anthem and thus avoid having the issue of national identity being solely bound to the Hindu symbolism.

Symbolic and Constitutional Meaning

- It was not just a question of semantics; the boundary that was set between national song and national anthem had serious political undertones. It marked an agreed compromise between their veneration of the affective legacy of the patriotic movement and their protection of their idea of secular inclusiveness in a heterogeneous polity. This concession reinforced that the contributions of minority views played a key role in the construction of the symbolic architecture of India, and enlightened that there were, in fact, difficulties of significance to the nation-building of having a unified national identity.

Conclusion

- The controversy, which surrounded Vande Mataram, highlights the complications of the process of national identity formation in a pluralistic society. Even though the Indian National Congress also marked the song as a historic text of struggle, the Muslim League emphasized its exclusivist religious representation. The final compromise, which saw the use of Vande Mataram as a national song and Jana Gana Mana as the national anthem, was based on the conscious effort to strike a balance between the generations and secularism. This discussion shows that symbols of

nationalism are not simply cultural objects but are objects of meaning which are being contested, hence determining the direction of the ethos of democracy in India and its diversity and unity.

Beyond Algorithms: Why Thought Still Defines Being

- Rapid advances in artificial intelligence and automation are challenging long-held ideas about thought, consciousness, and human uniqueness, reviving debates once central to philosophy.
- At the same time, the decline of philosophy in public discourse has raised concerns about society's ethical and intellectual preparedness for technological change.

Why Thought Still Defines Being?

- Technology and philosophy together examine how tools, machines, and algorithms reshape human values, knowledge, ethics, and identity. While technology expands capability, philosophy interrogates meaning, purpose, responsibility, and limits of such expansion.

Thought as the Basis of Existence:

- **Cartesian Rationalism and Epistemic Certainty:** Descartes' cogito establishes self-conscious rational thought as the indubitable foundation of existence, privileging epistemic certainty over sensory or empirical doubt.
- **Intentionality as Moral Distinction:** Unlike AI's computational outputs, human thought possesses intentionality—the directedness of consciousness—central to moral responsibility and ethical accountability.
- **Self-awareness and Reflexive Agency:** Human cognition is reflexive, capable of evaluating its own beliefs and actions, a prerequisite for moral agency absent in algorithmic systems.
- **Normative Reasoning vs Instrumental Rationality:** Human thought engages in normative reasoning (what ought to be), whereas AI operates within instrumental rationality, optimising means without moral ends.
- **Personhood and Moral Status:** Ethical traditions (Kantian ethics) ground personhood in autonomy and dignity, not mere information processing—distinguishing humans from synthetically intelligent entities.

Decline of Philosophy in Public Life

- **Erosion of Practical Wisdom (Phronesis):** Public discourse increasingly values technical expertise over phronesis—ethical judgment rooted in lived human experience.
- **Utilitarian Education Paradigm:** Market-driven systems prioritise economic utility over critical reflection, marginalising philosophy as “non-productive” despite its civic value.
- **Fragmentation of Moral Discourse:** The loss of philosophical frameworks has led to moral relativism and polarized debates lacking shared ethical reasoning.
- **Technocratic Governance Bias:** Policy-making increasingly relies on technocratic rationality, sidelining ethical deliberation on justice, rights, and social consequences.
- **Displacement by Ideology and Dogma:** In the absence of philosophical skepticism, ideological absolutism fills the vacuum, reducing nuanced ethical inquiry to binary moral postures.

Misconceptions Behind Philosophy's Perceived Decline

- **Scientific reductionism replacing normative inquiry:** Science explains causal mechanisms (how things work), but cannot address normative questions of value, purpose, and moral obligation, which remain philosophical.
- **Ideology masquerading as philosophy:** Dogmatic ideologies offer closed answers and moral certainty, unlike philosophy's commitment to critical skepticism, fallibilism, and open-ended inquiry.
- **Hyper-specialisation and temporal acceleration:** Academic fragmentation and fast-paced economies devalue slow reasoning, reflection, and conceptual synthesis essential for philosophical insight.
- **Materialist bias in measuring relevance:** Philosophy's non-quantifiable outcomes—ethical clarity, moral imagination, and civic reasoning—are obscured in productivity-driven evaluative frameworks.

Why Philosophy Remains Indispensable?

- **Ethical navigation under uncertainty:** When empirical data is inconclusive, philosophy provides ethical frameworks—utilitarian, deontological, virtue-based—to guide responsible decision-making.
- **Epistemic resilience against manipulation:** Philosophical training cultivates critical rationality, enabling individuals to resist misinformation, propaganda, and algorithmic persuasion.
- **Foundations of justice and rights:** Concepts like dignity, equality, and moral worth are

philosophical constructs that underpin legal and political institutions.

- **Meaning beyond optimisation:** Philosophy addresses existential questions of purpose and flourishing, which lie beyond computational efficiency or economic optimisation.

Technology as the Moment of Philosophy's Return

- **AI and the problem of moral agency:** Autonomous systems raise questions about responsibility, accountability, and intent, requiring philosophical—not technical—resolution.
- **Algorithmic power and epistemic justice:** Bias, opacity, and surveillance demand philosophical scrutiny of fairness, consent, and distributive justice in digital systems.
- **Language, truth, and digital distortion:** Echo chambers and misinformation revive **Wittgensteinian** concerns about language, meaning, and truth in public discourse.
- **Human relevance in an automated age:** As machines outperform humans instrumentally, philosophy reasserts human dignity, creativity, and moral uniqueness as non-replaceable values.

Conclusion

- As technology accelerates, philosophy is not fading—it is quietly becoming essential again. In an age of intelligent machines, philosophy ensures that progress remains human-centred, ethical, and meaningful. The future demands not less philosophy, but deeper reflection on what it means to think, to choose, and to be human.

U.S. Naval Moves against Venezuela

- Recently, The United States has announced a “total and complete blockade of all sanctioned oil tankers going into and,” out of Venezuela marking a significant escalation in its pressure campaign against the Nicolás Maduro government.

What are the three merchant ships targeted by the U.S.?

1. Skipper – It was seized by U.S. authorities off the coast of Venezuela.

- The vessel was carrying nearly two million barrels of crude oil.
- According to the U.S. government, the oil had been shipped at subsidised rates to Cuba, which has been providing economic and political support to the Maduro regime.

2. Centuries – The Panamanian-flagged tanker was stopped and boarded by the U.S. Coast Guard.

- The Venezuelan Navy escorted the ship up to the boundary of Venezuela's Exclusive Economic

Zone, after which U.S. forces intervened.

- The vessel was transporting Venezuelan oil and had previously lost certification from major international classification societies.

3. Bella 1 – The U.S. Coast Guard attempted to intercept this tanker that was en route to Venezuela to load crude oil.

- The vessel had earlier been sanctioned by the U.S. for trading Iranian oil and was again suspected of violating U.S. sanctions related to Venezuela.
- These three ships illustrate the methods used by sanctioned states to continue oil exports despite international pressure.

What are the nature and scope of U.S. Sanctions?

- **United Nations sanctions** – These imposed by the United Nations are legally binding on all member states and can include military, diplomatic, or economic measures.
- **U.S. sanctions** – They are largely unilateral measures designed to achieve American foreign policy objectives at relatively low direct cost.
- Rather than relying on physical enforcement, which is expensive and often ineffective, the U.S. increasingly uses financial and economic leverage.
- **Past experience of US sanctions** – The maritime blockade of Iraq under the Oil-for-Food Programme after the **First Gulf War**, showed that physical blockades cost billions of dollars and failed to prevent illegal oil trading.
- **Revised Strategy of US** – Since the **Second Gulf War**, the U.S. has focused on exploiting its dominant position in the global financial system, especially through control over the U.S. dollar and international banking infrastructure

What is the role of the dollar and global finance?

- **Petro dollar system** – The U.S. exercises significant influence through the petrodollar system, as most global oil transactions are conducted in U.S. dollars.
- The American government has direct authority over U.S. companies and prohibits them from trading with sanctioned countries.
- **Submission of other banks and agencies** – Non-U.S. banks and companies also comply with U.S. sanctions to retain access to the American market and the global financial system, which is heavily centred in the United States.
- Even transactions that do not directly involve the U.S. often pass through American financial

intermediaries, allowing Washington to block or monitor them.

- For example, major international banks such as HSBC were reluctant to re-enter Iran even after the 2015 nuclear deal, due to continuing restrictions on U.S. firms.
- In 2014, **BNP Paribas** paid nearly \$9 billion in fines for violating U.S. sanctions.
- Similarly, U.S. pressure on Banco Delta Asia in Macau effectively disrupted North Korea's access to international finance.

What are the shipping-related sanctions and their mechanisms?

- **Control over various factors** – Shipping sanctions rely heavily on control over insurance, certification, and registration, rather than ownership of vessels.
- **Dominance of west** – While shipbuilding and ownership are globally dispersed, marine insurance is dominated by Western companies, particularly those based in the United Kingdom.
- Ships require insurance coverage, especially Protection and Indemnity (P&I) insurance, to enter ports and conduct trade.
- **Mandatory certification** – Certification by recognised classification societies, most of which belong to the International Association of Classification Societies (IACS), is also mandatory for obtaining insurance.
- When the U.S. imposes sanctions, classification societies often withdraw certification and major insurers terminate coverage.
- For instance, Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, several Russian ships were stranded in the **Bosphorus Strait** after losing P&I insurance, making them unacceptable risks for transit through Turkish waters.

Confirmed locations of US military ships



- In addition, some countries may revoke flag registration of sanctioned vessels to avoid U.S. retaliation.
- Ships that lose their flag or falsely claim nationality can be boarded by naval forces under the **United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea**.

What are the effectiveness of U.S. sanctions in the shipping sector?

- Finding alternate route – Energy-rich states such as Iran and Russia have managed to develop alternative networks despite losing access to mainstream insurers and classification societies.
- Russia, in particular, has partially bypassed price-cap mechanisms imposed on its oil exports.
- **Role of OFAC** – The **U.S. Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC)** plays a central role in enforcing sanctions by identifying and blacklisting individuals, companies, and vessels.
- In June 2024, OFAC sanctioned Bella 1 for allegedly transporting cargo linked to a **Hezbollah-owned company**.

- **Operating with irregularities** – Many vessels now operate under unclear or frequently changing ownership, flags of convenience, and lesser-known classification societies.
- This complicates enforcement and reflects deliberate attempts to evade sanctions.
- **The Shadow Fleet and Emerging Counter-Networks** – The cases of Skipper, Centuries, and Bella 1 exemplify what Western governments describe as the “shadow fleet” aging vessels operating without proper insurance, certification, or transparent ownership.
- Centuries, once certified by the American Bureau of Shipping, later received certification from a smaller classification society not affiliated with the IACS.
- Skipper similarly lost certification from recognised bodies and was accused by U.S. authorities of falsely flying the flag of Guyana.
- **Cooperation among countries** – These developments indicate increasing cooperation among sanctioned states such as Venezuela, Iran, Russia, and potentially China, aimed at weakening U.S. dominance over global finance and maritime trade.

What lies ahead?

- The decision by the United States to resort to a physical maritime blockade against Venezuelan oil exports signals the limits of financial sanctions alone.
- While U.S. control over the dollar, banking, insurance, and certification remains formidable, the persistence of shadow fleets and alternative trading networks shows that sanctioned states have achieved partial success in resisting economic isolation.
- For global governance, this raises important questions about the future effectiveness of unilateral sanctions, the fragmentation of the international economic order, and the increasing militarisation of maritime enforcement in global trade routes.

India's Research Deficit

- India's chronic research and development (R&D) deficit has returned to focus following renewed debate on India's global ambitions, low R&D spending ($\approx 0.7\%$ of GDP), and comparisons with countries-and even firms like Huawei-that far outspend India on innovation.

India's Research Deficit:

- India's research deficit refers to the systemic underinvestment, weak ecosystem linkages, and low output in scientific research, innovation, and high-end technology development, despite having

one of the world's largest talent pools and economies.

Key trends

- **R&D expenditure:** ~0.6–0.7% of GDP (declining relative to GDP growth).
- China: ~2.4% | USA: ~3.5% | Israel: ~5.4%
- Global research output: India has ~17.5% of world population but produces only ~3% of global research output.

Patents (2023):

- **Total filings:** 64,480 (6th globally; fast growth from low base)
- Share of global filings: ~1.8%
- Resident filings per million people: 47th rank
- **Researchers density:** ~255 researchers per million people
- Global average: ~1,198 | USA: 4,452 | China: 1,307 | South Korea: 7,980
- **Private sector role:** Government contributes ~63.6% of R&D spend; private sector only ~36.4%.
- **Global Innovation Index 2024: 39th rank.**

Need for Strong Research in India

- **Economic competitiveness and value-chain upgradation:** R&D enables transition from assembly to design-led manufacturing and intellectual leadership.
- Despite ₹1.6 lakh crore cleared under India Semiconductor Mission (2025), the absence of a commercial sub-28 nm mega-fab keeps India import-dependent for advanced logic chips.
- **Strategic autonomy and technology sovereignty:** Indigenous research reduces exposure to external “technology vetoes” in critical sectors.
- Although 65% defence equipment is domestically produced, dependence on GE-F404 engines for Tejas Mk-1A reflects the long-standing aero-engine R&D deficit (**Kaveri legacy**).
- **Conversion of demographic dividend into innovation capital:** High-quality research jobs prevent “brain waste” among India's STEM youth.
- In 2024–25, 7.6 lakh students went abroad, with a 35% surge in AI and renewable-energy PhDs, driven by weak deep-tech lab infrastructure at home.
- **Societal problem-solving and contextual innovation:** Indian challenges need India-specific scientific solutions beyond global models.
- The 47°C Delhi heat events (2024–25) exposed limits of global climate models, prompting **Mission Mausam (2024)** to develop indigenous, localised weather forecasting.

Initiatives taken

- **₹1 lakh crore Research, Development and Innovation (RDI) Fund:**
- ₹20,000 crore allocated initially; focus on private-sector and deep-tech R&D
- **Anusandhan National Research Foundation (ANRF):** Strengthens academic research, labs, and basic science
- **National missions:** India Semiconductor Mission, National Quantum Mission, AI Mission, Green Energy & Hydrogen initiatives

Challenges Associated

- **Private-sector risk aversion in R&D:** Indian industry underinvests in long-gestation “blue-sky” research. India’s GERD remains ~0.65% of GDP, with private contribution at 36%, compared to 70%+ in South Korea and the U.S.
- **Academia-industry disconnect:** Weak commercialization culture prevents lab-to-market transition. While IIT Madras scaled 5G RAN licensing (2024–25), over 80% patents from smaller colleges remain unlicensed due to absence of Technology Transfer Offices.
- **Persistent brain drain due to ecosystem gaps:** Talent migrates to stable innovation clusters offering funding continuity. GII 2025 ranks India 38th, yet top 0.1% STEM talent exits due to delays and uncertainty in grants like JC Bose Fellowship.
- **Bureaucratic delays and funding liquidity crunch:** Slow disbursement disrupts experimental continuity in labs. Even after ANRF operationalisation (2024), SERB-SURE and DST funds took 8–12 months in 2025, causing project stagnation.
- **Weak intellectual property quality and enforcement:** Filing growth is not translating into disruptive innovation. Though India became the 6th largest patent filer (2024–25), its GII Business Sophistication rank (64) shows dominance of incremental over frontier inventions.

Way Ahead

- **Scale R&D investment decisively:** Raise R&D spending to 2% of GDP within 5–7 years, ensuring ≥50% private-sector share through tax credits, co-funding, and outcome-linked incentives.
- **Adopt mission-mode research governance:** Focus on AI, semiconductors, quantum, green energy, advanced materials, with uninterrupted funding, strategic milestones, and national-security alignment.
- **Reform universities into research engines:** Build research-centric universities, expand PhD fellowships, recruit global faculty, and establish world-class experimental infrastructure.

- **Institutionalise industry-academia integration:** Mandate industry-funded chairs, joint labs, incubators, and professional TTOs to bridge the “valley of death” between research and markets.
- **Strengthen IP and innovation incentives:** Fast-track patents, improve enforcement, and ensure revenue-sharing models that reward inventors and institutions.
- **Retain and attract top research talent:** Offer globally competitive pay, mobility grants, and flagship national labs, ensuring career stability and scientific autonomy.

Conclusion

- India's aspiration to become a global power cannot be sustained without a robust, well-funded R&D ecosystem. The current research deficit is not a talent problem but a structural and investment failure. Bridging this gap decisively in the next decade is essential for Viksit Bharat, technological sovereignty, and long-term economic leadership.

Trend and Progress of Banking in India 2024-25 Report

- RBI's latest “Trend and Progress of Banking in India” report flags a resilient banking system with multi-decadal low NPAs, strong balance-sheet expansion and policy push for safer, more inclusive finance.

Trend and Progress of Banking in India 2024-25 Report:

- An annual RBI flagship assessment of banking & NBFC performance, risks, regulation/supervision priorities, payments, technology adoption, financial inclusion and consumer protection, culminating in an overall systemic soundness assessment.

Key trends

- **Balance sheets expanding:** Scheduled commercial banks (SCBs) grew at a double-digit pace in deposits and credit (with some moderation).
- **Asset quality stronger:** SCBs' GNPA ratio fell to a multi-decadal low.
- **Capital & liquidity buffers:** Banks are well-capitalised with leverage and liquidity ratios above regulatory minimum.
- **Digital inclusion scale-up:** 514 districts became fully digitally-enabled (at least one digital payment mode for every eligible individual).
- **Financial Inclusion Index up:** RBI's FI Index improved to 67.0 (from 43.4 earlier), indicating

deeper inclusion.

- **ULI expanding credit access:** 64 lenders (41 banks, 23 NBFCs) onboarded; using 136+ data services across 12 loan journeys.
- **Deposit insurance reform:** Shift approved to risk-based deposit insurance premium, moving beyond the flat premium (ceiling noted as 12 paise/₹100 assessable deposits).

Positive growth of the Indian banking sector in India

- **Asset quality at multi-decade best:** Gross Non-Performing Assets (**GNPA**) ratio declined to ~2.1% of total advances, the lowest level seen in several decades, indicating strong recovery and prudent lending.
- **Sustained credit expansion:** Bank credit has been growing at double-digit rates (~14–16%), reflecting healthy demand from industry, MSMEs, housing and services sectors.
- **Robust capital adequacy:** Scheduled Commercial Banks **maintain Capital to Risk Weighted Assets Ratio (CRAR)** well above 16%, significantly higher than the Basel III requirement of 11.5%, ensuring shock absorption capacity.
- **Strong deposit mobilisation:** Bank deposits have also grown at ~12–13%, showing rising public trust in the formal banking system despite alternative investment avenues.
- **Deepening financial inclusion:** RBI's Financial Inclusion Index improved to about 67, up sharply from earlier levels, reflecting wider access to accounts, credit, insurance and digital payments.

Key initiatives taken

- **PRAVAAH portal:** Centralised digital portal for regulatory submissions; wider service coverage to improve transparency and turnaround.
- **Digital payments push:** Inclusion-focused measures (district-level digital enablement; accessibility for PwD).
- **Unified Lending Interface (ULI):** Plug-and-play data architecture to speed up safer lending decisions and widen formal credit.
- **FREE-AI framework:** Principles + governance rails for responsible AI adoption (fairness, accountability, safety, transparency).
- **Risk-based deposit insurance:** Incentivises sound risk management and strengthens trust in the banking system.

Key challenges in banking

- **Customer grievances rising:** Complaints in loans, cards and digital channels are increasing,

exposing weak service delivery, slow resolution and inconsistent customer communication.

- **Digital fraud and cyber risk:** UPI/online banking growth expands the attack surface, and weak cybersecurity hygiene plus social engineering can quickly erode trust and trigger losses.
- **AI and model-risk concerns:** Greater use of AI in credit and fraud systems brings opacity, bias and privacy risks; poor governance can cause systemic mis-scoring and unfair outcomes.
- **Retail-credit stress pockets:** Even with overall better asset quality, certain unsecured/small-ticket segments can show strain, especially when underwriting and collection discipline weaken.
- **Inclusion-quality gap:** Access to accounts is not equal to meaningful inclusion; low financial literacy, language barriers and digital discomfort can lead to exclusion or mis-selling.

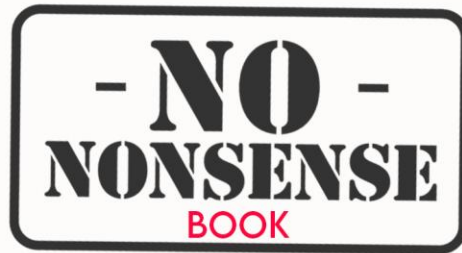
Way ahead

- **Quality-first credit expansion:** Strengthen underwriting with verified data, tighter affordability checks and risk-based pricing so growth remains sustainable, not consumption-bubble driven.
- **Stronger consumer protection stack:** Upgrade internal ombudsman processes, faster turnarounds and transparent escalation so grievances reduce and trust becomes a competitive advantage.
- **Tech governance and audits:** Build board-level oversight for AI and IT systems, mandate explainability, periodic audits, bias testing and strong data protection across lifecycle.
- **Cybersecurity-by-design:** Shift from reactive controls to continuous monitoring, secure authentication, staff training and coordinated fraud intelligence sharing across banks and agencies.
- **Deepen financial literacy:** Scale targeted literacy for rural users, seniors and first-time digital users, focusing on safe payments, fraud awareness and informed borrowing decisions.

Conclusion

- The report underlines that India's banks are entering a stronger phase with low NPAs, solid buffers and expanding balance sheets. Next gains will come from responsible tech adoption (ULI/AI) and faster, fairer customer protection. A stability-first approach that still enables innovation is the key to sustaining credit-led growth and inclusion.

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