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DEEP DIVE

India's Nuclear Renaissance: The Fast Breeder Bridge and the Three-Stage Strategy

Context

A Historic Milestone at Kalpakkam: On the 6th of April 2026, India marked a watershed moment in its civil nuclear programme when the indigenously designed and built 500 MWe Prototype Fast Breeder Reactor (PFBR) at Kalpakkam, Tamil Nadu, successfully attained its first criticality. Criticality is the crucial juncture at which a sustained and controlled nuclear fission chain reaction begins, indicating that the neutrons produced by fission perfectly equal those lost through absorption and leakage. This event signifies the transition from the construction phase to the operational phase, marking the initiation of steady heat and electricity generation.

Constructed by the Bharatiya Nabhikiya Vidyut Nigam Limited (BHAVINI), a wholly-owned enterprise of the Government of India under the Department of Atomic Energy (DAE), the PFBR's operationalisation officially inaugurates the much-anticipated second stage of India's three-stage nuclear power programme. Once fully commissioned, this achievement will elevate India to become only the second country in the world, after Russia, to operate a commercial fast breeder reactor.

The Genesis of India's Nuclear Strategy: A Resource Paradox

The foundation of India's nuclear strategy was laid in the 1950s by the visionary physicist Dr. Homi Jehangir Bhabha. The architecture of this programme was

fundamentally dictated by India's unique geological resource profile. India holds a mere 1% to 2% of the world's global uranium reserves, which are insufficient to sustain a massive, long-term nuclear energy expansion purely based on conventional reactors. However, India possesses approximately 25% of the world's thorium reserves, predominantly found in the monazite sands of coastal states such as Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Odisha.

The ultimate strategic objective of the nuclear programme is to bypass global uranium supply constraints and harness this vast thorium wealth. However, there is a scientific catch: Thorium-232 is "fertile" rather than "fissile". This means it cannot initiate or sustain a nuclear chain reaction on its own; it requires a "driver" fuel to absorb neutrons and transmute into a fissile material. To bridge this gap, Dr. Bhabha conceptualised a closed fuel cycle—where the spent fuel of one stage becomes the fertile or fissile material for the subsequent stage—structured across three distinct phases.

Decoding the Three-Stage Programme

The three-stage programme is arguably one of the most forward-looking energy strategies globally, designed not just for the immediate future, but to secure energy independence for centuries.

Stage 1: Pressurised Heavy Water Reactors (PHWRs) The first stage involves

conventional PHWRs fuelled by natural uranium (a mix of U-238 and U-235). In these reactors, heavy water (D₂O) acts as both the moderator to slow down neutrons and the coolant. During operation, the U-235 isotope undergoes fission to produce electricity. Simultaneously, the abundant U-238 isotope absorbs neutrons and transmutes into Plutonium-239 (Pu-239). This stage is currently fully commercialised and forms the bedrock of India's current installed nuclear capacity, generating the critical Pu-239 required for the next phase.

Stage 2: Fast Breeder Reactors (FBRs) – The Crucial Bridge This is the stage India has just actively entered with the Kalpakkam PFBR. Fast Breeder Reactors are a technological marvel because they "breed" more fissile material than they consume. They use a Uranium-Plutonium Mixed Oxide (MOX) fuel. Unlike Stage 1, FBRs do not use a moderator, relying instead on "fast" high-energy neutrons to sustain the reaction, and they utilise liquid sodium as a highly efficient coolant.

In the reactor, the core is surrounded by a "blanket" of Uranium-238. As the fast neutrons bombard this blanket, the fertile U-238 is converted into more fissile Pu-239. Because it creates more fuel than it burns, it earns the title of a "breeder". Once the reactor has bred sufficient Pu-239, a blanket of Thorium-232 is introduced around the core. The fast neutrons then transmute the Thorium-232 into Uranium-233 (U-233). This U-233 is the ultimate prize, acting as the foundation for the third stage.

Stage 3: Thorium-Based Advanced Heavy Water Reactors (AHWRs) The final stage will harness India's vast thorium reserves at scale. These reactors will use a combination

of U-233 (bred in Stage 2) and Thorium-232. As the U-233 undergoes fission to produce baseload power, the surrounding thorium absorbs neutrons to breed even more U-233, creating a self-sustaining, clean, and proliferation-resistant energy cycle. The Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC) has already designed a 300 MWe AHWR to demonstrate the commercial viability of this technology, though it remains in the R&D phase.

The Technological Mastery of the PFBR

The 500 MWe PFBR is a testament to decades of indigenous scientific research led by the Indira Gandhi Centre for Atomic Research (IGCAR). Operating a fast breeder reactor is incredibly complex. The core of the PFBR is much smaller and has a significantly higher power density than conventional reactors, requiring exceptional heat transfer mechanisms. Liquid sodium is used because it has excellent thermal conductivity and does not moderate (slow down) the neutrons, which is essential for the breeding process.

Furthermore, the PFBR operates on a closed fuel cycle. The spent fuel generated by the reactor will be continuously reprocessed and recycled back into the system. This closed loop not only maximises fuel efficiency—extracting up to 60 times more energy from uranium than normal reactors—but also dramatically reduces the volume and radioactive lifespan of high-level nuclear waste, as it burns long-lived actinides.

Strategic and Economic Significance for India

The successful operationalisation of the PFBR and the broader transition into Stage 2 holds multifaceted significance for India's geopolitical and macroeconomic landscape.

1. Energy Security and Baseload Power

India's energy demands are surging, driven by industrialisation, data centres, and emerging technologies. While renewable energy sources like solar and wind are expanding rapidly, their intermittent nature necessitates immense investments in grid-scale battery storage to ensure stability. Nuclear power provides uninterrupted, reliable, round-the-clock baseload electricity.

2. Achieving Climate Commitments

To honour the "Panchamrit" pledges made at COP26 and the ambitious target of achieving Net Zero carbon emissions by 2070, India must aggressively decarbonise its power grid. Nuclear energy offers lifecycle emissions comparable to hydro and wind power, making it a practically indispensable component of India's clean energy transition.

3. Strategic Autonomy and Shielding from Global Shocks

Historically, India faced severe nuclear isolation following the 1974 Pokhran tests, leading to the formation of the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) which cut India off from global nuclear commerce. Although the 2008 Indo-US Civil Nuclear Deal resulted in an NSG waiver—allowing India to import uranium for civilian reactors under IAEA safeguards—dependence on imported fuel remains a vulnerability. FBRs and the eventual thorium economy insulate India's energy sector from global supply chain shocks and geopolitical blackmail.

Current Landscape and Future Expansion Trajectory

Currently, nuclear power accounts for roughly 3.1% of India's total electricity generation, with an installed capacity of 8.78 Gigawatts (GW) across 23 operational reactors. In the fiscal year 2024-25, these plants generated 56,681 Million Units of electricity.

The DAE has outlined a massive expansion blueprint to scale this up. The immediate target is to nearly triple the installed capacity to 22.38 GW by 2031-32, driven by indigenous 700 MWe PHWRs and 1000 MWe reactors built through international cooperation. Following the PFBR, India plans to construct two additional 600 MWe Fast Breeder Reactors (FBR-1 and FBR-2) at Kalpakkam.

The long-term vision is formalised in the newly announced **Nuclear Energy Mission**, outlined in the Union Budget 2025-26, which targets a monumental 100 GW of nuclear power capacity by 2047.

Policy Innovations: SMRs and the SHANTI Act, 2025

To facilitate this 100 GW target, the government has executed significant policy shifts. A crucial development is the focus on Small Modular Reactors (SMRs). The Nuclear Energy Mission has allocated Rs 20,000 crore towards the design and deployment of SMRs, targeting at least five indigenously designed SMRs to be operational by 2033. BARC is currently leading the development of the 200 MWe Bharat Small Modular Reactor (BSMR-200) and the 55 MWe SMR-55. SMRs are seen as ideal replacements for

ageing captive coal plants due to their smaller footprint and enhanced safety.

Furthermore, the government enacted the **Sustainable Harnessing and Advancement of Nuclear Energy for Transforming India (SHANTI) Act, 2025**. This landmark legislation modernises India's nuclear legal framework and crucially enables limited private sector participation under strict regulatory oversight. By inviting an estimated \$26 billion in private investment for nuclear components, steam generation, and secondary systems, the government aims to break the traditional state monopoly and accelerate capacity addition.

Challenges and Bottlenecks

Despite the optimism, the programme faces severe headwinds. The leap from Stage 1 to Stage 2 has proven highly demanding. The PFBR at Kalpakkam was originally slated for completion in 2010; the nearly decade-and-a-half delay has led to massive cost overruns. Fast breeder technology is inherently volatile. Handling highly reactive liquid sodium, which combusts upon contact with air or water, at extreme temperatures of 500-550°C requires flawless metallurgical engineering.

Additionally, India's stringent Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act (2010) has historically deterred both foreign suppliers and domestic private players from participating fully, fearing crippling supplier liability in the event of an accident. Land acquisition bottlenecks and local protests, as witnessed in Kudankulam, remain persistent domestic hurdles.

Way Forward and Conclusion

India's Three-Stage Nuclear Programme represents a triumph of long-term strategic foresight over short-term expedience. To ensure the programme meets its 2047 and 2070 targets, India must focus on replicating successful indigenous reactor designs in "fleet mode" to achieve economies of scale and drive down gestation periods. Expanding Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) via the SHANTI Act will be critical to injecting much-needed capital and manufacturing dynamism into the sector.

The attainment of criticality by the PFBR is not merely a scientific milestone; it is the crossing of a technological Rubicon. By mastering the closed fuel cycle and fast breeder technology, India is moving decisively from being a nation constrained by limited uranium to one poised to unlock the limitless potential of a thorium-powered future. For a rapidly expanding economy aiming for global leadership, this nuclear renaissance is the ultimate bedrock of energy security and strategic sovereignty.

Delimitation

Introduction to Delimitation

Delimitation is the methodical process of establishing, fixing, or redrawing the limits and boundaries of territorial constituencies in a country or province that has a legislative body. In India, it involves readjusting the boundaries of Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assembly constituencies to reflect population changes as recorded in the latest census. The fundamental objective of this exercise is to uphold the core democratic principle of "**One Person, One Vote, One Value**," ensuring that each constituency represents a roughly equal number of voters, thereby preventing any political party from gaining an undue advantage. Furthermore, delimitation is responsible for determining and allocating a fixed number of reserved seats for the Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) in these legislative houses.

Constitutional Framework and Legal Backing

The Constitution of India provides a robust framework for the delimitation process:

- **Article 82:** This article mandates that Parliament enact a Delimitation Act after every decadal Census to readjust the allocation of seats in the Lok Sabha to the states and to divide states into territorial constituencies.
- **Article 170:** Similar to Article 82, this provides for the readjustment of seats and the division of territorial

constituencies for the State Legislative Assemblies after every Census.

- **Articles 330 and 332:** These articles govern the re-fixing of the number of seats reserved for SCs and STs in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies, respectively.

To execute this mandate, Parliament has enacted Delimitation Commission Acts four times: in **1952, 1962, 1972, and 2002**.

The Delimitation Commission of India

The delimitation process is carried out by an independent, high-powered, and quasi-judicial statutory body known as the **Delimitation Commission** (or Boundary Commission).

- **Appointment and Composition:** The Commission is appointed by the President of India and works in close collaboration with the Election Commission of India (ECI). It consists of three primary members: a serving or retired Judge of the Supreme Court who acts as the Chairperson, the Chief Election Commissioner (or a nominated Election Commissioner), and the respective State Election Commissioners. Additionally, the Commission associates five elected Members of Parliament (MPs) and five Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) from the respective state to assist in the readjustment process.

- **Powers and Functions:** The Commission operates with the powers of a civil court, and in the event of a difference of opinion, the majority view prevails. Once the Commission finalizes its orders, they are published in official gazettes and implemented on a date specified by the President. Historically, these orders have had the absolute force of law and were immune from judicial scrutiny to avoid delaying the electoral process; they are laid before the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies, which cannot modify them.

Historical Context and the Freezing of Seats

The last delimitation exercise that altered the overall state-wise allocation of seats in the Lok Sabha was completed in 1976, based on the **1971 Census**. Following this, a major federal crisis emerged. Southern states had aggressively and successfully implemented the Union government's family planning and population control policies, leading to stabilized population growth. Conversely, northern states continued to experience high population growth.

To ensure that states were not penalized with a loss of political representation for effectively controlling their populations, Parliament intervened:

- **42nd Amendment Act (1976):** Froze the allocation of seats in the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies at the 1971 population levels until the year 2000.
- **84th Amendment Act (2001):** Extended this freeze on the total

number of allocated seats until the publication of the first census after the year **2026**.

- **87th Amendment Act (2003):** Allowed the 2002 Delimitation Commission to redraw internal territorial constituency boundaries based on the 2001 Census, but strictly without altering the total number of seats allotted to each state.

The Impending 2026 Delimitation and the North-South Divide With the impending expiration of the 84th Amendment's freeze, a population-based delimitation exercise post-2026 threatens to fundamentally alter India's federal equilibrium, creating a stark "North-South Divide".

- **The Demographic Reality:** There is a massive divergence in the Total Fertility Rate (TFR). For instance, southern states like Kerala (1.8) and Tamil Nadu (1.7) are well below the replacement rate, whereas northern states like Bihar (3.4) and Uttar Pradesh (2.7) continue to grow.
- **Projected Seat Shifts:** If representation is strictly reallocated based on projected population data, the northern states (Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan) stand to collectively gain **43 Lok Sabha seats**. Uttar Pradesh alone could see an increase of 17 seats, and Bihar could gain 11. Conversely, the southern states (Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and Telangana) face a collective loss of **24 seats**. Kerala could see a drastic 30% reduction in its representation, and Tamil Nadu a 23% reduction.

Competing Perspectives on Representation

- **The Southern Argument:** Southern states argue that pure population-based delimitation penalizes them for succeeding in national demographic goals. Furthermore, there is a stark economic imbalance; the southern states contribute 35% to the country's GDP despite housing only 18% of the population. Reducing their political voice while relying heavily on their tax revenues creates a scenario akin to "taxation without adequate representation".
- **The Northern Argument:** Northern states argue their constitutional right to representation. They maintain that the democratic principle of "one person, one vote" requires seats to reflect current realities. They emphasize that larger populations naturally equate to significantly greater challenges in education, healthcare, and infrastructure, necessitating adequate political representation to secure resources.
- **Constitutional and Federal Risks:** A shift in seats will alter the fundamental arithmetic of the Presidential Electoral College, raising concerns that northern states will gain a disproportionate, unilateral say in electing the President. Critics also fear this acts as a backdoor to centralize power, allowing a party to dominate national politics by winning solely in densely populated northern regions.

Recent Legislative Developments

The 2026 Bills and Women's Reservation To navigate this complex transition, the Union government has introduced three major bills designed to enable fresh delimitation and operationalize women's reservation.

1. **The Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill, 2026:** This bill seeks to amend Article 81 to dramatically increase the maximum strength of the Lok Sabha from 550 to **850 members**. By expanding the total size of the house, the government aims to ensure that no state loses its current absolute number of seats, softening the blow for southern states. The bill also removes the requirement of freezing seat readjustments, allowing the use of recent census data (likely 2011).
2. **The Delimitation Bill, 2026:** This legislation replaces the 2002 Act, officially creating a new Delimitation Commission with powers equivalent to a civil court to redraw boundaries and determine reservations.
3. **The Union Territories Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2026:** This enabling legislation extends the structural changes and women's reservation to Union Territories with legislatures, namely Delhi, Jammu & Kashmir, and Puducherry.

Crucially, the completion of this new delimitation exercise is the constitutional trigger required to operationalize the **Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam** (106th Constitutional Amendment Act, 2023). This mandate will implement a 33% reservation for women in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies, complete with a sub-quota for SC/ST women and a 15-year sunset clause.

Evolving Judicial Scrutiny of the Delimitation Commission

Historically, relying on Article 329(a) and the constitutional bench judgment in *Meghraj Kothari v. Delimitation Commission (1966)*, it was interpreted that Delimitation Commission orders, once assented to by the President, were completely immune from judicial review to prevent electoral delays. However, a recent landmark ruling by the Supreme Court of India stemming from a petition challenging the reservation of the Bardoli Legislative Assembly Constituency in Gujarat has fundamentally altered this understanding. The Supreme Court clarified that the Commission's orders are **not absolutely beyond judicial scrutiny**. Relying on the precedent set in *DMK v. State of Tamil Nadu (2020)*, the Court established that if an order is found to be manifestly arbitrary, *mala fide*, or contrary to constitutional values, constitutional courts retain the power to intervene and protect citizens' rights, ensuring that unchecked power does not violate the separation of powers.

Special Cases: Jammu & Kashmir and the North-East While national delimitation has been largely frozen, specific regional exercises have taken place:

- **Jammu & Kashmir:** Following the state's reorganization, a special Delimitation Commission chaired by Justice (retired) Ranjana Prakash Desai was constituted in March 2020 to delimit the constituencies of the new Union Territory.
- **North-Eastern States:** A delimitation exercise mandated by the 2002 Act for Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, and Nagaland was

suspended in 2008 due to threats to peace and public order.

International Practices India can draw upon international precedents to solve its representation dilemma:

- **United States:** The US House of Representatives has had its seat count capped at 435 since 1913, despite a massive population increase. Seats are redistributed post-census using the "method of equal proportion," ensuring stability.
- **European Union:** The EU Parliament utilizes the principle of "**degressive proportionality**," where the ratio of population to seats increases as the population increases (e.g., Denmark has one seat per 4 lakh people, while Germany has one per 8.6 lakh people).
- **Germany:** Utilizes a weighted voting system in the Bundesrat, allowing for non-strictly population-based representation to balance regional powers.

Way Forward

The 2026 delimitation is not merely a mathematical redistribution; it is a sensitive recalibration of political power in a diverse federation. To prevent a constitutional crisis and maintain federal harmony, several solutions are proposed:

- **A "Hybrid Model":** Moving away from solely population-based formulas, a new matrix should be devised. This model could allocate 50% of seats based on population and 50% based on factors like demographic performance,

economic contribution (GSDP), and geographic size.

- **Strengthening the Rajya Sabha:** To counterbalance a population-heavy Lok Sabha, the Rajya Sabha could be empowered to provide equal representation to all states regardless of their size, akin to the US Senate.
- **Federal Representation Index & Consensus:** Establishing a Constitutional Review Commission to

create a holistic "Federal Representation Index" and ensuring broad consensus via the Inter-State Council before any final boundary redraws are implemented.

- **Decoupling Quotas:** Some political analysts argue that the 33% women's reservation should be decoupled from the highly volatile delimitation process and implemented within the existing strength of the legislative houses.

NEWS GIST

ECONOMY

Global Tech

Restructuring: Oracle Layoffs and the AI Pivot

Context:

In April 2026, **Oracle Corporation** initiated a **massive workforce reduction, laying off 30,000 employees globally**, which constitutes roughly 18% of its workforce. Executed abruptly via automated emails and immediate system lockouts, this restructuring signifies a critical pivot in the global digital economy.

Key Drivers:

- **The Efficiency-Investment Paradox:** Tech giants are actively shedding traditional SaaS, middle-management, and support roles to finance heavy capital expenditure (CapEx) in AI. Despite reporting a 95% increase in net income, **Oracle is cutting \$8–10 billion in payroll to fund its \$300 billion "Stargate" AI supercomputer project.**
- **Structural Transformation:** Unlike the 2023-24 corrections linked to pandemic over-hiring, this is a structural shift where **AI-augmented workflows are replacing human-centric and manual coding roles.**

Significance for India:

- **Economic Vulnerability:** India bore a significant impact, with **approximately 12,000 jobs lost**

across major IT hubs like Bengaluru, Hyderabad, and Pune. This exposes the inherent vulnerability of India's "service-led" IT sector to the restructuring whims of foreign global giants.

- **Labour Rights:** The "dehumanized" downsizing approach has sparked a nationwide debate regarding severance pay and the necessity for stronger legal protections for white-collar professionals.

Way Forward:

- **Sovereign Tech Push:** India must accelerate its evolution from a "system integrator" to a "sovereign creator" through domestic initiatives like the **IndiaAI Mission.**
- **Reskilling Mandate:** As repetitive tech roles face obsolescence, the workforce must pivot toward niche skills such as Machine Learning and Data Engineering.
- **Labour Reforms:** Policymakers must urgently **update the Industrial Relations Code** to ensure fair compensation, transparency, and protection against abrupt digital-era layoffs.

The RBI Ban on Non-Deliverable Derivatives (NDD)

Context:

In April 2026, the **Reserve Bank of India (RBI)** **strictly prohibited banks from offering Non-Deliverable Derivative (NDD) contracts** involving the Rupee to both residents and non-residents. This regulatory intervention was triggered after the Rupee breached the 95/\$ mark amidst escalating West Asia tensions and surging global oil prices.

Key Provisions:

- **Targeting Speculation:** The mandate restricts Non-Deliverable Forwards (NDFs) and derivatives that settle in foreign currencies without the physical delivery of the Rupee.
- **Prohibition on Rebooking:** Banks are barred from "rebooking" cancelled contracts, closing a loophole used by traders to hold indefinite speculative positions.
- **Mandatory Documentation:** Lenders must now demand strict proof of underlying exposure (e.g., invoices) to ensure trades represent genuine business hedging rather than gambling.
- **Intra-group Restrictions:** The RBI barred related-party transactions to prevent multinational companies from shifting speculative profits across jurisdictions.

Significance:

- **Monetary Sovereignty:** By curbing offshore speculation which historically accounted for 15-20% of Rupee derivative volumes the RBI reinforced the primacy of domestic onshore markets.
- **Exchange Rate Stability:** Draining this speculative leverage effectively halted the Rupee's slide, prompting an immediate rally from 95 to 93.10/\$.
- **Inflation Control:** Because every 1% depreciation in the Rupee adds roughly 7 basis points to inflation, stabilizing the currency is crucial for keeping the CPI within the 4-6% target range.

Way Forward:

To build financial resilience, India must focus on **deepening its domestic derivative markets** to absorb migrating liquidity. Additionally, **enhanced global regulatory coordination** is necessary to monitor cross-border "shadow" trades, while ensuring that genuine exporters and importers still retain access to efficient, cost-effective hedging tools.

India's Defence Export Surge

Context:

In a landmark achievement for the "Make in India" initiative, India's defence exports reached a historic high of ₹38,424 crore in FY 2025-26, registering a 62.66% growth from the previous fiscal. This marks India's critical

transition from a leading importer to an emerging global exporter of military hardware.

Key Drivers & Reach:

- **Global Footprint:** India now exports to **over 90 countries**, securing significant deals across Southeast Asia, Africa, and South America.
- **Core Platforms:** Major exported systems include **BrahMos supersonic missiles, Advanced Light Helicopters (ALH), Pinaka Multi-Barrel Rocket Launchers**, and surveillance drones.
- **Policy Reforms:** This surge is driven by systematic reforms like the Defence Acquisition Procedure (DAP) 2020, the creation of seven new Defence Public Sector Undertakings (DPSUs), and **"Positive Indigenization Lists"**. Furthermore, liberalized FDI and streamlined licensing have catalyzed private sector participation.

Significance:

- **Strategic Autonomy:** The export boom reduces reliance on global powers while strengthening defence diplomacy with **"Global South"** nations.
- **Economic Impact:** Fostering a domestic high-tech manufacturing ecosystem directly contributes to India's **\$5 trillion economy goal**.
- **Global Credibility:** India is now established as a reliable provider of **"cost-effective yet high-quality" military solutions**, effectively challenging traditional market monopolies.

IBC 2.0: Reshaping India's Insolvency and Bankruptcy Framework

Context

In April 2026, the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (Amendment) Act, 2026, received presidential assent, marking the most comprehensive overhaul of India's insolvency regime since 2016. Triggered by a Parliamentary report noting that average resolution times had stretched to 713 days—far beyond the 330-day statutory limit—this legislation aims to maximize asset value and restore the "time-bound" essence of the Code.

Key Provisions:

- **Mandatory Admission:** To eliminate pre-admission litigation delays, the NCLT must now admit or reject a petition within 14 days based solely on the "existence of default".
- **Creditor-Initiated Resolution (CIIRP):** A new out-of-court mechanism allows financial creditors with 51% consent to initiate insolvency directly, mandating completion within 150 days.
- **Clean Slate & Scrutiny:** The Act statutorily enshrines the "clean slate" doctrine, extinguishing past claims post-approval, and extends the look-back period for scrutinizing undervalued or preferential "avoidance transactions" to two years.

Significance:

- **Investor Confidence:** Adopting a Cross-Border Insolvency framework aligned with UNCITRAL model laws makes India a more attractive destination for global capital.
- **Enterprise Preservation:** The novel "Group Insolvency" framework allows for the coordinated resolution of interconnected companies, preventing the piecemeal collapse of conglomerates.
- **Deterrence:** The Act introduces stiff civil penalties to curb frivolous litigation and promoter "shielding tactics".

Way Forward:

This shift towards a hybrid, creditor-driven "IBC 2.0" requires robust capacity building. Expanding NCLT benches and operationalizing an Electronic Insolvency Portal are crucial for success, alongside ensuring the out-of-court CIIRP model maintains transparency to protect smaller operational creditors.

US 100% Tariff on Patented Pharma and India's 'Generic Hedge'

Context:

In April 2026, the US invoked Section 232 of the Trade Expansion Act to impose a sweeping 100% ad valorem tariff on imported patented pharmaceutical products and their Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients (APIs). This move, driven by national security concerns over the fragility of medical supply

chains, signals a sharp protectionist shift in global healthcare policy.

Key Provisions:

- **The Mandate:** Effective 31 July 2026, the 100% duty targets branded, patented drugs from countries lacking specific "reshoring agreements".
- **Exemptions & Reviews:** Generics and biosimilars are currently exempt; however, they face a mandatory formal review within one year.
- **Geographic Tiering:** Preferential tariff rates of 10–15% have been granted to strategic allies like the UK, EU, Japan, South Korea, and Switzerland.

Significance:

- **The Generic Hedge:** India's established dominance as the "Pharmacy of the World" provides a vital natural buffer. Because generics constitute nearly 90% of India's \$9.7 billion pharma exports to the US (as of 2025), the immediate impact on the sector remains notably limited.
- **Looming Risks:** The one-year review mandate for generic medicines hangs as a "sword of Damocles" over Indian exporters, posing a significant risk of future "creeping tariffs".
- **Reshoring Pressure:** The US is actively weaponising these tariffs as a "pressure tool" to force global pharmaceutical giants to relocate manufacturing to American soil.

Way Forward:

- **Strategic Reshoring:** Indian pharmaceutical majors should accelerate investments in US-based "fill-and-finish" facilities to qualify for future duty waivers.
- **Market Diversification:** To mitigate US-concentration risk, India must fast-track the India-EU Free Trade Agreement and expand its export footprint into the "Global South".
- **PLI Strengthening:** Domestic manufacturing policies, such as PLI 2.0, must strategically shift from "volume" to "value" by heavily incentivising the production of complex, patented, and biopharmaceutical products.

The Oil-Rice Barter: Securing India's Food and Energy Future

Context:

In April 2026, escalating conflicts in West Asia and blockades in the Strait of Hormuz severely disrupted India-Iran trade. With US sanction waivers expiring and Iran's banking system crippled, ₹3,000–5,000 crore in Indian Basmati exporters' dues are currently stalled. Consequently, exporters are urging the Union Government to revive a sovereign-level Oil-Rice Barter mechanism to bypass dysfunctional SWIFT channels and secure energy needs.

Key Facts:

- **The Mechanism:** The proposal involves India importing discounted

Iranian crude oil and settling the corresponding payments in Rupees to domestic rice exporters via designated UCO or IDBI bank accounts.

- **The Catalyst:** This move is driven by a 17% decline in India's crude oil imports in March 2026 due to naval blockades, alongside tonnes of stranded export rice at Mumbai and Gulf ports.

Significance:

- **Dual Security:** This barter ensures India's agricultural surplus finds a market while securing steady energy supplies during a crisis where Brent crude has breached \$110/barrel.
- **Macroeconomic Stability:** A Rupee-payment mechanism reduces US Dollar dependency, shielding the Indian Rupee from extreme volatility, while clearing farmer stocks in Punjab and Haryana before the Kharif season.
- **Market Preservation:** It prevents India from losing its dominant 40% global rice trade share to competitors like Pakistan or Thailand.

Way Forward:

- **Diplomatic Balancing:** India must carefully navigate CAATSA risks by diplomatically framing this trade as a "humanitarian food-security corridor".
- **Strategic Transit:** Utilizing the Chabahar Port—which holds a separate US waiver until late April 2026—can effectively bypass the volatile Strait of Hormuz.

- **Expanding Scope:** The government should broaden this "Goods for Oil" framework to include other commodities like pharmaceuticals and tea.

Fiscal Fortitude: India's Resilience and Economic Consolidation

Context:

In April 2026, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) upgraded India's GDP growth forecast for FY27 to 6.5%, citing strong domestic demand and strict fiscal discipline. Despite a global scenario plagued by high inflation and a "Shadow of War," India's steadfast adherence to a fiscal "glide path" provides a crucial macroeconomic cushion against external shocks and US trade protectionism.

Key Facts:

- **Deficit Targets:** India successfully kept its commitment to reduce the fiscal deficit below 4.5% in FY26 (achieving 4.4% Revised Estimates) and has set an even lower target of 4.3% of GDP for FY27.
- **Debt Management:** The government aims to bring outstanding liabilities down to 50% of GDP by March 2031, compared to the FY27 estimate of 55.6%.
- **Record Capital Expenditure:** To drive economic growth without over-leveraging, public capex has been boosted by 11.5% to a decade-high of ₹12.2 lakh crore, or 4.4% of GDP.

Significance:

- **Sovereign Rating Upgrades:** This consistent discipline earned India credit rating upgrades from major agencies like S&P and Morningstar DBRS in 2025.
- **Inflation Hedge:** Maintaining a lower deficit reduces the government's need to borrow from the market, keeping interest rates manageable and curbing domestic inflation.
- **Investment Magnet:** Fiscal stability mitigates the risk of capital outflows triggered by high US yields, positioning India as a "safe haven" for long-term foreign direct investment.

Way Forward:

To maintain this momentum, India must focus on **revenue diversification** by widening the GST base and strengthening non-tax revenues. The critical challenge will be **balancing welfare with growth**—ensuring that interest payments (currently 26% of total expenditure) do not crowd out developmental spending and crucial social security initiatives like the new VB-GRAM G rural employment scheme.

Beyond Compliance: SEBI's Push to Upskill Independent Directors

Context:

In April 2026, SEBI announced a landmark joint initiative to upskill Independent Directors (IDs) at scale. Triggered by recent corporate board tensions and high-profile

resignations that eroded investor wealth, this initiative marks a regulatory shift from merely establishing governance structures to actively building director capability. It addresses the historical "translation gap" where directors relied too heavily on management narratives rather than offering unique, independent perspectives.

Key Facts:

- **Collaborative Curriculum:** SEBI is partnering with industry bodies (such as CII and FICCI) and academia to deliver capacity-building programs focused on modern, interdisciplinary challenges like **AI Strategy, Cyber Risk, Data Governance, and Complex Financial Engineering**.
- **Digital Integration:** The upskilling aligns with the new **2026 Digital Disclosure Framework**, which mandates standardized, real-time declarations of independence and qualifications from directors.
- **Constructive Engagement:** SEBI is urging IDs to move beyond "passive compliance" and "pointing fingers," adopting a constructive approach to solve problems alongside management.

Significance:

- **Proactive Oversight:** Equipping directors with technical expertise transforms boards from "decorative figureheads" into proactive units capable of identifying systemic risks before they manifest as crises.
- **Market Confidence:** By elevating corporate governance to an "adaptive" global standard, the

initiative bolsters market confidence and better protects minority shareholders from governance uncertainties.

Way Forward:

- **Continuous Learning:** SEBI intends to replace "one-time inductions" with structured, continuous learning modules.
- **Regulatory Calibration:** The regulator plans to refine LODR Regulations to mandate **periodic proficiency certifications** for IDs.
- **Strengthening NRCs:** Nomination and Remuneration Committees (NRCs) must evolve to prioritize deep technical proficiency alongside traditional independence criteria during board selection.

Surat's Synthetic Textile Crisis: A Looming Industrial Collapse

Context:

In April 2026, Surat—the epicenter of India's synthetic textile chain and producer of 90% of the nation's polyester—faced a severe crisis, halving its daily output from 6 crore to 3 crore meters of fabric. This "triple squeeze" stems from West Asian geopolitical conflicts, energy shortages, and a massive labour exodus, directly threatening the stability of India's \$174 billion textile industry.

Key Drivers:

- **Raw Material & Energy Spikes:** Supply chain disruptions tied to the Iran-Israel-US conflict caused crude oil spikes, pushing polyester and nylon prices up by 20–25%. Simultaneously, commercial LPG black-market prices skyrocketed to an unsustainable ₹500–600 per kg.
- **Mass Labour Drain:** The untenable cost of cooking fuel (LPG), combined with panic over a rumoured "war-induced lockdown," triggered an exodus of nearly **8 lakh migrant workers** back to Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Odisha.

Significance:

- **Supply Chain Contagion:** The production crash in Surat severely impacts downstream garment manufacturing hubs in Tiruppur, Noida, and Bangladesh.
- **MSME Vulnerability:** Over 400 dyeing mills and 6 lakh powerloom units are forced into "safe mode," shutting down for several days a week to prevent financial collapse.
- **Loss of Competitiveness:** Prolonged instability risks ceding India's synthetic fibre market share to aggressive global competitors like Vietnam and China.

Way Forward:

To stabilize the "Silk City," the government must urgently provide **subsidized LPG** or **"Community Kitchen" grants** to retain the crucial migrant workforce. Furthermore, releasing strategic reserves of petrochemical

derivatives (PTA and MEG) can help cool yarn prices. Over the long term, ensuring **financial relief for distressed MSMEs** and fast-tracking alternative trade routes like the **International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC)** are vital to bypassing volatile geopolitical chokepoints.

The Great Divide: Land Inequality in Rural India

Context: A recent April 2026 working paper by the World Inequality Lab (WIL), titled "Land Inequality in India: Nature, History, and Markets," reveals a stark deepening of rural land concentration. Despite decades of land ceiling acts, modern market forces have failed to dismantle historical ownership patterns, such as those inherited from the Zamindari system.

Key Findings:

- **Extreme Concentration:** The top 10% of rural households now control 44% of total land area, while the top 1% alone owns 18%.
- **Widespread Landlessness:** Nearly 46% of rural India remains entirely landless, with the highest rates found in Punjab (73%) and Bihar (59%). Kerala exhibits the highest land inequality index with a Gini coefficient of 90.
- **Village-Level Dominance:** On average, the single largest landholder in a village controls 12.4% of the land. In 3.8% of villages, a single landlord owns over half of the entire village land.
- **Infrastructure Paradox:** Proximity to towns and highways has

paradoxically increased inequality, as rising commercial value drives elites to consolidate land.

Significance:

- **Economic Exclusion:** Because land is the primary collateral for institutional credit, landlessness traps 46% of the rural population in high-interest informal debt cycles.
- **Productivity Stagnation:** With 85% of farmers being small or marginal, severe land fragmentation limits economies of scale and restricts agricultural growth.

Way Forward:

- **Inclusive Credit:** Banks must shift from "land-based collateral" to "income-based lending" to financially empower the landless.
- **Institutional Reforms:** Promoting land pooling for mechanized farming and legalizing tenancy rights will ensure farmers can access government subsidies.
- **Digital Transparency:** Accelerating the digitization of land records is crucial to eliminate "benami" transactions and expose hidden holdings.



The Great Nicobar Project: Strategic Gateway vs. Ecological Fragility

Context:

India's ambitious ₹72,000–₹81,000 crore Holistic Development of Great Nicobar Island (GNI) Project aims to transform its southernmost outpost into a global trade and tourism hub by 2047. Situated just 80 nautical miles from Sumatra and near the critical Strait of Malacca—which handles 40% of global trade—this "Greenfield City" represents a vital pivot in India's Indo-Pacific strategy.

Key Pillars: Implemented by ANIIDCO, the megaproject comprises four components: an **International Container Transshipment Terminal (ICTT)** at Galathea Bay to handle 16 million TEUs, a dual-use **Greenfield International Airport**, a 450-500 MVA hybrid gas and solar power plant, and a **Greenfield Smart City** projected to house 3.36 lakh people by 2055.

Significance:

Geopolitically, GNI acts as a deterrent against the "String of Pearls," enabling continuous monitoring of the Malacca Strait. Economically, it establishes Indian transshipment sovereignty by reducing reliance on foreign ports like Colombo or Singapore, while significantly boosting India's "Blue Economy" and high-end tourism.

The Ecological Dilemma: The development is highly controversial due to the proposed diversion of 130 sq. km of primary rainforest and the potential felling of 10 million trees. It threatens primary nesting sites for the **Leatherback Sea Turtle** and impacts indigenous groups like the **Shompen (a PVTG)** and the Nicobarese. Additionally, the island's location in Seismic Zone V raises long-term stability concerns.

Way Forward:

Balancing strategy with sustainability requires strict adherence to National Green Tribunal (NGT) ecological guardrails, such as coral translocation. Securing **"Free, Prior, and Informed Consent" (FPIC)** from tribal communities and establishing a dedicated **Island Ecological Authority** for real-time biodiversity monitoring are essential for climate-resilient growth.

The Phantom Boss and the Gig Worker's Social Contract

Context:

Recent strikes in major cities like Bengaluru, Delhi, and Hyderabad highlight growing unrest among India's gig workers over the slow implementation of the Social Security Code (2020). At the core of this stir is the rise of the "Phantom Boss" an automated algorithmic system that dictates tasks, monitors speed, and penalizes workers without providing any human point of contact for grievance redressal.

Key Issues:

- **The "Precarity" Trap:** Despite inflation, base payouts have remained static or declined over the past two years. The promised "flexibility" of app-based work has devolved into forced 14-hour shifts as workers chase daily targets to earn basic survival incentives.
- **Algorithmic Tyranny:** Workers frequently face "algorithmic de-platforming" or shadow-banning due to minor rating fluctuations, completely lacking the right to appeal.
- **Misclassification:** Platforms categorize gig workers as "independent contractors" rather than employees, dodging payroll taxes and liability. Consequently, over 90% of India's 15 million gig workers lack basic safety nets like health insurance or provident funds.

Significance:

With the gig economy projected to employ 23.5 million Indians by 2030, the systemic precarity of this workforce threatens urban economic stability. These strikes are critical as they push the judiciary to redefine the "employer-employee" relationship for the digital age, mirroring legal shifts in the UK and EU.

Way Forward:

To forge a sustainable "social contract 2.0," governments must mandate transparent frameworks where algorithms are held accountable. Implementing a "Platform Fee" or "Social Security Cess" on digital

transactions is essential to fund dedicated welfare boards, ensuring that digital labor is finally recognized as a formal, dignified pillar of the modern economy.

The FASTag VRN Mandate: Aligning Digital IDs with Number Plates

Context:

In April 2026, the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) issued a strict directive to all FASTag issuer banks to immediately validate Vehicle Registration Numbers (VRN). As the next crucial phase of the **"One Vehicle, One FASTag"** initiative, banks have been ordered to blacklist any tags where the digital data does not perfectly match the physical number plate.

Key Facts:

- **Targeting 'Toll Gaming':** The mandate addresses the "mismatch" problem where scanned FASTag IDs belong to different vehicles than those physically present at plazas. This discrepancy enables revenue evasion, such as using a car's tag on a heavy truck to pay lower fees.
- **The Legacy Issue:** Most mismatches originate from "Legacy FASTags," which were issued based on manual entries before the system was formally integrated with the VAHAN database.
- **The MLFF Transition:** India is transitioning to **Multi-Lane Free Flow (MLFF)** tolling. In this barrier-free system, high-speed cameras and Automatic Number Plate Recognition

(ANPR) capture data at 80-100 km/h, requiring instant synchronization between FASTag data and the physical plate to issue accurate e-Notices.

Significance:

- **Security and Enforcement:** By ensuring the digital "fingerprint" perfectly matches the physical "ID," security agencies can accurately track vehicles and prevent the misuse of tags on stolen or unregistered cars.
- **Economic & Environmental Efficiency:** Achieving 100% accurate 1:1 mapping is the "steel frame" needed to entirely remove physical toll booths, seamlessly facilitating travel and saving millions of liters of fuel wasted in idling queues.

Way Forward:

Citizens must complete the **"Know Your Vehicle" (KYV)** process by linking their tag to the correct Registration Certificate via the Rajmarg Yatra app. Users must eliminate multiple tags for a single vehicle and ensure their issuer bank has updated their vehicle details against the VAHAN database by uploading clear photos of their High-Security Registration Plates (HSRP).



Bengaluru: The Silicon Valley of Global Artificial Intelligence

Context:

Bengaluru has evolved from a traditional IT "back-office" into Asia's definitive strategic gateway for Artificial Intelligence, frontier research, and custom AI silicon design. Currently, the city accounts for **48% of India's Global Capability Centre (GCC) leasing** and hosts **50% of the nation's AI/ML talent pool**, encompassing roughly 6 lakh professionals.

Key Drivers:

- **Startup & Corporate Influx:** Hosting over 1,500 AI startups and three recent AI unicorns (including Krutrim), Bengaluru is rapidly attracting global titans such as OpenAI and Mistral AI to establish high-end engineering teams.
- **Ecosystem Readiness:** Premium corridors like the Outer Ring Road (ORR) provide scalable Grade-A infrastructure, complemented by the Karnataka government's **"Nipuna" initiative**, which actively bridges the industry-academia gap by co-creating curricula.

Significance:

- **Innovation Arbitrage:** Bengaluru has transcended "cost-arbitrage" models; it now competes directly with global hubs like Singapore and London for **"innovation-arbitrage"** and product ownership mandates.

- **Sovereign AI Development:** The influx of global giants has catalyzed domestic competition, accelerating the creation of India-native tech stacks optimized for Indic languages and local infrastructure constraints.

Way Forward:

To sustain this trajectory, public administration must pivot towards **"Intelligent Governance,"** leveraging AI to stabilize and optimize datasets across health and education. Crucially, because AI operations are highly resource-intensive, a strict **Sustainability Mandate** focusing on Edge Data Centres and liquid cooling is essential. Finally, accelerating urban infrastructure mega-projects, such as the **Tunnel Road Corridor** and Metro expansions, is critical to ensuring the city's physical mobility matches its digital velocity.

The SHANTI Act: Financing India's Nuclear Renaissance

Context: In April 2026, the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) approved a draft policy to permit Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in nuclear power, effectively ending decades of state monopoly. Facilitated by the SHANTI Act, 2025 (Sustainable Harnessing and Advancement of Nuclear Energy for Transforming India), this shift is critical for financing India's ambitious target of achieving 100 GW of nuclear capacity by 2047.

Key Provisions:

- **Banking FDI:** The policy aims to bridge an estimated ₹20 lakh crore investment gap by allowing global

banks and financial institutions to provide long-term, low-interest capital for the sector.

- **Equity Cap:** Foreign entities, including sovereign wealth funds, will be permitted to hold up to 49% equity through joint ventures with Indian PSUs such as NPCIL or NTPC.
- **Strategic Focus:** Investments will primarily target factory-built Small Modular Reactors (SMRs) and "fleet mode" nuclear projects.

Significance:

- **Net Zero Transition:** With a Capacity Utilization Factor (CUF) exceeding 85%, nuclear energy provides the "firm" base load essential to complement intermittent solar power and achieve India's 2070 Net Zero target.
- **Technology & De-risking:** Foreign capital facilitates access to advanced Gen-III+ and Gen-IV reactor technologies. It also brings global project management practices to mitigate the high upfront costs and long gestation periods that historically deterred investors.

Way Forward:

To ensure the success of this transition, the government must compress construction cycles from 13 years to 8–9 years through "fleet mode" execution and actively repurpose retiring thermal power plants into SMR hubs. Crucially, finalizing transparent civil nuclear liability rules is paramount to protect foreign investors against "phantom risks" and secure sustainable capital inflows.

The Fall of Paytm Payments Bank: A Regulatory Reckoning

Context: By April 2026, the transition period for the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) mandate permanently shutting down Paytm Payments Bank Ltd (PPBL) concluded. Invoking Section 35A of the Banking Regulation Act, 1949, the RBI's decisive regulatory intervention marked the definitive end of PPBL's core banking functions.

Key Facts & Background:

- **Operational Halt:** PPBL is permanently barred from accepting any new deposits, credit transactions, or top-ups in customer accounts, prepaid instruments, or FASTags, although users are permitted to withdraw existing balances without time limits.
- **Structural Pivot:** Following the deactivation of millions of Paytm-linked FASTags and transit cards, Paytm (One97 Communications) has transitioned into a pure Third-Party Application Provider (TPAP). It now relies on partner banks like Axis, HDFC, and SBI to process UPI transactions.
- **Compliance Failures:** This "nuclear option" was triggered by persistent supervisory concerns, including severe Anti-Money Laundering (AML) violations where thousands of accounts were linked to a single PAN, as well as opaque related-party transactions and data-sharing risks.

Significance:

- **Regulatory Supremacy:** The RBI's actions deliver a clear message to the fintech ecosystem: the startup ethos of "growth at any cost" cannot bypass strict financial compliance.
- **Systemic Safeguards:** By isolating the non-compliant bank, the RBI successfully mitigated systemic risks to the broader digital payment infrastructure, consequently triggering a market share reshuffle toward competitors like PhonePe and BHIM.

Way Forward:

The Indian fintech industry must urgently shift from reactive troubleshooting to "**Compliance by Design**," making Regulatory Technology (RegTech) a mandatory foundational investment. Concurrently, to build transactional resilience against future disruptions, consumers should embrace "**Financial Portability**" by diversifying their digital payment handles.



POLITY

Safeguarding Electoral Integrity: The Form 6 Crisis in West Bengal

In early 2026, a massive surge in Form 6 applications for voter registration in West Bengal sparked significant administrative and political controversy. Amidst allegations of demographic engineering, mass deletions without notice, and bulk filing by non-citizens in sensitive border districts, the Election Commission of India (ECI) mandated a special audit.

Constitutional and Legal Framework

The electoral registration process is grounded in Article 326 of the Constitution, which ensures Universal Adult Suffrage. Furthermore, Section 23 of the Representation of the People Act, 1950, and the Registration of Electors Rules, 1960, prescribe Form 6 specifically for the inclusion of new voters. Eligibility hinges on being an Indian citizen, reaching 18 years of age, and being an ordinary resident of the constituency.

Significance for Indian Polity

This crisis highlights several critical issues relevant to Indian governance:

- **Electoral Purity:** A flawless electoral roll is a *Sine Qua Non* (essential condition) for free and fair elections, which is recognized as part of the Basic Structure of the Constitution.

- **Federal Friction:** Because state government employees function as Booth Level Officers (BLOs) and Electoral Registration Officers (EROs), friction with the ECI which holds the mandate of "superintendence, direction, and control" under Article 324—exposes structural challenges in cooperative federalism.
- **Identity Politics:** Set against the backdrop of the CAA-NRC discourse, Form 6 has become a highly sensitive document linking local residency with national citizenship.

Way Forward

To uphold the democratic mandate, the ECI must balance inclusivity with integrity. Critical reforms include accelerating the voluntary Aadhaar-Voter ID linkage to eliminate duplicate entries and implementing real-time digital dashboards to ensure public transparency regarding application rejections. Finally, depoliticizing the verification process by exploring an independent cadre for electoral rolls could shield the process from local political pressures.



Jan Vishwas 2.0: Modernising India's Regulatory Framework

Context & Background

Introduced in March 2026, the Jan Vishwas 2.0 Bill marks a significant leap in **decriminalizing economic offenses**. Building on the foundational 2023 Act, it directly targets the "criminalization of economic life" by amending **79 laws across 23 Ministries**. Historically, India's regulatory landscape has suffered from severe over-criminalization, burdening citizens with over 5,300 imprisonment clauses for trivial or procedural lapses.

Core Provisions

The reform is massive in scale, amending a total of 784 provisions. Crucially, **717 provisions remove imprisonment clauses**, replacing them with civil penalties, while 67 provisions specifically aim to enhance the "Ease of Living". The legislation introduces a progressive **"Warning-First" approach** for minor, first-time offenders and mandates a **10% increase in minimum penalties every three years** to maintain deterrence against inflation.

Significance for Governance

- **Judicial De-clogging:** By converting criminal offenses into "civil contraventions," thousands of cases will be diverted to administrative Adjudicating Officers, significantly reducing the burden on overworked courts.

- **Trust-Based Governance:** The state's role transitions from a "controlling" to a **"facilitative" entity**, operating on the principle that citizens should be trusted until proven otherwise.
- **Economic Impetus:** Removing the fear of accidental imprisonment provides vital legal "breathing room" for MSMEs, directly boosting India's **Ease of Doing Business (EoDB)** rankings.

Way Forward

To successfully institutionalize this reform, robust **capacity building** for Adjudicating Officers is essential so they act as fair regulators rather than bureaucratic hurdles. Furthermore, **digital integration** is required to ensure transparent compliance, and state governments must partner by adopting similar models for local labor and municipal laws.

Identity Under Siege: The Crisis of Indian Transgender Law

Context & Background

The 2026 Amendment to the Transgender Persons Act of 2019 has sparked significant debate across India. While ostensibly aiming to structure rights, it introduces mandatory medical certification for gender reassignment and creates a centralized "National Transgender Registry," drawing criticism for moving towards surveillance rather than empowerment. This legislative shift deviates sharply from a progressive judicial arc, notably the landmark *NALSA v. Union of India* (2014) ruling which

recognized the right to gender self-determination under Article 21, and the *Puttaswamy* (2017) judgment protecting bodily autonomy and privacy of choice.

Core Provisions & Frictions

The 2026 Act mandates a District Screening Committee and a Chief Medical Officer's certificate to change legal gender markers, replacing the principle of self-identification with strict medical oversight. Furthermore, mandatory central registry enrollment to access government benefits is seen as violating privacy, while retained penalties for compelling transgender persons into begging penalize traditional cultural expressions like *badhai* without addressing the lack of formal employment opportunities.

Significance for Constitutional Polity

This amendment risks a severe erosion of autonomy by allowing the state to reclaim control over an individual's identity. It sets up a direct test of "Constitutional Morality"—a concept emphasized in the *Navtej Singh Johar* judgment—because severe verification hurdles may prevent the most vulnerable community members from accessing newly introduced healthcare and education quotas.

Way Forward

To truly harmonize law with human dignity, India should adopt the global "Self-ID" model, utilizing simple statutory declarations for legal recognition, similar to practices in Argentina and Denmark. Moving forward, the state must implement "Horizontal Reservation" in public employment, as seen in Karnataka and Tamil

Nadu, and ensure any screening committees include transgender representatives to prevent the law from becoming an exclusionary gatekeeping mechanism.

Mainstreaming the Margins: Delhi's 2026 Urban Regularization Policy

Context & Background

Historically, the regularization of Delhi's unauthorized colonies was paralyzed by the mandatory requirement of sanctioned layout plans, a near-impossible metric for organically grown settlements. The 2026 policy introduces a crucial "As-Is, Where-Is" breakthrough, removing this layout bottleneck. To accelerate the sluggish progress of the 2019 PM-UDAY scheme, administrative authority has been notably shifted from the DDA to the Delhi Government's Revenue Department to reduce bureaucratic multiplicity.

Core Provisions

The framework clears 1,511 of the 1,731 identified colonies for regularization. It enforces a strict 45-day fast-track timeline utilizing GIS-based satellite surveys and the unified SWAGAM digital portal. Land in these colonies is automatically reclassified as residential, with specific mixed-use relief granted to small convenience shops. Notably, 220 colonies located in ecologically fragile areas (Yamuna floodplains, Ridge forest), monument zones, and affluent neighborhoods remain explicitly excluded.

Significance for Urban Governance

- **Financial Inclusion:** Formal property conveyance deeds make homes "bankable" assets, unlocking institutional credit for millions of families for the first time.
- **Regulated Development:** While the policy protects current structures, all future reconstruction will mandate MCD-sanctioned building plans, curbing hazardous urban sprawl.
- **Infrastructure Parity:** Backed by a dedicated ₹800 crore budget allocation, these newly recognized colonies are slated to receive vital civic upgrades in roads, sewage, and drainage.

Way Forward

This transition from "Ad-hocism" to "Mainstreaming" relies heavily on executing the 45-day timeline and ensuring seamless inter-agency coordination between the DDA, MCD, and GNCTD. By prioritizing "Trust-Based Governance" over rigid planning legacies, the state can sustainably integrate 4.5 million citizens into the formal urban fabric, officially recognizing their right to the city.

Balancing Critique and Credibility: The 2026 NCERT Textbook Crisis

Context & Background

In February 2026, the **Supreme Court took suo motu cognisance** of a newly released Class 8 NCERT Social Science textbook titled "Exploring Society, India and Beyond". A

Bench led by Chief Justice Surya Kant strongly objected to Chapter 4, which explicitly discussed "corruption in the judiciary," observing that the content was **"irresponsible" and capable of demeaning the institution's dignity** in the eyes of impressionable students. The court criticized the authors for relying on **selective narratives** that implied systemic failure, while notably omitting the judiciary's substantial contributions to preserving democracy, providing legal aid, and ensuring access to justice.

Core Developments

On February 26, 2026, the Supreme Court imposed a **complete blanket ban** on the textbook's publication, sale, and digital dissemination. Following an unconditional apology from the Centre and NCERT citing an "error of judgment," the court directed the government to **blacklist the three drafting authors** from future public curriculum projects. Exposing a lack of transparency in internal approvals, this furore prompted the Solicitor General to announce a systemic overhaul, ensuring that a panel of **"independent, neutral domain experts"** vets all curriculum material before publication.

Significance & Way Forward

This judicial intervention highlights the delicate balance between **"healthy critique" and "institutional undermining,"** setting a significant precedent for judicial review over educational content that misrepresents constitutional bodies. The controversy also led to the reconstitution of the National Syllabus and Teaching Learning Material Committee (NSTC) in April 2026.

To ensure the 2026-27 academic session is free of controversy, the Centre has appointed a **high-level expert committee**—comprising former Attorney General K.K. Venugopal, former SC Judge Indu Malhotra, and Justice Aniruddha Bose—to review and rewrite the chapter. Furthermore, NCERT has been directed to involve the **National Judicial Academy** to provide students with a holistic, accurate understanding of the judiciary as an evolving, vital pillar of Indian democracy.

Mahatma Phule: The Architect of Indian Social Justice

Context & Background

On Mahatma Jyotirao Phule's 199th birth anniversary, the Prime Minister highlighted his **"Antyodaya" philosophy**—the upliftment of the last person—as a foundation for modern policy-making. Born in 1827 into the Mali caste, Phule's personal experiences with discrimination ignited a lifelong crusade against India's caste hierarchy and "Aryan" supremacy theories.

Core Contributions

Bestowed with the title '**Mahatma**' in 1888, Phule championed institutional and educational reform. He established the **Satyashodhak Samaj in 1873** to secure rights for marginalized groups, and alongside Savitribai Phule, founded **India's first girls' school** in Pune in 1848. His radical activism included opening his personal water tank to untouchables and authoring seminal texts like ***Gulamgiri*** (Slavery) and ***Shetkarayacha Aasud*** (The Whipcord of the Cultivator).

Significance & Way Forward

Considered a primary "Guru" by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, Phule's ideology directly informed the constitutional principles of **Equality and Fraternity**. Institutionalizing his vision today requires bridging the modern "Digital Divide" and ensuring universal "Quality Education" through frameworks like NEP 2020. Furthermore, translating his dream of economic empowerment into reality necessitates leveraging initiatives like **Stand-Up India** to definitively eradicate the "mental slavery" of caste and patriarchy.

The CAPF Act 2026: A Unified Security Framework

Context & Background

The Ministry of Home Affairs recently notified the CAPF (General Administration) Act, 2026. Termed an "umbrella law," it fundamentally shifts the administrative and operational command of India's paramilitary forces, replacing historically fragmented rules that caused significant service litigation.

Core Provisions

The Act creates a unified legal framework for recruitment and service conditions across all CAPFs. Crucially, it empowers the Centre to override previous judicial orders, such as a 2025 Supreme Court directive that aimed to reduce Indian Police Service (IPS) deputation. The law explicitly codifies senior leadership quotas for IPS officers: 50% for IGs, a minimum of 67% for ADGs, and 100% for Special DGs and DGs. It also mandates a codified grievance redressal system with statutory timelines.

Significance

By reinforcing IPS leadership, the legislation seeks "institutional synergy," arguing that an IPS "police-mindset" is vital for coordinating central operations with state intelligence. Additionally, it provides statutory backing for the welfare and financial benefits of nearly one million personnel.

Way Forward

While the Act provides administrative clarity, the government must balance this by addressing career stagnation among CAPF cadre officers facing promotional bottlenecks. Fostering mutual respect through reciprocal deputations to agencies like the IB or CBI, alongside continuous technological modernization, is vital for long-term institutional morale.

The Punjab Anti-Sacrilege Act 2026: Safeguarding the Living Guru

Context & Background

Enacted in April 2026, the Jaagat Jot Sri Guru Granth Sahib Satkar (Amendment) Act addresses the volatile issue of *beadbi* (sacrilege), a focal point of Punjab politics since the 2015 Bargari incidents. Unlike previous legislative attempts that stalled, this Act specifically protects the Guru Granth Sahib, which is recognized both spiritually and legally as a "Living Guru".

Core Provisions

The Act establishes stringent deterrence, prescribing 7 to 20 years of imprisonment for

desecration, and up to life imprisonment with a ₹25 lakh fine for criminal conspiracies aimed at disrupting communal harmony. The definition of sacrilege is broad, covering both physical damage and digital offences on social media. All offences are classified as cognizable, non-bailable, and non-compoundable. Uniquely, the law introduces "guardian liability," holding custodians accountable if a dependent commits sacrilege, countering the common defense of "mental instability". Additionally, it mandates the SGPC to maintain a centralized registry tracking all *Saroops*.

Significance & Way Forward

While the state aims to send a resolute "zero-tolerance" message to fringe elements, the law's success hinges on fair enforcement. To ensure accountability, investigations are restricted to senior officers of at least DSP or ACP rank. Moving forward, robust judicial scrutiny is essential to prevent the law's misuse for personal vendettas, while the government must carefully navigate potential pressures to extend similar statutory protections to other religious scriptures.

Dignity Behind Bars: Mandating Inclusive Prison Reforms

Context & Background

In a landmark April 2026 ruling (*Sathyan Naravoor v. Union of India*), the Supreme Court directed the formulation of a comprehensive, nationwide action plan for disabled-friendly prisons. This directive stems from a Public Interest Litigation (PIL)

that gained national prominence following the custodial deaths of activists G.N. Saibaba and Stan Swamy, cases that starkly highlighted the fatal denial of basic assistive devices and specialized medical care.

Core Directives

To bridge the gap between law and ground reality, the Court expanded the mandate of an existing High-Powered Committee (HPC) to oversee disability reforms and ensure compliance with Section 89 of the RPwD Act, 2016. The mandated reforms include providing mobility aids tailored to individual functional needs, conducting nationwide accessibility audits (installing ramps, tactile flooring, and wheelchair-accessible toilets), and establishing specialized medical and vocational care. Additionally, inmates with "benchmark disabilities" are granted enhanced visitation provisions to secure sustained family support.

Significance

- **Constitutional Morality:** Upholding Articles 14 (Equality) and 21 (Right to Life), the Court firmly asserted that "incarceration cannot be a justification for diluting fundamental rights".
- **Substantive Equality:** The judgment enforces "Reasonable Accommodation," a legal mandate requiring the state to proactively modify environments to guarantee equal access.
- **International Alignment:** The ruling harmonizes Indian custodial practices with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and the Nelson Mandela Rules.

Way Forward

Transforming Indian prisons from "warehouses of punishment" into humane correctional centers requires states to shift from mere "affidavit-filing" to actionable "fund-releasing" for infrastructural retrofitting. Furthermore, implementing rigorous sensitization training for prison staff and establishing independent grievance redressal desks will be vital to protecting disabled inmates from systemic neglect and indirect discrimination.

Meta's Automated Sovereignty: The Three-Hour Takedown Regime

Context & Background

In a major shift for digital governance, India has reduced the mandatory takedown timeline for "unlawful" online content from 36 hours to just three hours. Utilizing the Ministry of Home Affairs' Sahyog portal, law enforcement agencies can now issue bulk, automated takedown notices directly to intermediaries. To avoid losing legal immunity ("Safe Harbour") under Section 79 of the IT Act, platforms like Meta have implemented systems to automatically restrict content immediately upon notice, often bypassing detailed legal or human rights review.

Core Frictions

This transition from a "Safe Harbour" to a "Quasi-Strict Liability" model fundamentally alters the nature of the internet in India. While the government prioritizes preventing viral misinformation from causing real-world

harm (such as communal riots), rights groups warn of a significant "chilling effect" on legitimate speech. Automated systems struggle with nuance and satire, leading to algorithmic over-removal and rapid-fire censorship without an independent, transparent unblocking mechanism.

Significance for Governance

By enforcing this regulatory precedent, India is setting a global benchmark for "extreme takedown regimes," redefining the delicate balance between national security and digital rights. The affirmative duty placed on intermediaries to actively police content challenges their historical role as neutral digital "pipes".

Way Forward

To safeguard fundamental rights, bulk takedown orders must be subjected to judicial oversight to ensure they meet the "proportionality" test established in the *Puttaswamy* privacy judgment. Platforms must publish granular transparency reports, while Grievance Appellate Committees (GAC) should be empowered to efficiently handle over-blocking cases. Ultimately, deploying "Human-in-the-loop" hybrid moderation can balance urgent threat mitigation with the protection of nuanced free speech

ENVIRONMENT

India's Plastic Waste Management Reforms: The 2026 Circular Framework

Context:

In March 2026, the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) notified amendments to the Plastic Waste Management Rules, shifting India's strategy from blanket bans to a pragmatic "**Circular Economy**" approach. These reforms ease the regulatory burden on businesses while treating plastic waste as an economic resource.

Key Provisions:

- **Enhanced Traceability:** From January 2025, all plastic packaging must feature a QR code or barcode, enabling instant supply-chain traceability for regulators and consumers, thereby moving away from manual audits.
- **Recycled Content Targets:** A mandate of 40% recycled content in rigid plastic packaging is set for the 2026-27 period to help formalize the domestic recycling industry.
- **Redefining "End-of-Life":** Energy recovery methods, such as co-processing in cement/steel plants and waste-to-oil, are now legally recognized disposal avenues, granting companies more flexibility to meet targets.

- **Ease of Doing Business:** Registration for Producers, Importers, and Brand

Owners (PIBOs) is now centralized through a single CPCB portal.

Combating Greenwashing: The 2026 framework establishes stringent standards for eco-alternatives to eliminate false environmental claims. It strictly distinguishes **Compostables** (requiring industrial composting conditions to degrade without toxic residue within 180 days) from **Biodegradables** (degrading in ambient conditions). Any material that merely fragments into microplastics is legally classified as "conventional plastic" and remains subject to Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) targets.

Way Forward:

Transitioning to a plastic-neutral economy requires scaling up "Waste-to-Energy" infrastructure, utilizing government subsidies to offset the high costs of compostable alternatives, and leveraging mandatory QR codes to boost consumer awareness and verification.

The Great Nicobar Project: Strategic Imperative vs. Ecological Concerns

Context:

In early 2026, the National Green Tribunal (NGT) upheld environmental clearance for

the ₹92,000-crore Great Nicobar Island (GNI) project, citing its "overriding strategic importance". However, a newly released Draft Master Plan (2047) has triggered protests from the indigenous Nicobarese and Shompen communities, who fear forced relocation and a planned "population explosion" on the island.

Core Components: Implemented by ANIIDCO, the mega-infrastructure project features an International Container Transshipment Port (ICTP) at Galathea Bay, a dual-use international airport, a 450 MVA power plant, and a massive integrated township expected to house 6.5 lakh people by 2050.

Strategic & Economic Significance:

Geopolitically, the island's proximity to the Strait of Malacca a crucial global shipping choke point enables India to monitor regional naval movements. Economically, the port aims to handle 14.2 million TEUs, capturing transshipment traffic from hubs like Singapore and Colombo, thereby significantly boosting India's Sagarmala Programme.

Key Challenges:

- **Tribal Rights:** The Shompen (a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group) and Nicobarese face the loss of their ancestral "Tribal Reserve". The Tribal Council has actively withdrawn its consent over unsettled forest rights.
- **Ecological Catastrophe:** The development requires felling nearly one million trees and diverting 130 sq. km of pristine forest. This severely threatens the world's most important nesting sites for the Giant

Leatherback Turtle and the endemic Nicobar Megapode.

- **Disaster Vulnerability:** The Island lies in highly active Seismic Zone V, raising severe safety doubts for large-scale concrete infrastructure, especially given the catastrophic subsidence during the 2004 Tsunami.

Way Forward:

The government must prioritize "Free, Prior, and Informed Consent" (FPIC) with tribal councils, as mandated by the Forest Rights Act, 2006. Adopting a phased, low-impact development model and instituting independent oversight for the Environmental Management Plan will be critical to balancing national strategic interests with the island's fragile carrying capacity.

Advanced Biomass Cookstoves: A Hybrid Approach to Rural Energy Resilience

Context:

Despite the success of the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY) in expanding gas connections, high LPG refill prices have led many rural households to revert to traditional, polluting fuels. Recognizing this reality of "stacked fuel use," India's energy policy is shifting to promote **Advanced Biomass Cookstoves (ABCs)** as a clean, cost-effective alternative to expensive gas cylinders.

Core Technology & Efficiency:

Unlike traditional mud stoves that operate at roughly 10% thermal efficiency, modern ABCs achieve 35–45% efficiency. These stoves utilize **gasification** (secondary combustion) and battery-powered fans to optimize the air-to-fuel ratio. This technology ensures near-complete combustion, effectively reducing Particulate Matter (PM-2.5) and Carbon Monoxide (CO) emissions by 70–90% compared to open fires.

Significance:

- **Health & Empowerment:** ABCs significantly mitigate indoor air pollution a leading cause of respiratory diseases while reducing the "drudgery" for rural women by cutting down soot cleaning and fuel collection time.
- **Climate & Economy:** By converting readily available agricultural residues into fuel, ABCs prevent field burning, reduce black carbon emissions, and shield vulnerable populations from global oil price volatility.

Way Forward:

The primary barrier to adoption is the initial cost of ABCs, which ranges from ₹2,500 to ₹5,000. To make these accessible, companies must leverage **Carbon Markets** by utilizing IoT sensors to track usage and generate carbon credits, which can subsidize end-user costs. Furthermore, the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) must enforce strict emission norms to prevent substandard products from flooding the market. Moving forward, a **Hybrid Model** where ABCs handle

heavy, prolonged cooking while LPG is reserved for quick tasks offers the most realistic path to both health and financial stability in rural India.

India's Rooftop Solar Evolution 2026: Incentivizing State Adoption

Context:

To achieve the ambitious target of solarizing 1 crore households and reaching 40 GW of cumulative rooftop solar (RTS) capacity by March 2027, the Central Government is planning a new incentive scheme. This initiative aims to accelerate State-level adoption under the PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana, which achieved an installed capacity of 9.56 GW by March 2026.

Core Provisions:

The proposed framework addresses varying State cooperation by offering performance-linked payouts to Power Distribution Companies (DISCOMs) that register growth in residential RTS installations. This strategy officially transforms historically reluctant DISCOMs into proactive "Solar Aggregators". Currently, households receive Central Financial Assistance (CFA) of up to ₹78,000 for a 3 kW system. Combined with state top-ups from proactive states like Gujarat and Delhi, consumers can see upfront cost reductions of over 50%.

Significance:

- **Economy & Employment:** The sector is projected to create 17 lakh jobs in manufacturing, installation, and

maintenance by 2027, while offering consumers a swift 4–5 year financial payback period.

- **Environment:** Solarizing 1 crore households will prevent an estimated 720 million tons of emissions over a 25-year lifespan.
- **Grid Security:** Distributed solar significantly reduces the load on the national grid during peak daylight hours.

Challenges & Way Forward:

RTS adoption remains uneven due to complex net-metering paperwork, outdated residential transformers incapable of handling reverse power flow, and newly proposed "electricity duty" or grid support charges in states like Maharashtra. To meet the 2027 targets, India must standardize net-metering approvals to a uniform 15-day window, directly fund DISCOMs to modernize transformers for bi-directional energy flow, and heavily incentivize the development of 100% renewable "Solar Cities".

India's Escalating Heatwave Crisis: The 2026 Outlook

Context:

In April 2026, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) issued a severe seasonal outlook predicting an unprecedented number of heatwave days across the country. This underscores a shifting climatic reality where the transition from spring to summer has vanished, and extreme heat is now a seasonal certainty rather than an anomaly.

Core Phenomenon: A heatwave is declared when maximum temperatures reach at least 40°C in the plains. Driven by anticyclonic circulations and exacerbated by climate change which has made heatwaves 30 times more likely the 2026 summer is expected to see heatwaves lasting 10–20 days, up from the normal 4–8 days. Furthermore, high humidity in coastal areas is pushing dangerous "wet-bulb" temperatures beyond 50°C, while "Warm Night" events (minimum temperatures staying above 30°C) prevent physiological and environmental recovery.

Impact & Challenges:

- **Economy & Agriculture:** Heat-induced labor productivity loss is projected to cost India 5.8% of its working hours by 2030. Additionally, extreme temperatures threaten the reproductive phase of vital crops like wheat.
- **Energy Grid:** Surging cooling demands are expected to push India's peak power load to a record 250-260 GW, risking grid stability.
- **Urban Heat Island (UHI):** Concrete expansion makes cities 5-8°C hotter than rural areas. Meanwhile, air conditioning waste heat fuels a "cooling paradox" that disproportionately impacts the urban poor living in poorly ventilated housing.

Way Forward:

Combating this structural challenge requires a shift to Hyper-Local Heat Action Plans (HAPs) featuring "cool roofs" and public water kiosks. Massive urban afforestation, mandated workplace "heat breaks," and robust early warning systems via SMS are

critical steps toward building a heat-resilient India.

The Intensity Trap: Navigating India's New Flash Flood Reality

Context:

Recent climatic trends reveal a dangerous paradox: regions experiencing "below-average" seasonal rainfall are increasingly suffering from catastrophic flash floods. This shifting reality, termed the "**Intensity Trap**," demands a critical pivot in disaster management from measuring rainfall *volume* over months to tracking rainfall *velocity* over hours.

Core Mechanism:

Driven by the Clausius-Clapeyron equation, a warming atmosphere holds approximately 7% more moisture for every 1°C rise in temperature, resulting in violent, concentrated downpours. Consequently, "cloudburst-like" events exceeding 100mm of rain per hour are surging, even in historically arid zones like Rajasthan. Prolonged dry spells exacerbate this hazard by baking the earth into a hardened, concrete-like surface. This prevents natural groundwater infiltration and instantly converts intense rainfall into devastating surface runoff.

Impact & Challenges:

This phenomenon severely threatens urban and rural infrastructure. Most Indian city drainage systems are engineered for rainfall intensities of just 12–20 mm per hour and are rendered obsolete by modern storms that frequently triple that rate. Furthermore, meteorological models struggle to forecast precise, localized "intensity bursts," while rampant, unplanned urbanization continues to pave over natural water-absorbing wetlands.

Way Forward:

To survive this new climatic era, India must urgently adopt "**Sponge City**" infrastructure by integrating permeable pavements, rain gardens, and restored wetlands to absorb sudden hydraulic surges. Updating municipal drainage design standards, implementing impact-based forecasting for localized evacuations, and promoting regenerative agriculture to maintain soil porosity are essential steps toward true climate resilience.

Science & Technology

India's Semiconductor Push: From Blueprint to Production

Context:

Capitalizing on post-pandemic supply chain disruptions and the global "China Plus One" strategy, India is rapidly transitioning into a hardware powerhouse through the **India Semiconductor Mission (ISM)**. The initiative aims to meet a projected \$110 billion domestic demand by 2030 and position India as a trusted global partner.

Key Developments (2026):

Backed by a ₹76,000 crore incentive package, India's ambitions are materializing. Major recent milestones include:

- **Sanand, Gujarat:** Inauguration of Micron's \$2.75 billion Assembly and Test facility (processing advanced memory wafers) and Kaynes Semicon's OSAT plant.
- **Dholera Fab:** Tata Electronics is establishing India's first commercial AI-enabled Semiconductor Fabrication unit with a ₹91,000 crore investment.
- **Policy & Skill Push:** The Union Budget 2026-27 introduced "**Semicon 2.0**," expanding the focus from just chips to the entire manufacturing ecosystem. Additionally, over 60,000 engineers have been trained in global Electronic Design Automation tools.

Significance:

- **Strategic & Diplomatic:** Ensures strategic autonomy by reducing import dependence for critical infrastructure, defense, and telecommunications. It also strengthens US-India diplomacy through the iCET initiative for national security co-development.
- **Economic:** Acts as a massive multiplier by fueling the AI economy and creating a new class of industrial workers, with the Dholera plant alone generating 21,000 jobs.

Challenges & Way Forward:

Ensuring infrastructure reliability, such as **uninterrupted power and ultra-pure water**, is critical for scaling. Moving forward, India must transition from assembly (OSAT) to deep manufacturing (Fab) and prioritize "**Design in India**" to secure intellectual property ownership. By navigating these challenges, India aims to become a top-five global semiconductor nation by 2032.

Qdenga: A Breakthrough in Global Dengue Management

Context: Driven by climate change and rapid urbanization, dengue cases are surging, with India alone projecting over 310,000 cases in 2026. The introduction of the Qdenga (TAK-003) vaccine marks a historic pharmaceutical

intervention in combating the world's fastest-spreading mosquito-borne disease.

Key Features & Developments (2026):

- **The Vaccine:** Developed by Takeda Pharmaceuticals, Qdenga is a live-attenuated tetravalent vaccine targeting all four dengue serotypes using a DENV-2 genetic backbone. Administered in two doses three months apart, it reduces symptomatic cases by 80% and hospitalizations by a staggering 90%.
- **Overcoming Past Barriers:** Unlike its predecessor, Dengvaxia, Qdenga is safe for individuals without prior dengue exposure. This eliminates the need for expensive pre-vaccination blood screening, making mass immunization highly viable.
- **Indian Rollout:** In April 2026, India officially approved the vaccine for ages 4 to 60. A manufacturing partnership with Biological E ensures the production of up to 50 million doses annually.

Significance:

- **Public Health & Economy:** By preventing 9 out of 10 hospitalizations, Qdenga will alleviate immense pressure on healthcare infrastructure and prevent billions in lost productivity across tropical economies.
- **Global Supply:** Domestic manufacturing secures the supply chain not just for India, but for the broader Global South.

Challenges:

Qdenga exhibits lower efficacy against the DENV-3 and DENV-4 strains in seronegative individuals. Furthermore, while it prevents severe illness, it does not block the human-to-mosquito transmission cycle.

Way Forward:

Qdenga is a vital "shield," but not a standalone cure. Integrating this vaccine with robust vector control, sanitation efforts, and social awareness remains essential in the ongoing war against dengue.

GRSE's Historic "Triple Delivery": A Milestone in Naval Aatmanirbharta

Context: Aligning with the *Aatmanirbhar Bharat* (Self-Reliant India) mission, the Indian Navy is aggressively modernizing to cement its role as a "Net Security Provider" in the Indian Ocean Region. On March 30, 2026, Garden Reach Shipbuilders & Engineers Ltd. (GRSE) achieved a historic "triple crown" by delivering three frontline warships simultaneously, showcasing India's growing maturity in complex, high-speed naval manufacturing.

Key Deliveries (The "Triplets"):

- **INS Dunagiri:** A 6,670-tonne **Project 17A Stealth Frigate** equipped with BrahMos missiles, advanced AESA radar, and stealth features to evade enemy detection. Its integrated construction methods reduced build time by over 13 months compared to earlier classes.

- **INS Sanshodhak:** The fourth and final **Survey Vessel (Large)** designed for deep-water hydrographic surveys and oceanographic data collection.
- **INS Agray:** An **Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW) Shallow Water Craft** serving as a "submarine hunter" in littoral waters, armed with lightweight torpedoes.

Significance:

- **Strategic & Operational:** These vessels collectively provide strategic strike capabilities (the "teeth"), underwater navigation (the "eyes"), and defense against silent threats in the "shallows". Delivering three complex production lines concurrently demonstrates top-tier global shipbuilding efficiency.
- **Economic Impact:** Boasting **75% to 88% indigenous content**, the project engaged over 200 Indian MSMEs and generated employment for over 14,000 personnel, transforming defense spending into a domestic economic engine.

Way Forward:

India is evolving from a domestic builder to a global naval exporter, with 13 vessels currently under construction for international clients. Moving forward, the focus will shift to building **Next Generation Corvettes (NGC)**, incorporating eco-friendly "green shipping" propulsion and AI-integrated autonomous tools to secure the maritime horizon of 2030.

Pediatric Cancer: An Emerging Public Health Crisis in India

Context:

A landmark April 2026 study published in *The Lancet* highlights a stark epidemiological shift: cancer has emerged as the 10th leading cause of death among Indian children. As India improves its healthcare infrastructure against infectious diseases and malnutrition, the rising prominence of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) exposes a critical vulnerability in pediatric oncology.

Key Facts (GBD 2023 Analysis):

- **Scale:** India records 50,000 to 75,000 new childhood cancer cases annually, causing approximately 17,000 deaths in 2023.
- **Prevalence:** Leukaemia is the most common, accounting for 45% of cases.
- **Disparities:** Higher incidence rates in urban centers suggest a massive "hidden burden" of undiagnosed cases in rural India.

The Survival Gap & Challenges: While high-income countries boast childhood cancer survival rates over 80%, India's rate stagnates at 40-50%. This tragedy is driven by delayed diagnoses—averaging 3 to 6 months—as symptoms are often mistaken for common infections. Furthermore, the lack of rural specialized centers forces families to bear high indirect costs, frequently leading to treatment abandonment.

Significance:

Unlike adult cancers, pediatric cancers are highly curable if caught early; thus, these deaths represent a profound loss of life and economic potential. Addressing this is also imperative under the Right to Life (Article 21), ensuring equitable healthcare access.

Way Forward:

India must formulate a National Childhood Cancer Plan integrated into the existing NPCDCS framework. Crucial steps include training frontline workers (ASHAs) to identify "red flag" symptoms, expanding Population-Based Cancer Registries (PBCRs) for accurate data collection, and utilizing Ayushman Bharat to shield families from the long-term financial burdens of pediatric care.

INS Aridhaman: Bolstering India's Nuclear Triad

Context:

On April 3, 2026, India quietly commissioned **INS Aridhaman (S4)** at Visakhapatnam. Following INS Arihant and INS Arighaat, it is India's third indigenously built **Nuclear-powered Ballistic Missile Submarine (SSBN)**, marking a monumental milestone in the nation's strategic autonomy.

Key Technical Features:

Originating from the classified Advanced Technology Vessel (ATV) project, this "Arihant-stretch" variant displaces 7,000 tonnes and is powered by an upgraded **83**

MW Compact Light Water Reactor (CLWR), enabling prolonged submerged operations. Crucially, it boasts **double the firepower** of INS Arihant, featuring eight vertical launch tubes capable of deploying 24 K-15 (750 km), 8 K-4 (3,500 km), or developmental K-5 intercontinental missiles. For survivability, it integrates advanced stealth anechoic tiles and indigenous sonars like USHUS.

Strategic Significance:

- **Credible Second-Strike:** As the most survivable leg of the nuclear triad, INS Aridhaman guarantees a retaliatory strike, which is the foundational requirement of India's **"No First Use" (NFU) doctrine**.
- **Permanent Deterrence:** Operating a three-SSBN fleet allows the Indian Navy to maintain a "permanent at-sea deterrence" in the Indian Ocean, ensuring one vessel is always on patrol.
- **Global Standing:** This induction solidifies India's position in the elite club of six nations (including the USA, Russia, China, France, and the UK) capable of indigenously designing and operating nuclear submarines.

Way Forward:

To further secure the Indo-Pacific, India is targeting the commissioning of its fourth SSBN (Project S4*) by 2027, shifting focus toward developing **Nuclear-powered Attack Submarines (SSNs)**, and expediting the operationalization of longer-range K-5 and K-6 missiles.

Anthropic's Silicon Gamble: The Quest for AI Sovereignty

Context:

Amidst explosive growth and an industry-wide "compute crunch," AI startup Anthropic creator of the Claude chatbot is exploring the development of its own custom AI chips. Driven by a revenue surge to \$30 billion in 2026 and severe infrastructure strain from tools like Claude Code, the company is seeking to reduce its reliance on third-party hardware giants.

Key Developments:

- **The Silicon Shift:** Anthropic currently relies on a hybrid infrastructure of Nvidia GPUs, Google TPUs, and Amazon Trainium chips. To bridge immediate capacity gaps, it recently signed a 10-year, \$100 billion deal with Amazon AWS and a multi-gigawatt agreement with Google and Broadcom.
- **The Investment Barrier:** Designing a competitive frontier AI chip costs an estimated \$500 million. While Anthropic is still in the early stages and lacks a dedicated silicon team, it is weighing the long-term benefits of in-house design.

Significance:

- **Breaking Dependencies:** Heavy reliance on Nvidia creates critical bottlenecks regarding high costs, hardware scarcity, and optimization. Custom Application-Specific

Integrated Circuits (ASICs) can be explicitly tuned for Claude's architecture, offering superior efficiency and lower power consumption compared to general-purpose GPUs.

- **AI Sovereignty:** By moving vertically to control its own hardware, Anthropic joins an elite group of "Hyperscalers" securing their supply chains. Owning the silicon allows Anthropic to control its margins and potentially offer cheaper APIs, positioning it to win the enterprise AI price war.

Way Forward:

Anthropic is adopting a two-pronged strategy: mass-procuring Amazon's Trainium 3 and 4 chips to secure short-term capacity through 2027, while exploring a long-term partnership with Broadcom to co-design an exclusive AI accelerator.

India's High-Speed Rail Milestone: The J-Slab Ballastless Track System

Context:

As of April 2026, the Mumbai-Ahmedabad High-Speed Rail (MAHSR) project has achieved over 59% physical progress. To sustain operational speeds of 320 kmph, the National High Speed Rail Corporation Limited (NHSRCL) is deploying the Japanese J-Slab ballastless track technology, marking a historic first for Indian Railways.

Key Technical Features:

Originating from Japan's Shinkansen network, the J-Slab system replaces traditional stone "ballasted" tracks with a highly stable four-layer rigid structure. This includes a 300mm Reinforced Concrete (RC) track bed, a 50mm vibration-absorbing Cement Asphalt Mortar (CAM) layer, pre-cast high-strength concrete track slabs, and precision fasteners. Through a comprehensive technology transfer partnership, these highly precise slabs are now being manufactured domestically at facilities in Anand and Kim, Gujarat, advancing the 'Make in India' initiative,.

Significance:

- **Operational Safety & Comfort:** The rigid J-Slab structure rigorously maintains track alignment and completely eliminates the dangerous risk of "flying ballast"—where stones are sucked up by high-speed winds and damage the train's undercarriage,. It also significantly reduces noise and vibration.
- **Strategic Economic Shift:** This adoption highlights India's shift toward a "Life Cycle Cost" (LCC) strategy. Despite higher initial construction costs, the J-Slab offers a nearly 100-year lifespan with drastically reduced maintenance compared to conventional tracks,.

Way Forward:

The successful implementation of the J-Slab will serve as a foundational blueprint for future high-speed corridors, such as the Delhi-Varanasi route. The immediate focus is

on skilling Indian engineers in Japanese high-precision standards and scaling up local manufacturing to prepare for the first trial run between Surat and Vapi by August 2026.

India's Green Skies: The National Sustainable Aviation Fuel Framework

Context:

In April 2026, the Government of India achieved a crucial milestone in decarbonizing its aviation sector by amending the Aviation Turbine Fuel (ATF) (Regulation of Marketing) Order, 2001. This amendment legally integrates Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF) into the national framework, creating the enabling provision required for airlines to use blended fuels locally.

Key Features & Mandates:

- **Redefining Fuel:** The legal definition of ATF has been expanded beyond petroleum to include synthetic hydrocarbons and refinery co-processed fuels.
- **CORSIA Alignment:** Driven by the mandatory 2027 phase of the ICAO's Carbon Offsetting and Reduction Scheme for International Aviation (CORSIA), India has set indicative blending targets for international flights: 1% by 2027, 2% by 2028, and 5% by 2030.
- **"Drop-in" Capability:** SAF is chemically identical to conventional jet fuel, meaning it requires absolutely no modifications to existing aircraft engines or

infrastructure. It can be produced from diverse feedstocks, including agricultural residues, waste oils, and ethanol (Alcohol-to-Jet pathways).

Significance:

- **Emissions & Security:** SAF can slash lifecycle greenhouse gas emissions by up to 80%. Furthermore, relying on domestic biomass will significantly reduce India's heavy dependence on imported crude oil, which currently fulfills over 85% of its aviation fuel needs.
- **Global Competitiveness:** This legal framework ensures Indian carriers avoid heavy financial penalties internationally and remain aligned

with standards in the EU, UK, and USA.

Way Forward:

To realize these targets, India must overcome high production costs and a lack of large-scale commercial SAF plants. Attracting investments for large Alcohol-to-Jet (ATJ) facilities, establishing a clear pricing and subsidy roadmap, and eventually expanding mandates to domestic flights will be vital for achieving India's Net Zero 2070 ambitions.

International Relations

Mountain Shield: India's High-Altitude Radar Strategy

Context:

On March 31, 2026, the Ministry of Defence signed a landmark ₹1,950-crore contract with Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL) to equip the Indian Air Force (IAF) with two advanced Mountain Radar systems.

Key Highlights:

- **Indigenization:** Procured under the highest indigenization category, **Buy (Indian-IDDm)**, the radars are designed by DRDO's Electronics and Radar Development Establishment (LRDE) and manufactured by BEL.
- **Tactical Advantage:** Designed specifically for the rugged Himalayas, these lightweight, modular radars eliminate "blind spots" caused by steep valleys. They effectively counter "terrain masking," a tactic where low-flying threats like drones or cruise missiles hide behind mountain peaks to evade detection.

Strategic Significance:

- **Strategic Autonomy:** Historically reliant on foreign systems from Israel and France, India now retains the Intellectual Property (IP). This prevents dependence on foreign "black box" technologies, ensuring

full control over software updates and maintenance.

- **National Security:** The radars are crucial for monitoring previously unseen sectors, helping counter modern "gray-zone" warfare and drone incursions.
- **Economic Boost:** The project integrates a massive network of Indian MSMEs, strengthening the domestic Defence Industrial Base (DIB) and creating high-tech jobs.

Way Forward:

This acquisition is a foundational step toward creating a seamless "**electronic fence**" across the entire Line of Actual Control (LAC). For maximum operational effectiveness, these mountain radars will be integrated into the **Integrated Air Command and Control System (IACCS)**, delivering real-time data to decision-makers in seconds. Furthermore, proving their ruggedness in extreme Himalayan conditions opens up significant export potential to other countries with mountainous borders, such as those in Central Asia or South America.

Safeguarding the Blue Helmets: India's Stand on UNIFIL Security

Context:

Amid the escalating conflict in West Asia, India recently joined a global coalition of over 40 nations to strongly condemn attacks on the United Nations Interim Force in

Lebanon (UNIFIL). With over 900 Indian troops currently deployed in the region, New Delhi's proactive response highlights its deep commitment to the safety of peacekeepers.

Background:

Established in 1978, UNIFIL monitors the cessation of hostilities along the "Blue Line" separating Lebanon and Israel, acting as a critical buffer against regional escalation. After recent incidents where UNIFIL watchtowers and bases were targeted or caught in the crossfire, India reiterated that UN premises are "inviolable" under international law and the neutrality of peacekeeping forces must be strictly respected.

Strategic Significance:

- **National Security:** As a historically major Troop Contributing Country (TCC), ensuring the physical security of Indian soldiers in volatile conflict zones is a high-priority national interest.
- **Principled Neutrality:** India skillfully balances its complex strategic ties in West Asia while staunchly defending the rules-based international order and UN mandates.
- **Global Leadership:** This definitive stance reinforces India's image as a responsible global power and a steadfast voice for the Global South at the UN.

Way Forward:

- **Statutory Accountability:** India advocates for the UN Security Council to investigate deliberate

attacks on peacekeepers as potential war crimes.

- **Enhanced Protection:** There is an urgent need to upgrade defensive infrastructure and technological surveillance at UNIFIL outposts to withstand modern hybrid warfare.
- **Diplomatic De-escalation:** Emphasizing a return to the path of dialogue, India maintains that peacekeeper safety is ultimately contingent upon a comprehensive political solution and ceasefire.

Geopolitics of the Hormuz Stranglehold

Context:

Global maritime trade faces profound uncertainty as Iran exercises aggressive operational control over the Strait of Hormuz. Despite a fragile ceasefire, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) enforces a de facto closure, leaving over 150 vessels stranded in the Gulf of Oman.

Key Highlights:

- **Aggressive Tactics:** Following military clashes with the U.S. and Israel, Iran shifted to "infrastructure-based power projection" utilizing sea mines, satellite spoofing, and drone boats.
- **Seizures and Tolls:** The IRGC recently seized two container ships, including one bound for India, and is reportedly attempting to institutionalize its control by charging \$1 million tolls for "safe passage".

- **Counter-Blockade:** The U.S. Navy has implemented a targeted blockade of vessels entering or leaving Iranian ports, escalating the geopolitical standoff.

Strategic and Economic Significance:

- **Energy Security:** The Strait facilitates approximately 20% of global oil and LNG trade. Sustained disruptions have driven crude prices to record highs and severely delayed supply chains for essential goods.
- **Threat to International Law:** Iran's discretionary approval system directly challenges the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) regarding "transit passage," setting a dangerous precedent for global maritime chokepoints.

Way Forward:

- **Alternative Routes:** Discussions are underway to formalize a "Southern Corridor" through Omani territorial waters, though this remains vulnerable to long-range missiles.
- **Multilateral Escorts:** Shippers are urging a "Coalition of the Willing" to provide armed escorts to restore freedom of navigation.
- **Diplomatic Resolution:** The ongoing "Islamabad Talks" remain the primary viable path to secure a permanent, safe reopening of the Strait and avert an energy-led global recession.

India-Africa Co-Development: A Global South Synergy

Context:

In April 2026, India unveiled the roadmap for the Fourth India-Africa Forum Summit (IAFS-IV), resuming the dialogue after a decade-long hiatus. With the African Union's recent permanent inclusion in the G20, a milestone championed by New Delhi—this partnership cements their collective role as the "Voice of the Global South".

Key Highlights:

- **Strategic Evolution:** The relationship has evolved from ideological non-alignment and capacity-building programs to an "Enhanced Partnership" focused on digital infrastructure, trade, and maritime security.
- **Economic & Digital Integration:** Bilateral trade recently surpassed the \$100 billion mark, making India Africa's third-largest trading partner. Furthermore, African nations like Namibia are actively adopting India's Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI), including UPI-inspired systems.
- **Capacity Building:** Shifting from just hosting students, India is exporting educational excellence by establishing an IIT Madras campus in Zanzibar and a National Forensic Sciences University (NFSU) campus in Uganda.

Strategic Significance:

- **Reformed Multilateralism:** Representing a third of humanity, India and the 54 African nations form a formidable bloc advocating for UN Security Council reforms.
- **Non-Prescriptive Model:** Contrasting with "debt-trap" diplomacy, India's demand-driven approach emphasizes local empowerment rather than mere resource extraction.
- **Maritime Security (SAGAR):** Cooperation in the Western Indian Ocean is vital for anti-piracy efforts and securing critical Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs).

Way Forward:

To maximize potential, India must transition from merely providing Lines of Credit (LoC) to fostering robust Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). Addressing infrastructure implementation gaps and aligning India's 'Viksit Bharat' (2047) goals with Africa's 'Agenda 2063'—while integrating with the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)—will ensure this remains a transformational partnership of equals.

The Berlin Roadmap: Indo-German Defence Synergy

Context:

On April 22, 2026, high-level bilateral talks in Berlin marked the 75th anniversary of Indo-German diplomatic relations and 25 years of their Strategic Partnership. Driven by

Germany's pivotal foreign policy shift (*Zeitenwende*), Berlin increasingly views India as a primary strategic anchor in the Indo-Pacific.

Key Highlights:

- **Strategic Blueprint:** The new **Defense Industrial Cooperation Roadmap** promotes long-term co-development and co-production of platforms, definitively moving away from traditional buyer-seller dynamics.
- **Niche Tech & Training:** Both nations finalized a **UN Peacekeeping Training Arrangement** and prioritized joint collaboration in AI, cybersecurity, unmanned systems, and Underwater Domain Awareness (UDA).
- **Military Interoperability:** Germany confirmed its Air Force's participation in India's mega air exercise, **Ex-TARANG SHAKTI**, with intentions to also join Exercise MILAN.

Strategic Significance:

- **Diversification & Self-Reliance:** Partnering with Germany provides India with a high-tech alternative to Russian defense equipment, a crucial step for the "**Aatmanirbhar Bharat**" initiative.
- **Submarine Diplomacy:** The visit catalyzed progress on the crucial **Project-75I deal**, where the German firm TKMS is a leading contender to construct advanced stealth submarines in India.
- **EU Catalyst:** Defense synergy with Germany, the EU's economic powerhouse, accelerates the

broader India-EU Security and Defense Partnership.

Way Forward:

To cement this evolution from "tactical procurement" to true "strategic co-

creation", Germany must streamline its export control regimes to ensure seamless **Technology Transfer**. Furthermore, integrating German *Mittelstand* (SMEs) with Indian startups and establishing a regular **2+2 Dialogue** will institutionalize these gains and help navigate broader geopolitical divergences.

SOCIAL ISSUES

Judicial Realism: Supreme Court's Directives against Human Trafficking

Context

In April 2026, the Supreme Court expressed deep frustration over the "lackadaisical" implementation of past anti-trafficking judgments, shifting from mere monitoring toward a stance of "Judicial Realism". Hearing a decade-old missing child case, the Court underscored that human trafficking is a fundamental violation of Article 21 (Right to Life) and Article 23 (Prohibition of Traffic). Despite the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) reporting over 10,000 cases annually, fragmented inter-state responses frequently lead to "victim re-victimization".

Key Supreme Court Directives

- **National SOP:** A high-level Expert Core Committee, chaired by the Secretary of the Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD), has been ordered to draft a practical Standard Operating Procedure by June 2026.
- **Strict Enforcement:** The Court mandated immediate FIR registration for missing persons, legal presumption of trafficking for missing children, and day-to-day, six-month time-bound trials.
- **Accountability:** States failing to submit compliance reports face the threat of being officially branded as "defaulting" states.

Underlying Challenges

India's anti-trafficking efforts face systemic hurdles, including fragmented policing, underfunded Anti-Human Trafficking Units (AHTUs), and an outdated reliance on the Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956, which neglects forced labor and organ harvesting. Furthermore, the comprehensive Trafficking of Persons Bill remains in legislative limbo, creating a vacuum the judiciary is forced to fill.

The Way Forward

Building structural resilience requires a centralized, real-time inter-state database to track missing persons and syndicates. Justice must be victim-centric, prioritizing the testimony of trafficked children as "injured witnesses," while strengthening infrastructure like Mission Vatsalya and One Stop Centres to provide rehabilitation independent of a conviction. Finally, deploying the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) to seize criminal assets can serve as a crucial economic deterrent against organized syndicates.

The Regression of Transgender Autonomy in India

Context

An early 2026 amendment to the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019, has controversially shifted gender identity recognition from "Self-

Identification" to a mandatory "Medical Certification" process.

Key Provisions & Legal Conflict

The amendment requires transgender individuals to appear before a district-level medical board to verify their gender, with District Magistrates issuing identity certificates only upon the board's recommendation. It also introduces strict penalties of up to 15 years for "undue influence," which vaguely criminalizes NGOs, doctors, and families supporting an individual's transition.

This legislative shift directly contradicts landmark Supreme Court rulings:

- **NALSA vs. Union of India (2014):** Recognized gender identity as an innate perception and upheld the right to self-identification without medical intervention.
- **K.S. Puttaswamy vs. Union of India (2017):** Protected bodily autonomy and personal identity choices under the fundamental Right to Privacy.

Core Issues

By replacing self-declaration with external medical validation, the state effectively re-pathologizes identities already declassified as mental disorders by the World Health Organization. The mandate risks invasive examinations, violating Article 21 and human dignity, while inducing severe minority stress and trauma. Furthermore, the threat of prosecution creates a "chilling effect" for medical professionals providing necessary gender-affirmative care.

The Way Forward

To align with Constitutional Morality, the government must restore the rights-based approach of the NALSA judgment, allowing identity declaration via a simple affidavit. Policy focus should pivot towards standardizing accessible gender-affirming healthcare and sensitizing the bureaucracy to prevent social rejection, rather than policing identities through rigid bureaucratic frameworks.

The Bauxite Express: Industrial Expansion vs. Tribal Sovereignty in Odisha

Context

In April 2026, the Ministry of Railways notified a new 20-km broad-gauge "Special Railway Project" in Odisha. This dedicated mineral corridor will connect the Tikiri railhead to the ecologically sensitive Sijimali and Kutrumali bauxite mines, which are operated by industrial giants like Vedanta and the Adani Group.

Economic Significance

With Odisha producing over 70% of India's bauxite, this rail line is critical for India's ambition to become a global aluminium hub. The dedicated corridor will significantly reduce logistics costs and lower the carbon footprint of mineral transport compared to traditional road haulage.

Underlying Challenges

The project has ignited socio-ecological friction, punctuated by violent clashes between police and local Kondh and Paraja tribes in April 2026.

- **Rights Violations:** Activists argue the development bypasses the Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006, and PESA, 1996, with locals alleging that recent Gram Sabha resolutions were "fraudulent".
- **Ecological Threat:** Located near the famous Niyamgiri Hills, these Eastern Ghats act as natural "water towers". Large-scale mining and rail infrastructure threaten biodiversity and risk irreversible depletion of the perennial streams sustaining local agriculture.

The Way Forward

Balancing industrial growth with tribal autonomy requires strict adherence to the Supreme Court's 2013 Niyamgiri mandate, ensuring transparent and genuine Gram Sabha consultations. The Ministry of Environment must conduct a regional **Cumulative Impact Assessment** rather than viewing projects in isolation. Furthermore, adopting "sponge infrastructure" to protect hydrological systems and moving toward a benefit-sharing model where tribal communities are stakeholders rather than mere compensation recipients is vital for inclusive development.

The Silent Pandemic: Addressing the Global Toxic Workplace Crisis

Context

The 2026 International Labour Organization (ILO) report, "The Psychosocial Working Environment," highlights that toxic work environments are now a primary driver of global mortality. This marks a critical shift in occupational safety, moving from traditional physical hazards to prioritizing the psychological safety of the 3.4 billion global workforce.

Lethal Metrics and Economic Impact

Work-related stress—leading to cardiovascular diseases, strokes, and suicides—claims approximately 8.4 lakh lives annually. Key risk factors include long working hours (affecting 35% of the workforce), workplace violence, AI-induced job insecurity, and severe effort-reward imbalances. Economically, this public health crisis costs 45 million disability-adjusted life years (DALYs) and results in an annual loss of 1.37% of global GDP due to absenteeism and "presenteeism" (being present but unproductive).

Underlying Challenges

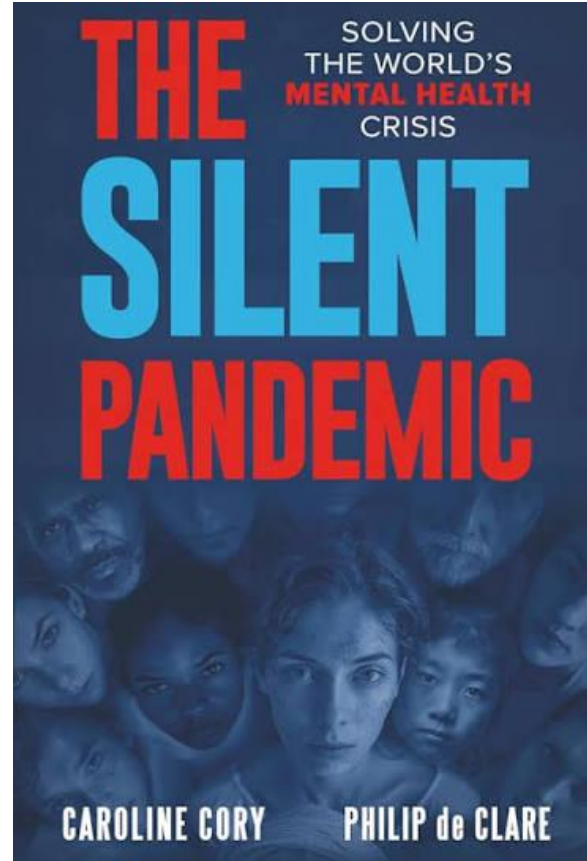
- **Invisible Scars:** Unlike physical injuries, psychosocial harm is highly stigmatized and difficult for employees to report or regulators to prove.
- **Digital Intensification:** The rise of AI-driven workflows and an "always-on" remote culture have created an "AI

treadmill," increasing workplace surveillance and pressuring humans to match machine-level speeds.

- **Legal Lacunae:** National labor laws remain outdated, focusing primarily on physical safety mechanisms (like fire exits) while ignoring toxic managerial practices and harassment.

The Way Forward

Governments must integrate psychosocial risks into mandatory Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) frameworks and legislate a clear "Right to Disconnect" to curb digital exhaustion. Organizations must transition from superficial wellness apps to structural "Organizational Justice" by ensuring manageable workloads, fair rewards, and zero-tolerance anti-bullying policies, while empowering workers through strong collective bargaining mechanisms.



PUBLIC DISCOURSE

India's Anti-Defection Law: A Safeguard for Democracy or a Legitimized Escape Route?

Introduction to the Public Discourse

The integrity of India's parliamentary democracy has long been tested by the phenomenon of political defections. In the 1960s, the phrase "*Aaya Ram Gaya Ram*" entered the Indian political lexicon after an MLA from Haryana, Gaya Lal, changed his political allegiance three times in a single day. To combat this culture of political opportunism and the destabilization of elected governments, the Parliament enacted the 52nd Constitutional Amendment Act in 1985, which introduced the Tenth Schedule, popularly known as the Anti-Defection Law.

While the original intent of the law was to curb political corruption and ensure that elected representatives remain loyal to the mandate on which they were elected, public discourse today frequently questions its efficacy. Recent high-profile political events, particularly the mass defection of lawmakers invoking the "merger" exception, have triggered a critical constitutional debate: **Is the Anti-Defection Law functioning as a deterrent, or has it inadvertently become a sophisticated tool for legitimizing wholesale defections?**

The Mechanics and the Whip System

The Tenth Schedule establishes clear grounds for disqualifying an elected Member of Parliament (MP) or Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA). According to Paragraph 2 of the Schedule, a legislator incurs disqualification if they "voluntarily give up" their party membership or if they vote or abstain from voting in the House contrary to "any direction" issued by their political party.

This direction is enforced through the "whip system." A party's chief whip acts as the critical link between the party leadership and its legislators. Whips come in varying degrees of severity, with a "three-line whip" being the strictest directive, mandating that members be present and vote strictly according to the party line. Defying a three-line whip without prior permission or subsequent condonation within 15 days leaves the legislator vulnerable to disqualification under the Tenth Schedule.

The Controversy of the "Merger" Exemption

When the law was introduced in 1985, it contained two primary exceptions to disqualification: a "split" (where one-third of a party's legislators break away) and a "merger". However, the "split" provision was widely abused to orchestrate mass defections and was subsequently deleted by the 91st Constitutional Amendment Act in 2003.

Today, the sole surviving exception is found in Paragraph 4, which exempts legislators from disqualification if their "original political party" merges with another party, provided that the merger is agreed upon by

at least two-thirds of the members of that party's legislative wing.

This clause forms the core of the current public and legal debate. **Does the law require a structural merger of the broader political party outside the legislature, or is it sufficient for two-thirds of the elected legislators to simply switch sides?**

A strict reading of Paragraph 4 suggests a twin requirement: a foundational decision by the original political party to merge, followed by the consent of two-thirds of the legislature party. As the Supreme Court noted in *Subhash Desai v. Principal Secretary, Governor of Maharashtra (2023)*, the political party and the legislature party are distinct entities; treating them interchangeably allows legislators to unilaterally sever ties with the organization that sponsored their election. Yet, lower courts and Speakers have frequently treated the two-thirds legislative strength as a standalone justification for a merger, reducing the constitutional safeguard into a mere numbers game.

The AAP Crisis: A Constitutional Stress Test

The ambiguity of the merger clause recently came under intense national scrutiny when Raghav Chadha and six other Rajya Sabha MPs broke away from the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and announced a "merger" with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Constituting exactly two-thirds of AAP's ten Rajya Sabha MPs, the rebel faction claimed absolute immunity from disqualification under Paragraph 4, and the Rajya Sabha Chairman accepted this transition as a valid merger.

The public discourse surrounding this event is rich with irony. Just four years prior, in August 2022, Raghav Chadha himself introduced a Private Member's Bill seeking to tighten the Anti-Defection Law. His proposed legislation argued that "nefarious floor crossing" bypasses the democratic wishes of the electorate. He sought to amend the Tenth Schedule to increase the threshold for a valid merger from two-thirds to a stringent three-fourths majority. Furthermore, his bill proposed a six-year election ban for defectors to prevent "Resort Politics". Had Chadha's 2022 bill been enacted, his own faction's defection would have failed, as they would have required the backing of eight MPs rather than seven.

This episode acts as a massive stress test for the Anti-Defection framework. If two-thirds of legislators can manufacture a merger independently of the party's organizational wing, critics argue that the Tenth Schedule ceases to be a safeguard against defection and instead becomes its most sophisticated disguise.

Judicial Review and the Role of the Speaker

Another intense point of public discourse is the adjudicatory mechanism of the law. Paragraph 6 of the Tenth Schedule vests the power to decide disqualification disputes exclusively in the Speaker or the Chairman of the House. Originally, Paragraph 7 entirely barred the jurisdiction of civil courts from reviewing these decisions.

However, in the landmark 1992 judgment *Kihoto Hollohan v. Zachillhu*, the Supreme Court of India struck down Paragraph 7 because it had not been ratified by state legislatures as required by Article 368 of the

Constitution. The Court established that Speakers acting under the Tenth Schedule function as judicial Tribunals. Consequently, while their decisions are final, they are not immune to judicial review by the High Courts and the Supreme Court if they suffer from jurisdictional errors, constitutional violations, mala fides, or perversity.

Despite this judicial oversight, the Speaker's role remains controversial. The Speaker's tenure is inherently dependent on the continuous support of the majority party. Unlike in the UK, Speakers in India rarely resign from their political parties upon assuming the chair. Consequently, disqualification petitions are often subjected to prolonged delays or partisan rulings. Because there is no statutory time limit for the Speaker to decide a disqualification plea, defectors frequently enjoy their new ministerial berths while petitions gather dust, thereby subverting the very essence of the law.

Does the Law Stifle Freedom of Conscience?

A parallel debate questions whether the Anti-Defection Law suppresses the democratic right to dissent. By forcing an elected representative to blindly follow the party whip, the law is accused of breaking the chain of accountability between the legislator and their electorate. As noted in public forums, MPs and MLAs are forced into servility, unable to exercise independent judgment on public policy.

Yet, the Supreme Court has consistently upheld the law's constitutionality, prioritizing institutional stability over individual dissent. The Court reasoned that a political party functions on the strength of

shared beliefs, and a legislator elected on a party's ticket owes an obligation to that party's mandate. To balance these competing interests, experts like former Vice President Hamid Ansari have suggested that the Anti-Defection Law should be restricted to critical votes that determine the survival of the government—such as No-Confidence Motions or the passage of the annual budget—allowing legislators to vote their conscience on ordinary bills.

Conclusion and the Path Forward

India's Anti-Defection Law stands at a critical crossroads. The original intention of the 52nd Amendment to eliminate the ethical degradation of floor-crossing is fundamentally sound, but its execution is faltering. The "merger" exception, combined with the partisan powers of the Speaker, has created a loophole large enough to swallow entire legislature parties, as seen in the recent AAP-BJP split.

To restore the law's credibility, several constitutional bodies—including the Law Commission and the Election Commission—have recommended that the power to disqualify lawmakers should be stripped from the Speaker and handed to the President or the Governor, acting on the binding advice of the Election Commission. Furthermore, authoritative judicial clarity is urgently needed to settle the ambiguity surrounding Paragraph 4. Until the Supreme Court categorically mandates that a legislative merger requires a corresponding organizational merger of the parent political party, the Anti-Defection Law will continue to operate less as a guardian of democratic integrity and more as a mirage.

The Long Road to Parity: Assessing India's Women's Reservation Reform

A truly representative democracy cannot exist when half of its population is systematically relegated to the margins of political power. In India, the world's largest democracy, the struggle for women's political representation has been a protracted battle against deeply entrenched patriarchal norms, structural barriers, and political apathy. The passage of the Constitution (One Hundred and Sixth Amendment) Act, 2023, widely known as the ***Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam***, was heralded as a watershed moment in the nation's history. By mandating a 33% reservation for women in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies, the Act promises to shatter the legislative glass ceiling. However, a closer examination of the reform, its delayed implementation timeline, and the lessons learned from three decades of local governance reservations reveals that the road to true gender parity remains fraught with constitutional, societal, and institutional hurdles.

The Stark Reality of Representation

To understand the necessity of this reform, one must first confront the abysmal statistics regarding women's political participation at the national level. The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) notes that globally, women hold approximately 26% of parliamentary seats. By contrast, India ranks 143rd out of 185 countries. In the 18th Lok Sabha, elected in 2024, there are only 74 women Members of

Parliament (MPs), constituting a mere 13.6% of the 543 seats. This actually represents a slight decline from the 17th Lok Sabha, which saw a historic high of 78 women MPs. **The situation is even more dire in State Legislative Assemblies, where the national average of women's representation stands at an abysmal 9%, with no state exceeding 20%.**

This underrepresentation in the legislature presents a stark dichotomy when juxtaposed with women's participation as voters. In the 2024 general elections, female voter turnout reached an impressive 65.8%, a dramatic increase from 46.6% in 1962, effectively closing the gender gap at the ballot box. Yet, the number of women actually running for office remains stubbornly low. Out of 8,049 candidates in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, less than 9% were women; in 2024, this figure barely moved to 799 candidates, or 9.5%. This gap exposes a harsh truth: while political parties gladly accept women's votes, they are overwhelmingly reluctant to share political power with them, often relegating women to "unwinnable" seats and denying them organizational backing.

Lessons from the Grassroots: The Panchayat Experience

The demand for women's political reservation is not a modern phenomenon; it dates back to the Constituent Assembly debates, where it was initially rejected on the optimistic assumption that a free democracy would naturally ensure representation for all groups. When that failed, the government introduced the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments in 1992, reserving one-third of seats for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and urban local bodies.

Thirty years later, this grassroots experiment has yielded transformative results. Over 1.4 million women have been elevated to leadership positions, and today, women hold 44% of seats in local administrative bodies across India, with states like Karnataka surpassing the 50% threshold. Research clearly demonstrates the "welfare effect" of these Elected Women Representatives (EWRs). Female leaders are less associated with corruption and are statistically more likely to invest in critical human development infrastructure, such as drinking water facilities, education, and maternal healthcare.

However, the local governance model also serves as a cautionary tale. EWRs face formidable challenges that their male counterparts do not. The policy of rotating reserved seats every five years acts as a severe barrier to career progression, preventing female leaders from capitalizing on their experience and often sending them back to the domestic sphere after a single term. Furthermore, the phenomenon of proxy representation—commonly known as the *Sarpanch Pati* syndrome—remains a grim reality, wherein male family members wield the actual power while the elected woman serves merely as a figurehead. Additionally, structural policies in certain states, such as the two-child norm or minimum educational qualifications for contesting elections, disproportionately disqualify women, who often lack access to family planning choices and formal education. The gender digital divide further hampers their administrative efficiency in an increasingly digitized governance landscape.

The 106th Amendment: A Delayed Promise

It is against this complex backdrop that the *Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam* must be evaluated. The legislation inserts new articles (Article 330A and 332A) into the Constitution, reserving seats for women in the Lok Sabha, State Assemblies, and the National Capital Territory of Delhi. **The passage of the bill breaks a 27-year legislative deadlock, during which previous versions were repeatedly blocked or lapsed due to chaotic opposition in Parliament.**

Yet, the victory is heavily caveated by Article 334A, which dictates that the reservation will only come into effect following a delimitation exercise based on the first census published after the Act's commencement. Because the 2021 census was indefinitely delayed and the allocation of parliamentary seats is currently frozen until after 2026, critics rightly point out that the actual implementation of the quota may not materialize until the 2029 or even 2034 elections. This linkage has been heavily criticized as a "delay tactic" that defers gender justice for at least another electoral cycle.

Furthermore, the impending delimitation exercise raises profound constitutional stakes. Should the government proceed with an expedited delimitation using outdated 2011 census data, it would result in constituencies being redrawn on the basis of demographic realities that are fifteen years out of date, severely compromising the fairness of electoral representation. Moreover, the Union government's proposed pro-rata model—increasing seats for all states in proportion to their current share to prevent southern states from losing

representation arguably conflicts with Articles 81 and 82 of the Constitution, which require seat distribution to reflect updated population data. Expanding the Lok Sabha to accommodate the quota without addressing broader questions of parliamentary design, such as strengthening the Rajya Sabha as a forum for state representation, risks centralising power further. It is also worth noting that the 106th Amendment explicitly omits the Rajya Sabha and State Legislative Councils from the reservation mandate, creating a glaring representation gap in the upper chambers of Indian lawmaking.

The Intersecting Debates: Merit, Caste, and Alternatives

Beyond the timeline and constitutional mechanics, the ideological debate surrounding the reservation reform remains highly polarized. Opponents often invoke the principle of "meritocracy," arguing that gender quotas compromise candidate quality and restrict voter choice. However, this argument willfully ignores the fact that Indian politics is already heavily influenced by money, muscle power, and nepotism—forces that actively disadvantage women. As proponents counter, Article 15(3) of the Indian Constitution empowers the state to enact special provisions for women to achieve substantive equality. Achieving a "critical mass" of 30-35% female representation is historically proven to be the threshold required for marginalized groups to meaningfully influence policy without being sidelined.

A more valid critique comes from the lens of intersectionality. Political leaders across various parties have highlighted the Act's failure to include sub-quotas for women from Other Backward Classes (OBCs) and

religious minorities. Without these sub-quotas, there is a legitimate fear that the benefits of the reservation will be monopolised by highly educated, urban, upper-caste women, leaving behind Dalit, tribal, and rural women who face the harshest brunt of systemic marginalisation.

Charting the Way Forward

While the 106th Amendment sets a legal framework for eventual parity, India cannot afford to wait until 2029 to empower its female politicians. In the interim, alternative and complementary mechanisms must be aggressively pursued.

First, political parties must be held accountable. Rather than waiting for legal mandates, parties can implement voluntary quotas, much like the Trinamool Congress (which boasts 38% women among its Lok Sabha MPs) or the Naam Tamilar Katchi (which fielded 50% female candidates). Institutionalising internal party quotas shifts the burden of finding and nurturing female leaders onto political organizations rather than relying solely on geographical seat reservations. Alternatively, legal reforms introducing proportional representation via a Party List System—where parties must alternate male and female candidates on their lists—could ensure immediate gender parity without the complexities of seat delimitation and constituency rotation.

Second, massive capacity-building initiatives are required to support women navigating the treacherous waters of Indian politics. Mentorship programs, financial subsidies for electoral campaigns, and stringent measures by the Election Commission to curb political violence and cyber-harassment are non-

negotiable prerequisites to make public life safe and accessible for women.

The *Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam* is an undeniable milestone, acknowledging that compensatory justice is required to offset millennia of patriarchal exclusion. However, legislation alone is insufficient. Political

reservation must serve as a ladder, not a ceiling. The true success of this reform will be measured not by the delayed redrawing of electoral maps, but by India's collective willingness to dismantle the social, financial, and institutional barriers that prevent women from claiming their rightful place in the halls of power.

PREP ZONE

CA QUIZ -MAY

FROM Deep Dive:

Q1. The three-stage nuclear power programme of India was formulated by Dr. Homi Bhabha to leverage the country's vast resources of which mineral?

- A. Plutonium
- B. Thorium
- C. Beryllium
- D. Uranium

Q2. What is the primary technical objective of the 'Second Stage' (Fast Breeder Reactors) in India's nuclear programme?

- A. To use natural uranium to generate electricity and thorium.
- B. To decommission old reactors and store spent fuel safely.
- C. To achieve nuclear fusion using deuterium and tritium.
- D. To burn Plutonium-239 to breed more fuel from Uranium-238 or Thorium-232

Q3. India is a member of several global export control regimes. Which of the following is India NOT yet a member of?

- A. Wassenaar Arrangement
- B. Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR)
- C. Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG)
- D. Australia Group

Q4. Which Indian nuclear reactor is the first to be placed under International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards as a result of the 'Separation Plan'?

- A. CIRUS
- B. The Prototype Fast Breeder Reactor (PFBR) at Kalpakkam
- C. Dhruva
- D. Rajasthan Atomic Power Station (RAPS) units

Q5. India has not signed the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). What is the primary official reason cited by India for this stance?

- A. The treaty is discriminatory, dividing the world into 'nuclear haves' and 'have-nots' with different rules for each.
- B. It wants to hide its nuclear inventory from the world.
- C. The treaty mandates that India must share its Thorium technology.
- D. The treaty prohibits the use of nuclear energy for electricity.

Q6. Which Article of the Indian Constitution mandates the Parliament to enact a Delimitation Act after every Census?

- A. Article 324
- B. Article 82
- C. Article 72
- D. Article 170

Q7. The 84th Amendment Act, 2001, extended the freeze on the total number of seats in the Lok Sabha. Until which year was this freeze extended?

- A. 2050
- B. 2011
- C. 2026

D.2031

Q8. The 'Delimitation Commission' is often referred to as a high-power body. Who appoints the members of this Commission?

- A. The President of India
- B. The Parliament of India
- C. The Chief Justice of India
- D. The Law Minister

Q9. One of the major concerns regarding future delimitation is 'Demographic Divergence'. What does this refer to in the Indian context?

- A. The difference in religion between urban and rural populations.
- B. The gap in population growth rates between Northern and Southern states, which could lead to Southern states losing political weight.
- C. The increase in the number of female voters compared to male voters.
- D. The migration of people from India to foreign countries.

Q11. What is the primary objective of delimitation in a representative democracy like India?

- A. To increase the geographic area of every constituency after every census.
- B. To reduce the number of political parties participating in elections.
- C. To provide 'One Vote, One Value' by ensuring roughly equal population segments are represented by one legislator.
- D. To ensure that each state has an equal number of seats in the Lok Sabha regardless of population.

Q12. Which census currently forms the basis for the *internal* readjustment of boundaries (within states) for Lok Sabha seats?

- A. 2011 Census
- B. 2001 Census
- C. 1971 Census
- D. 1951 Census

Q13. Which of the following is NOT a member of the Delimitation Commission?

- A. The Election Commissioners of the respective States
- B. The Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha
- C. A retired Judge of the Supreme Court
- D. The Chief Election Commissioner

FROM NEWS GIST:

Q1. With reference to Form 6 under the electoral framework in India, consider the following statements:

1. It is used for inclusion of name in the electoral roll.
2. It can be filed only offline through the Electoral Registration Officer (ERO).
3. Non-resident Indians (NRIs) can also use Form 6 under certain conditions.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 1 and 3 only
- C. 2 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

Q2. Which of the following mechanisms can the ECI use to address large-scale irregularities in electoral rolls?

1. Booth Level Officers (BLOs) verification
2. Aadhaar seeding (voluntary linking)
3. Social audit by political parties
4. Use of GIS-based mapping

Select the correct answer:

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 1, 2 and 4 only
- C. 2 and 3 only
- D. 1, 3 and 4 only

Q3. With reference to the Jan Vishwas (Amendment of Provisions) Act, 2023 and proposed Jan Vishwas 2.0 reforms, consider the following statements:

1. The primary objective is to reduce compliance burden and improve ease of doing business.
2. It replaces imprisonment provisions for all economic offences with monetary penalties.
3. It promotes trust-based governance by decriminalizing minor and technical offences.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 1 and 3 only
- B. 1 and 2 only
- C. 2 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

Q4. With reference to transgender rights in India, consider the following statements:

1. The Supreme Court in National Legal Services Authority v. Union of India recognized transgender persons as a "third gender."
2. The judgment affirmed that gender identity is integral to personal autonomy under Article 21.
3. It mandated reservations for transgender persons under Articles 15 and 16 as a fundamental right.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

Q5. Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019:

1. It provides for a certificate of identity issued by the District Magistrate.
2. It fully adopts the principle of self-identification without any administrative process.
3. It prohibits discrimination in education, employment, healthcare, and access to public goods.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 1 and 3 only
- B. 2 only
- C. 1, 2 and 3
- D. 1 only

Q6. Consider the following statements about the

National Curriculum Framework (NCF):

1. It provides guiding principles for school education in India.
2. It is legally binding on all states and institutions.
3. It is periodically revised to reflect societal and educational changes.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 1 and 3 only
- B. 2 only
- C. 1, 2 and 3
- D. 1 only

Q7. Consider the following statements regarding curriculum regulation in India:

1. Education is a subject in the Concurrent List.
2. States have no role in curriculum development after the adoption of National Curriculum Framework (NCF).
3. NCERT develops curriculum guidelines, while states can adapt them.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 1 and 3 only
- B. 2 only
- C. 1, 2 and 3
- D. 1 only

Q8. The work of Savitribai Phule is most closely associated with:

1. Promotion of women's education
2. Abolition of sati
3. Upliftment of marginalized communities
4. Widow remarriage movement

Select the correct answer:

- A. 1 and 3 only
- B. 2 and 4 only
- C. 1, 2 and 3 only
- D. 1, 3 and 4 only

Q9. With reference to the right to vote in India, consider the following statements:

1. The right to vote is a fundamental right under Part III of the Constitution.
2. It is a statutory right derived from the Representation of the People Act, 1950.
3. It is subject to reasonable restrictions imposed by law.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 2 and 3 only
- B. 1 and 2 only
- C. 1 and 3 only
- D. 2 only

Q10. Which of the following forces are categorized as Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs)?

1. Central Reserve Police Force

2. Border Security Force
3. Assam Rifles
4. National Security Guard

Select the correct answer:

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 1, 2 and 3 only
- C. 1, 2, 3 and 4
- D. 2 and 4 only

Q11.CAPF (General Administration) Act, 2026, consider the following statements:

1. It seeks to create a unified administrative framework for all Central Armed Police Forces.
2. It merges all CAPFs into a single force with a unified command structure.
3. It aims to standardize service conditions, recruitment, and disciplinary mechanisms.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 1 and 3 only
- B. 2 only
- C. 1, 2 and 3
- D. 1 only

Q12.With reference to the Jaagat Jot Sri Guru Granth Sahib Satkar (Amendment) Act, 2026, consider the following statements:

1. It prescribes a minimum punishment of 7 years, which may extend to life imprisonment for acts of sacrilege.
2. The Act applies exclusively to the desecration of the Sri Guru Granth Sahib.

3. It was enacted to supplement existing provisions under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS).

Which of the statements given above is/are correct? (a) 1 and 2 only (b) 2 and 3 only (c) 1 and 3 only (d) 1, 2, and 3

Q13.Which of the following Constitutional provisions provides the primary basis for the State's power to enact and revise minimum wage laws?

- (a) Article 39(d): Equal pay for equal work for both men and women.
- (b) Article 43: State shall endeavour to secure a living wage and a decent standard of life for all workers.
- (c) Article 23: Prohibition of traffic in human beings and forced labour. (d) Seventh Schedule: "Labour" as a subject in the Union List

Q14.With reference to the Uttar Pradesh Minimum Wage Revision 2026, consider the following statements:

1. The revision introduced a three-tier district classification, with Category I comprising Gautam Buddha Nagar and Ghaziabad.
2. The new wage structure was notified under the provisions of the Code on Wages, 2019, which became fully enforceable in November 2025.
3. The revision applies uniformly to all 74 scheduled employments without any differentiation based on skill levels.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct? (a) 1 only (b) 1 and 2 only (c) 2 and 3 only (d) 1, 2, and 3

Q15. With reference to the Supreme Court's 2026 mandate on "Inclusive Prison Reforms," consider the following statements:

1. The Court held that caste-based labor allocation in prisons violates the "right to live with dignity" under Article 21.
2. It directed the Union Government to move "Prisons" from the State List to the Concurrent List of the Seventh Schedule.
3. The ruling mandates that prison manuals must strictly adhere to the "Model Prison Manual 2016" guidelines regarding the non-segregation of habitual offenders by caste.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct? (a) 1 and 2 only (b) 1 and 3 only (c) 2 and 3 only (d) 1, 2, and 3

Q16. Consider the following Supreme Court judgments and their themes:

- **Shreya Singhal v. Union of India:** Struck down Section 66A of the IT Act to protect online Free Speech.
- **Justice K.S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India:** Established Privacy as a Fundamental Right under Article 21.
- **Anuradha Bhasin v. Union of India:** Declared that freedom of speech and trade over the internet is a fundamental right.

Which of the pairs given above are correctly matched? (a) 1 and 2 only (b) 2 and 3 only (c) 1 and 3 only (d) 1, 2, and 3

Q17. With reference to the recently contracted VSHORAD (Very Short Range Air Defence) systems, consider the following statements:

1. It is a Man-Portable Air Defence System (MANPAD) designed specifically for neutralizing low-altitude aerial threats in mountainous terrain.
2. The system is propelled by a dual-thrust solid motor and incorporates an uncooled Imaging Infrared (IIR) seeker.
3. These systems are being procured from a foreign Original Equipment Manufacturer (OEM) under a "Global-Buy" emergency procurement.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct? (a) 1 and 2 only (b) 2 and 3 only (c) 1 and 3 only (d) 1, 2, and 3

Q18. Consider the following pairs regarding UN Peacekeeping initiatives and their objectives:

- **Action for Peacekeeping (A4P):** Aimed at refocusing peacekeeping with more targeted mandates and stronger missions.
- **UNSCR 2589 (2021):** A resolution co-sponsored by India calling for accountability for crimes against peacekeepers.
- **Operation Blue Star:** The specific code name for Indian tactical operations within the UNIFIL framework.

Which of the pairs given above are correctly matched? (a) 1 and 2 only (b) 2 and 3 only (c) 1 and 3 only (d) 1, 2, and 3

Q19. With reference to the geography of the Strait of Hormuz, consider the following statements:

1. It connects the Persian Gulf with the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea.
2. The Musandam Peninsula, which forms the southern coast of the strait, is an exclave of Oman.
3. At its narrowest point, the strait is approximately 21 miles wide, placing the shipping lanes within the territorial waters of Iran and Oman.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct? (a) 1 and 2 only (b) 2 and 3 only (c) 1 and 3 only (d) 1, 2, and 3

Q20. With reference to Austria's international standing and its relationship with India, consider the following statements:

1. Austria is a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) but maintains a policy of "Active Neutrality."
2. The "Declaration of Neutrality" (1955) is a constitutional act that prohibits Austria from joining military alliances or allowing foreign military bases.
3. India was the first country to establish diplomatic relations with Austria following the end of World War II.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct? (a) 1 and 2 only (b) 2 only (c) 2 and 3 only (d) 1, 2, and 3

Q21. With reference to India's development cooperation with Africa, consider the following statements:

1. The "Duty-Free Tariff Preference (DFTP)" scheme provides unilateral market access to Least Developed Countries (LDCs), many of which are in Africa.
2. The **e-VidyaBharti and e-ArogyaBharti (e-VBAB)** network project is the successor to the Pan-Africa e-Network Project, focusing on tele-education and tele-medicine.
3. India is the largest contributor of troops to UN Peacekeeping missions specifically deployed within the African continent.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct? (a) 1 and 2 only (b) 2 and 3 only (c) 1 and 3 only (d) 1, 2, and 3

Q22. The 2026 defense engagement is anchored in which of the following foundational frameworks?

1. The Bilateral Defence Cooperation Agreement of 2006.
2. The India–EU Security and Defence Partnership (2026).
3. The Green and Sustainable Development Partnership (GSDP).

Select the correct code: (a) 1 and 2 only (b) 2 and 3 only (c) 1 and 3 only (d) 1, 2, and 3

Q23. With reference to the "India Semiconductor Mission (ISM)," consider the following statements:

1. It is a specialized and independent Business Division within the Digital India Corporation.
2. The mission provides a uniform fiscal support of 50% of the project cost for all technology nodes in setting up Semiconductor Fabs in India.
3. The "Design Linked Incentive (DLI) Scheme" offers financial and infrastructure support to domestic startups and MSMEs for five years.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct? (a) 1 and 2 only (b) 2 and 3 only (c) 1 and 3 only (d) 1, 2, and 3

Q24.Consider the following pairs of Mosquito-Borne Diseases and their Vaccines:

- **Malaria:** Mosquirix (RTS,S) / R21 Matrix-M.
- **Yellow Fever:** 17D Vaccine.
- **Dengue:** Qdenga / Dengvaxia.

Which of the pairs given above are correctly matched? (a) 1 and 2 only (b) 2 and 3 only (c) 1 and 3 only (d) 1, 2, and 3

Q25.With reference to the "Triple Delivery" by GRSE in April 2026, consider the following statements:

1. The delivery included a P-17A Stealth Frigate, a Survey Vessel (Large), and an Anti-Submarine Warfare Shallow Water Craft (ASW-SWC).
2. All three vessels were constructed using the "Integrated Construction" methodology to reduce the build period.

3. This is the first time in Indian maritime history that a single shipyard has delivered three frontline warships to the Navy on the same day.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct? (a) 1 and 2 only (b) 2 and 3 only (c) 1 and 3 only (d) 1, 2, and 3

Q26.With reference to Pediatric Cancer in India, consider the following statements:

1. Unlike adult cancers, lifestyle factors like tobacco and alcohol are the primary drivers of cancer in children.
2. Leukemia (blood cancer) is the most common type of pediatric cancer in India, followed by lymphomas and central nervous system tumors.
3. India currently has a lower cure rate for childhood cancers (~30-40%) compared to high-income countries (~80%), primarily due to late-stage presentation and "abandonment of treatment."

Which of the statements given above is/are correct? (a) 1 and 2 only (b) 2 and 3 only (c) 1 and 3 only (d) 1, 2, and 3

Q27.With reference to the INS Aridhaman (S3), consider the following statements:

1. It is the second indigenously designed and built Nuclear-powered Ballistic Missile Submarine (SSBN) under the Advanced Technology Vessel (ATV) project.
2. Compared to INS Arihant, INS Aridhaman features a significantly higher number of vertical launch tubes (VLS), doubling its missile carrying capacity.

3. It is powered by a pressurized water reactor (PWR) using high-enriched uranium, developed with technical assistance from France.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct? (a) 1 and 2 only (b) 2 and 3 only (c) 1 and 3 only (d) 1, 2, and 3

Q28.With reference to "Custom AI Chips" (ASICs) being developed by AI labs, consider the following statements:

1. ASICs (Application-Specific Integrated Circuits) are designed to perform a wide range of general-purpose computing tasks more efficiently than a standard CPU.
2. Custom AI chips often prioritize "Matrix Multiplication" and high-bandwidth memory (HBM) to accelerate the training and inference of Large Language Models (LLMs).
3. Developing in-house silicon allows AI companies to reduce their dependence on third-party GPU providers and optimize software-hardware integration.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct? (a) 1 and 2 only (b) 2 and 3 only (c) 1 and 3 only (d) 1, 2, and 3

Q29.With reference to the "Nuclear Fuel Cycle," consider the following statements:

1. The "Front-End" of the cycle involves uranium mining, milling, and the enrichment process to increase the concentration of U-235.
2. An "Open Fuel Cycle" involves reprocessing spent fuel to recover plutonium and unused uranium for further power generation.

3. The "Back-End" of the cycle includes the vitrification of high-level radioactive waste for long-term geological disposal.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct? (a) 1 and 2 only (b) 1 and 3 only (c) 2 and 3 only (d) 1, 2, and 3

Q30.With reference to the 'J-Slab' track system being installed for the Bullet Train project, consider the following statements:

1. It is a precast ballastless track system consisting of a reinforced concrete slab, a cement asphalt mortar (CAM) layer, and a track bed.
2. Unlike traditional tracks, it uses 'ballast' (crushed stones) to provide high elasticity and vibration absorption for trains traveling above 300 km/h.
3. The system is based on the Japanese Shinkansen technology, known for its high safety standards and low maintenance requirements.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct? (a) 1 and 2 only (b) 1 and 3 only (c) 3 only (d) 1, 2, and 3

Q31.With reference to Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF), consider the following statements:

1. SAF is a "drop-in" fuel, meaning it can be mixed with conventional Jet A-1 fuel without requiring modifications to existing aircraft engines or infrastructure.
2. It is produced exclusively from food crops like sugarcane and corn, leading to significant "food vs. fuel" security concerns.

3. SAF can reduce lifecycle carbon emissions by up to 80% compared to traditional fossil-based aviation turbine fuel.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct? (a) 1 and 2 only (b) 2 and 3 only (c) 1 and 3 only (d) 1, 2, and 3

Q32.The "CORSIA" framework, which India has recently committed to for international aviation emission monitoring, stands for:

- (a) Carbon Offsetting and Reduction Scheme for International Aviation
- (b) Collaborative Ozone Recovery and Solar Infrastructure Act
- (c) Council for Regional Sustainable International Aerospace
- (d) Climate Oriented Regional Sectoral Integrated Agreement

Q33.The "Heat Index" (HI), recently launched by the IMD, provides information regarding:

- (a) The amount of solar radiation absorbed by the Earth's crust.
- (b) The impact of humidity combined with air temperature to determine "how it feels" to the human body.
- (c) The rate of glacier melt in the Hindu Kush Himalayan region.
- (d) The total carbon footprint of urban heat islands (UHIs).

Q34.With reference to the phenomenon of "Rainfall Intensity," consider the following statements:

1. It refers to the ratio of the total amount of rain to the duration of the rainfall event.

2. Climate change has led to a "squeezing" of the monsoon, where more rain falls in fewer, more intense "burst" events.
3. High-intensity rainfall allows for better groundwater recharge as the water has more force to penetrate deep soil layers.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct? (a) 1 and 2 only (b) 2 and 3 only (c) 1 and 3 only (d) 1, 2, and 3

Q35.Consider the following international conventions ratified by India:

- **UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC)**
- **Palermo Protocol (Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons)**
- **SAARC Convention on Preventing and Combating Trafficking in Women and Children**

Which of the above are relevant to the "Judicial Call for Action" for cross-border cooperation? (a) 1 and 2 only (b) 2 and 3 only (c) 1 and 3 only (d) 1, 2, and 3

Q36.With reference to the constitutional and legal safeguards against human trafficking in India, consider the following statements:

1. **Article 23** of the Indian Constitution prohibits "traffic in human beings and begar" and other similar forms of forced labor.
2. The **Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act (ITPA), 1956**, is the primary legislation for the prevention of

trafficking for commercial sexual exploitation.

3. The National Investigation Agency (NIA) has been designated as the national-level nodal agency to investigate cases of organized human trafficking.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct? (a) 1 and 2 only (b) 2 and 3 only (c) 1 and 3 only (d) 1, 2, and 3

Q37. With reference to the Mental Healthcare Act (MHCA), 2017, consider the following statements:

1. The Act effectively decriminalized suicide by creating a statutory presumption of severe stress for any person who attempts it.
2. It prohibits the use of Electroconvulsive Therapy (ECT) without the use of muscle relaxants and anesthesia.
3. Every person has the right to make an "Advance Directive" specifying how they wish to be treated (or not treated) for a mental illness.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct? (a) 1 and 2 only (b) 2 and 3 only (c) 1 and 3 only (d) 1, 2, and 3

Q38. The concept of "Dignity" in the context of mental health, as upheld by the Supreme Court in the *Navtej Singh Johar* case, is primarily derived from:

- (a) Article 14 (Right to Equality)
- (b) Article 19 (Right to Freedom of Speech)
- (c) Article 21 (Right to Life and Personal Liberty)
- (d) Article 25 (Freedom of Religion)

Q39. In the context of the "Bauxite Express" and mining in Odisha, the 'Samatha Judgment' of the Supreme Court is significant because it ruled that:

- (a) Private mining companies have an absolute right to exploit minerals in tribal areas if they pay market compensation.
- (b) Government land in Scheduled Areas cannot be leased to private companies for mining; only state-owned corporations or tribal cooperatives can mine there.
- (c) The Gram Sabha has no say in mining projects that are of "National Importance."
- (d) Forest clearance is not required for bauxite mining if the area is not a "Protected Forest."

Q40. With reference to the "Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020," consider the following statements:

1. It empowers the State Government to exempt any new factory from the provisions of the Code to create more economic activity.
2. The Code mandates that no worker shall be required or allowed to work in an establishment for more than eight hours in a day.
3. It introduces the concept of a "Social Security Fund" for unorganized workers, including gig and platform workers.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct? (a) 1 and 2 only (b) 2 and 3 only (c) 3 only (d) 1, 2, and 3

Q41. With reference to the "Critical Minerals" of India, consider the following statements:

1. Critical minerals are those that are essential for economic development and national security, but whose supply chain is vulnerable to disruption.
2. The Ministry of Mines has identified a list of 30 critical minerals, including Lithium, Cobalt, and Rare Earth Elements (REEs).
3. Under the MMDR Amendment Act 2023, the Central Government is empowered to auction blocks for critical and strategic minerals.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct? (a) 1 and 2 only (b) 2 and 3 only (c) 1 and 3 only (d) 1, 2, and 3

Q42. With reference to the Plastic Waste Management (Amendment) Rules, 2026, consider the following statements:

1. It introduces a 'carry-forward' mechanism allowing companies to fulfill missed recycling targets over the subsequent three years.
2. Companies utilizing this flexibility must meet at least 50% of the unfulfilled deficit annually.
3. The amendment marks a shift from a recycling-centric approach to a circular model emphasizing mandatory reuse.

How many of the statements given above are correct?

- A. Only two
- B. All three

- C. Only one
- D. None

Q43. Regarding the Great Nicobar Island (GNI), consider the following statements:

1. It is the southernmost point of India's territory.
2. The island is home to the Shompen, a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG).
3. The entire island is designated as a UNESCO World Network of Biosphere Reserves.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- A. 1 and 3 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1, 2, and 3
- D. 1 and 2 only

Q44. Regarding Biomass Gasification technology for clean cooking, consider the following statements:

1. It involves the complete combustion of biomass in an oxygen-rich environment to produce heat.
2. The process produces 'syngas', which primarily consists of Hydrogen, Carbon Monoxide, and Methane.
3. Modern gasification stoves can achieve thermal efficiencies comparable to or higher than traditional open-fire 'chulhas'.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 1 and 3 only
- C. 2 and 3 only

D.1, 2, and 3

Q45.Regarding the 'PM-Surya Ghar: Muft Bijli Yojana', consider the following statements:

1. It aims to provide up to 300 units of free electricity every month to one crore households.
2. The scheme provides a subsidy covering up to 40% of the cost for solar plants up to 3 kW capacity.
3. Rural Local Bodies and Urban Local Bodies are incentivized to promote rooftop solar in their areas.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- A.2 and 3 only
- B.1 and 2 only
- C.1, 2, and 3
- D.1 and 3 only

Q46.With reference to the recent operationalization of 30 mineral blocks in FY2025-26, consider the following statements:

1. The operationalization includes a significant number of 'Critical and Strategic' minerals.
2. The Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Act, 2023, empowered the Central Government to auction these critical minerals directly.
3. Most of these blocks are located in the coastal regions to facilitate immediate export.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- A.1 and 2 only
- B.1 and 3 only
- C.1, 2, and 3
- D.2 and 3 only

Q47.Regarding the 'Gig Economy' which often absorbs displaced tech workers, consider the following statements:

1. It is characterized by short-term contracts and freelance work as opposed to permanent jobs.
2. The Code on Social Security (2020) in India for the first time recognized 'gig workers' and 'platform workers'.
3. Gig workers in India currently enjoy the same pension and gratuity benefits as regular government employees.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- A.2 and 3 only
- B.1, 2, and 3
- C.1 and 2 only
- D.1 and 3 only

Q48.With reference to the Customs Duty Exemption on critical petrochemicals for FY 2026-27, consider the following statements:

1. The exemption primarily targets 'feedstock' materials like Naphtha and Ethane to lower input costs for downstream industries.
2. This policy move is a fiscal tool intended to curb 'inverted duty structures' where raw

materials are taxed higher than finished goods.

3. Such exemptions are automatically renewed annually under the Finance Act unless specifically repealed.

How many of the statements given above are correct?

- A. All three
- B. None
- C. Only one
- D. Only two

Q49.Consider the following chemicals often categorized as 'Critical Petrochemicals' in Indian trade notifications:

- 1. Paraxylene
- 2. Ethylene Glycol
- 3. Vinyl Chloride Monomer
- 4. Purified Terephthalic Acid (PTA)

Which of the above are essential precursors for the 'Textile and Polyester' industry in India?

- A.1, 2, 3 and 4
- B.2 and 3 only
- C.1, 3 and 4 only
- D.1, 2 and 4 only

Q50.Which of the following platforms has been exported by India?

- 1. BrahMos missile
- 2. Dornier Do-228 aircraft
- 3. Pinaka rocket system

Select the correct answer:

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 and 2 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

Q51.Consider the following statements regarding PNG:

- 1. It is mainly used for domestic cooking and industrial fuel.
- 2. It is transported through cryogenic tankers.
- 3. It is considered cleaner than LPG and coal.

Which of the statements is/are correct?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 1 and 3 only
- C. 2 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

Q52.Mission-mode PNG expansion contributes to which of the following?

- 1. Reduction in urban air pollution
- 2. Energy security
- 3. Increase in coal dependency

Select the correct answer:

- A. 1 only
- B. 1 and 2 only
- C. 2 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

Q53.Which of the following issues has been a major concern prompting IBC reforms?

- 1. Delays in resolution process
- 2. Low recovery rates in some sectors
- 3. Judicial backlogs in NCLT
- 4. Excessive control by promoters during insolvency

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 1, 2 and 3 only
- C. 1, 3 and 4 only
- D. 1, 2, 3 and 4

Q54. Consider the following statements:

1. Generic drugs are bioequivalent to branded drugs.
2. India is often called the “pharmacy of the world.”
3. Patented drugs are always cheaper than generics.

Which are correct?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 only
- C. 1, 2 and 3
- D. 1 only

Q55. India’s strategic interest in Iran is also linked to:

- A. Arctic shipping routes
- B. Access to Central Asia via Chabahar Port
- C. NATO cooperation
- D. ASEAN trade bloc

Q56. Which of the following are challenges posed by renewable energy integration?

1. Intermittency of solar and wind
2. Frequency fluctuations
3. Predictable generation patterns
4. Need for balancing reserves

- A. 1, 2 and 4 only
- B. 1 and 3 only
- C. 2 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2, 3 and 4

Q57. With reference to corporate governance in India, consider:

1. Independent Directors must be free from material pecuniary relationships
2. SEBI mandates certain board composition norms for listed companies
3. Independent Directors are appointed only by regulators

Which are correct?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 only
- C. 1, 2 and 3
- D. 1 only

Q58. In the context of international trade and IPR, what does the term 'Compulsory Licensing' primarily refer to under the TRIPS agreement?

- A. The automatic expiration of a drug patent after 10 years to allow for generic competition.
- B. A government authorization allowing someone else to produce a patented product without the consent of the patent owner.
- C. The mandatory registration of all life-saving drugs with the World Health Organization.
- D. A trade policy where a country mandates 100% tariffs on imported patented medications.

Q59. The US 'Special 301 Report' is frequently in the news concerning India. What is the primary purpose of this report?

- A. To track the global export volume of generic medicines from developing nations.

- B. To monitor compliance with international climate change agreements in the manufacturing sector.
- C. To identify countries that do not provide adequate and effective protection of intellectual property rights.
- D. To allocate subsidies for US-based pharmaceutical research and development.

Q60. Which of the following is considered the primary 'capital expenditure' (CAPEX) barrier for an MSME unit intending to switch from coal to Piped Natural Gas (PNG)?

- A. The cost of hiring specialized environmental lawyers for carbon credit filing.
- B. The monthly subscription fee paid to the City Gas Distribution (CGD) network.
- C. The electricity charges required to pump the gas into the factory premises.
- D. The cost of modifying existing boilers and burners to handle gas-based combustion.

Q61. One major deterrent for MSMEs is the 'Take-or-Pay' clause in PNG contracts.

What does this clause typically mandate?

- A. The consumer must pay for a minimum contracted quantity of gas even if they do not consume it.
- B. The MSME must take an insurance policy before the gas connection is activated.
- C. The gas provider must pay a fine if they fail to provide 24/7 supply.
- D. The government must pay the MSME a subsidy for every unit of gas consumed.

Q62. The 'Rupee Payment Mechanism' established between India and Iran was primarily designed to bypass which of the following?

- A. The physical transport bottlenecks in the Strait of Hormuz.
- B. The international SWIFT banking system and US-led financial sanctions.
- C. The high tariffs imposed by the World Trade Organization on crude oil.
- D. The volatility of the Indian Rupee against the Iranian Rial.

Q63. The concept of 'Ramping Up' or 'Ramping Down' in a thermal power plant is critical for green energy integration because:

- A. It allows thermal plants to use solar energy as a starter fuel.
- B. It prevents the grid from operating at a frequency higher than 60 Hz.
- C. Thermal plants must increase output when solar generation drops during sunset to maintain grid balance.
- D. Ramping is the only way to generate electricity from coal without emitting CO_2 .

Q64. In the context of grid management, what does the term 'Ancillary Services' refer to?

- A. The import of emergency power from neighboring countries like Nepal and Bhutan.
- B. Administrative services provided by DISCOMs for bill collection.
- C. Services required to support the transmission of energy while maintaining reliable operation and grid frequency.
- D. The secondary transmission lines used to supply power to rural households.

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Q66. Under the current 'Must-Run' status in India, renewable energy plants can only be curtailed under which of the following conditions?

- A. During periods of low electricity demand in urban areas.
- B. When the state government wants to promote its own local power plants. State-level preference is not a valid technical or legal reason for curtailment.
- C. To maintain grid security or to ensure the safety of equipment and personnel.
- D. When the cost of thermal power becomes cheaper than renewable power.

Q67. What is the economic implication of the 'Deviation Settlement Mechanism' (DSM) for a renewable energy developer?

- A. It imposes a financial penalty if the actual power injected differs significantly from the scheduled forecast.
- B. It eliminates the need for developers to pay Goods and Services Tax (GST).
- C. It provides a fixed subsidy for every unit of solar power generated.
- D. It guarantees a 100% return on investment within the first five years.

Q68. Consider the following initiatives regarding independent directors in India:

1. Mandatory inclusion of IDs on listed company boards
2. Creation of a databank for independent directors
3. Mandatory certification or training programs

Which of the above are part of governance reforms?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1, 2 and 3
- D. 1 only

Q69. The 'Migrant Exit' from industrial hubs is often linked to the concept of 'Push and Pull Factors'. Which of the following is a typical 'Push Factor' in the context of internal migration in India?

- A. Government incentives for workers to move to industrial corridors.
- B. The availability of high-paying industrial jobs in cities like Surat.
- C. The presence of superior healthcare and educational facilities in urban centers.
- D. Lack of sustainable livelihood opportunities and agricultural distress in rural areas.

Q70. What is the 'Bullwhip Effect' in a supply chain, which often occurs during disruptions like the one in Surat?

- A. The use of automated machinery to speed up the weaving process.

- B. When a small fluctuation in consumer demand leads to increasingly larger fluctuations in orders up the supply chain.
- C. The government's policy of 'whipping' industries into compliance with environmental laws.
- D. When the price of raw material (yarn) drops suddenly due to oversupply.

Q71.The Galathea Bay, often mentioned in the project, is important because:

- A. It is a major coral mining site
- B. It serves as a potential site for a transshipment port
- C. It is India's largest mangrove forest
- D. It is a freshwater lake

Q72.The strategic development of Great Nicobar aligns with which of the following broader initiatives?

- 1. SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region)
- 2. Act East Policy
- 3. Indo-Pacific strategy

Select the correct answer using the code below:

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1, 2 and 3
- D. 1 only

Q73.With reference to Danish Chamber of Commerce in India, consider the following statements:

- 1. It aims to promote bilateral trade and investment between India and Denmark.

- 2. It functions as a regulatory authority over Indian companies.
- 3. It facilitates business networking and policy advocacy.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 1 and 3 only
- B. 2 only
- C. 1 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

Q74.With reference to “base load” in power systems, consider the following statements:

- 1. It refers to the minimum level of demand on an electrical grid over a period.
- 2. Base load is typically met by intermittent renewable sources like solar and wind.
- 3. Coal and nuclear power plants are commonly used to meet base load demand.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 1 and 3 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

Q75.In the context of power sector policy, “merit order dispatch” refers to:

- A. Prioritizing renewable energy regardless of cost
- B. Dispatching electricity starting from the lowest marginal cost sources
- C. Allocating power based on political

considerations

D. Dispatching only base load plants

Q76. With reference to National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) and FASTag, consider the following statements:

1. FASTag is a prepaid tag that uses RFID technology for toll payments.
2. It is mandatory for all vehicles on national highways in India.
3. FASTag operates independently of vehicle registration details.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

Q77. FASTag is based on which of the following technologies?

- A. GPS-based tracking
- B. Infrared sensors
- C. Radio Frequency Identification
- D. Blockchain

Q78. The term “imported inflation” refers to:

- A. Inflation caused by domestic demand
- B. Inflation due to increased taxes
- C. Inflation resulting from higher prices of imported goods
- D. Inflation caused by wage increases

Q79. Which of the following institutions are associated with Bengaluru’s AI and tech ecosystem?

1. Indian Institute of Science
2. Indian Space Research Organisation
3. Reserve Bank of India

Select the correct answer using the code below:

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

Q80. With reference to nuclear power regulation in India, consider the following statements:

1. The Atomic Energy Act, 1962 grants the central government exclusive control over nuclear energy.
2. Private sector participation in nuclear power generation is currently fully permitted without restrictions.
3. The central government can authorize corporations to operate nuclear facilities under specific conditions.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 1 and 3 only
- B. 2 only
- C. 1 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

Q81. The role of Indian Strategic Petroleum Reserves Limited (ISPRL) is to:

1. Maintain strategic crude oil reserves
2. Stabilize supply during disruptions
3. Regulate global oil prices

Select the correct answer using the code below:

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

Q82. Which of the following functions are permitted for Payments Banks?

- 1. Issuing ATM/debit cards
- 2. Accepting demand deposits (within limits)
- 3. Providing credit cards

Select the correct answer using the code below:

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

Q83. Payments Banks in India were primarily introduced on the recommendation of:

- A. Narasimham Committee
- B. Nachiket Mor Committee
- C. Kelkar Committee
- D. Urjit Patel Committee

ANSWER CODE:

From Deep Dive:

1B, 2D, 3D, 4D, 5A, 6B, 7C, 8A, 9B, 11C, 12B, 13B

From News Gist:

1B, 2B, 3A, 4A, 5A, 6A, 7A, 8A, 9A, 10C, 11A, 12D, 13B, 14B, 15B, 16D, 17A, 18A, 19D, 20B, 21A, 22A, 23D, 24D, 25D, 26B, 27A, 28B, 29B, 30B, 31C, 32B, 33B, 34A, 35D, 36D, 37D, 38C, 39B, 40D, 41D, 42A, 43D, 44C, 45D, 46A, 47C, 48D, 49D, 50D, 51B, 52B, 53D, 54A, 55B, 56A, 57A, 58B, 59C, 60D, 61A, 62B, 63C, 64C, 65C, 66C, 67A, 68C, 69D, 70B, 71B, 72C, 73A, 74A, 75B, 76A, 77C, 78C, 79A, 80A, 81A, 82A, 83B

CA MAINS QUESTIONS:

From Deep Dive:

Q1. "India's three-stage nuclear power programme was conceived as a strategy to attain long-term energy independence by leveraging indigenous mineral wealth. Evaluate the progress made in the transition to the second stage and discuss the strategic challenges India faces in integrated global nuclear governance." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

Q2. Trace the evolution of India's nuclear programme from its inception to the present. Discuss how it balances energy security, strategic autonomy, and environmental sustainability.

Q3. Assess the challenges in scaling up nuclear power in India despite technological capability. Suggest policy measures to accelerate its growth

Q4. "The impending delimitation exercise based on the next census poses a significant challenge to the principle of cooperative federalism in India." **Discuss how the reallocation of Lok Sabha seats might exacerbate the North-South divide and suggest a framework to balance demographic representation with federal stability.** (250 Words, 15 Marks)

Q5. "While the Delimitation Commission is a high-powered body whose orders cannot be called into question in any court, its mandate often lacks a mechanism to address 'qualitative representation' of marginalized groups." **Critically examine.** (250 Words, 15 Marks)

Q6. "The 42nd and 84th Constitutional Amendment Acts were 'strategic pauses' in India's democratic journey." **Analyze the rationale behind freezing seat allocation for five decades and evaluate whether a further extension is a viable solution to current demographic disparities.** (150 Words, 10 Marks)

FROM NEWS GIST:

Q1. The recent restructuring and layoffs by Oracle Corporation reflect a broader transition toward Artificial Intelligence (AI)-driven business models.

Critically examine the impact of such restructuring on global employment patterns and economic productivity.

Q2. Global technology firms are increasingly reallocating resources toward AI and cloud computing, often accompanied by workforce rationalization.

Analyze the concept of 'creative destruction' in this context and its socio-economic consequences.

Q3. What are Non-Deliverable Derivatives (NDD)?

Explain their role in currency markets and the concerns associated with them.

Q4. "Regulatory interventions in derivative markets often involve a trade-off between financial stability and market efficiency."

Evaluate this statement in the context of RBI's stance on NDDs.

Q5. India's defence exports have witnessed a significant surge in recent years.

Examine the key drivers behind this growth and assess its implications for India's strategic autonomy and economic development.

Q6. Analyze the challenges faced by India in becoming a major global defence exporter, including technological, regulatory, and geopolitical constraints.

Suggest measures to overcome these challenges.

Q7. The proposed "IBC 2.0" reforms aim to address structural inefficiencies in India's insolvency resolution process.

Critically examine the need for these reforms and evaluate their potential impact on credit culture and ease of doing business.

Q8. A proposed 100% tariff by the United States on patented pharmaceuticals has significant implications for global trade and access to medicines.

Critically analyze how this move could impact India's pharmaceutical industry and its role as the "pharmacy of the world."

Q9. Discuss the economic rationale behind barter trade in the modern global economy.

Evaluate its advantages and limitations in the context of India's trade and fiscal management.

Q10. "Fiscal resilience is not merely about reducing deficits but ensuring sustainable and inclusive growth."

Q11. **Discuss** "Independent directors are expected to act as custodians of corporate governance, yet their effectiveness often remains limited."

Discuss the challenges faced by independent directors in India and how capacity-building initiatives can address them. his statement in the context of India's evolving fiscal policy framework.

Q12. The synthetic textile industry in Surat has been a major driver of employment and exports.

Analyze the causes behind the current crisis and assess its implications for India's MSME sector and labour market

Q13. Examine the role of institutional mechanisms such as the NITI Aayog and state governments in addressing land inequality.

What reforms are needed in land governance?

Q14. The development project in Great Nicobar Island represents a strategic push for infrastructure and maritime connectivity.

Critically examine the economic and strategic benefits of the project vis-à-vis its environmental costs.

Q15. "While customs duty exemptions on critical petrochemicals provide immediate relief to domestic manufacturers, they also highlight the structural vulnerabilities of India's upstream

sector. Discuss the need for a balanced trade policy that protects domestic refiners while empowering downstream users." **(250 words, 15 Marks)**

Q16. The growing influence of the offshore Non-Deliverable Forward (NDF) market often undermines domestic monetary policy objectives. In this context, discuss the rationale behind the NDD ban and evaluate its effectiveness in reclaiming price discovery from offshore entities to domestic markets." **(250 words)**

Q17. "While SEBI's push for upskilling is a progressive step, 'regulatory cholesterol' can often hinder the ease of doing business. Critically analyze whether mandating specific skill sets for Independent Directors is a necessary intervention or an overreach that might discourage seasoned professionals from taking up board positions." **(250 words)**

Q18. "Analyze the structural and operational vulnerabilities of the Payments Bank model in India. In light of recent regulatory crackdowns, do you agree that the current regulatory framework needs a shift from 'supervision by reporting' to 'real-time algorithmic oversight'?" **(250 words)**

Q19. "The deployment of advanced surveillance infrastructure in high-altitude regions is a shift from reactive to proactive border management. Examine the implications of India's 'Mountain Shield' strategy on regional stability and its impact on the 'Offense-Defense' balance in the Himalayas." **(250 words)**

Q20. "Traditional peacekeeping models are struggling to adapt to asymmetric warfare and cross-border escalations. Analyze the need for a transition from 'Passive Monitoring' to 'Robust Peacekeeping,' with special reference to India's recent interventions at the UN Security Council regarding UNIFIL's security." **(250 words)**

Q21. "The spillover of the Persian Gulf conflict into the wider Indian Ocean underscores the vulnerability of India's maritime lifelines. Discuss the role of the Indian Navy and 'Atmanirbharta' in defense technology in mitigating the risks posed by asymmetric warfare in maritime chokepoints." **(250 words)**

Q22. "The inclusion of the African Union as a permanent member of the G20 under India's presidency was a watershed moment in Indo-African ties. However, challenges like the 'Debt Trap' in African nations and increasing maritime competition in the Indian Ocean remain. Discuss." **(250 words)**

Q23. As India and Germany mark 25 years of their Strategic Partnership in 2026, their collaboration is expanding into high-tech defense and maritime security. Analyze the significance of Indo-German synergy in maintaining a rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific and its implications for the 'Global South'." **(250 words)**

Q24. "The shift from 'procurement-heavy' models to 'co-development and co-production' is the cornerstone of the Berlin Roadmap. Discuss the potential of Indo-German collaboration in niche technologies like underwater surveillance, AI-enabled drones, and advanced propulsion systems."

Q25. "The Election Commission's constitutional mandate to 'superintend, direct, and control' elections is often tested by administrative lapses at the grassroots level. Critically analyze the 'Form 6 crisis' as a failure of the booth-level verification mechanism and suggest reforms to insulate the registration process from political interference." **(250 words)**

Q26. "Legal recognition is the first step toward social citizenship, but for the transgender community, the process often becomes an ordeal of state surveillance. In light of this, critically analyze the ethical dilemmas involved in the state-mandated 'certification of identity' versus the individual's right to privacy and autonomy." **(250 words)**

Q27. "While 'Mainstreaming the Margins' is a social necessity, it often conflicts with the imperatives of environmental conservation and planned urban growth. Critically analyze the challenges of regularizing settlements located in ecologically sensitive zones or floodplains." **(250 words)**

Q28. "Textbooks are not merely tools of information but instruments for shaping the democratic temperament of the next generation. In the context of the 2026 NCERT revision controversies, evaluate the institutional mechanisms required to ensure that curriculum changes remain academically rigorous and free from ideological oscillations." **(150 words)**

Q29. "The establishment of the Satyashodhak Samaj was a watershed moment in the history of social justice in India. Discuss how Phule's ideology of 'Truth-seeking' challenged the hegemony of the priestly classes and laid the foundation for the later Dalit-Bahujan movements." **(250 words)**

Q30. "While the CAPF Act 2026 focuses on administrative standardization, it must also address the 'human cost' of security operations. In this context, analyze the provisions of the Act related to grievance redressal, mental health support, and the mitigation of the high attrition rates seen in the forces." **(250 words)**

Q31. "Criminal law typically punishes intent and action against persons or property. Critically analyze the shift in Indian jurisprudence where 'Sentiments' and 'Sacred Objects' are increasingly being afforded heightened legal protection. What are the ethical implications of this shift for a pluralistic society?" **(250 words)**

Q32. "Urban regularization is not merely a legal process but a tool for socio-economic empowerment. Discuss the impact of the 2026 policy on the 'Right to the City' for Delhi's marginalized populations and its role in bridging the 'Digital and Civic Divide'." **(250 words)**

Q33. "Semiconductors are the 'new oil' of the digital age. In light of the global supply chain disruptions of the mid-2020s, evaluate how the India Semiconductor Mission (ISM) strengthens India's 'Strategic Autonomy' and reduces its 'Import Dependency' on East Asian economies."

Q34. "The introduction of the Qdenga vaccine marks a shift from 'reactive' vector control to 'preventive' immunization in India's fight against dengue. Evaluate the potential of this vaccine in reducing the disease burden, considering its 'disease-modifying' nature." **(150 words)**

Q35. "The simultaneous delivery of three distinct naval platforms by GRSE underscores the maturing of India's warship-building ecosystem. Evaluate the role of public sector shipyards in achieving 'Aatmanirbharta' in naval technology." **(150 words)**

Q36. "Pediatric cancer is not just a medical challenge but a socio-economic crisis for Indian families. Discuss the role of the 'Ayushman Bharat' scheme in mitigating catastrophic health expenditures and suggest measures to move toward a 'care-continuum' approach for survivors." **(250 words)**

Q37. "A nuclear triad is only as strong as its most survivable leg. In light of the induction of INS Aridhaman, discuss the strategic importance of sea-based deterrence in ensuring a resilient second-strike capability for India." **(250 words)**

Q38. "The emergence of 'Sovereign AI Stacks' among private tech giants is reconfiguring the architecture of political economy. In light of Anthropic's 2026 custom chip exploration, discuss the potential challenges of 'Techno-Nationalism' and the risks of technological colonization for developing economies." **(250 words)**

Q39. "Infrastructure development is the backbone of the 'India @ 2047' vision. Discuss how the domestic manufacturing of J-Slab components and the mechanization of track laying contribute to the 'Make in India' initiative and long-term economic resilience." **(250 words)**

Q40. "The transition to SAF presents a 'Circular Economy' opportunity for India's agrarian sector. Discuss how the integration of 'Feedstock-to-Flight' value chains can boost rural incomes while addressing the challenges of fuel security and high aviation turbine fuel (ATF) costs." **(250 words)**

Q41. "Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) in India has evolved from mere voluntary collection to a sophisticated, credit-based regulatory framework. Discuss the significance of the 2026 amendments, with particular reference to 'Traceability' and the 'Carry-Forward' mechanism in ensuring long-term environmental accountability." **(250 words)**

Q42. Advanced Biomass Cookstoves represent a 'Hybrid Approach' to energy resilience by balancing local resource availability with global climate mandates. Discuss the role of 'Carbon Finance' and 'Biomass Pelletization' in making clean cooking a commercially viable reality for rural India." **(250 words)**

Q43. "Rooftop Solar is transitioning from a 'middle-class luxury' to a 'prosumer-led' energy revolution. Discuss how the integration of 'Virtual Net Metering' and 'Group Net Metering' can democratize solar energy access for high-density urban areas and tenant populations." **(250 words)**

Q44. "Heatwaves are often described as a 'Silent Disaster' as they lack the visual devastation of floods or cyclones. Critically evaluate the efficacy of the 'National Heat Adaption Plans' and discuss the necessity of declaring Heatwaves as a 'Notified Disaster' under the Disaster Management Act, 2005." **(250 words)**

Q45. "Flash floods are no longer limited to Himalayan terrain; they have become a recurring feature of the Indian plains and coastal cities. Discuss the challenges in 'Early Warning Systems' (EWS) for flash floods compared to riverine floods and suggest a framework for 'Hyper-local' disaster resilience." **(250 words)**

Q46. "Individual conscience vs. Party discipline: Discuss how the Anti-Defection Law impacts the representative character of a legislator in a parliamentary democracy like India." **(250 Words, 15 Marks)**

Q47. "Human trafficking is not merely a law-and-order issue but a profound violation of Article 21 and 23 of the Constitution." **Critically examine the role of the Supreme Court in directing the establishment of a centralized 'Organized Crime Investigative Agency' to tackle cross-border trafficking.** (250 Words, 15 Marks)

Q48. "While the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019, aims to provide a safety net, it has been criticized for being paternalistic rather than empowering." **Discuss the challenges in the implementation of the Act, particularly regarding the 'Right to Residence' and 'Medical Intervention'.** (150 Words, 10 Marks)

Q49. "Extractive industries in the Red Corridor often act as a double-edged sword for regional stability." **Analyze how perceived 'alienation from land' contributes to Left-Wing Extremism (LWE) and suggest a 'Shared Prosperity' model for sustainable mining.** (250 Words, 15 Marks)

Q50. Workplace toxicity is no longer just a human resource issue; it is a burgeoning public health crisis and a violation of the right to a dignified life." **In light of the ILO Convention 190, evaluate the adequacy of India's current legal framework, including the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions (OSH) Code, 2020, in addressing psychosocial risks.** (250 Words, 15 Marks).