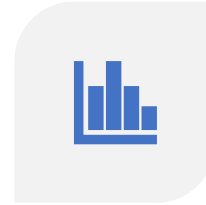
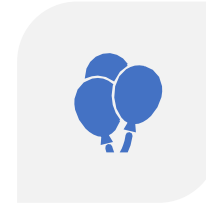




# AXIA IAS ACADEMY



EDITORIAL ANALYSIS



MAY 28



CONSISTENT  
COMPREHENSIVE AND  
CREDIBLE



UNIQUE AND BEST IN  
QUALITY



1. A new lexicon of Indo-US ties (FINANCIAL EXPRESS)
2. What the Nordic media got wrong about India (HINDUSTAN TIMES)
3. A colonial ghost that haunts Jan Vishwas (HINDUSTAN TIMES)
4. Victim of its Stellar Success (THE ECONOMIC TIMES)



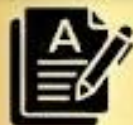
# AXIA IAS ACADEMY

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# A new lexicon of Indo-US ties



## HARSH V PANT

Vice President, studies and foreign policy,  
Observer Research Foundation

The significance of Rubio's visit lies in what it reveals about changing global politics: India-US partnership today is driven not by sentimentality but by converging structural interests

MARCO RUBIO'S FIRST visit to India as US Secretary of State this week was never meant to produce dramatic headlines or transformational breakthroughs. At a moment when India-US ties had begun to show signs of strain under President Trump's renewed "America First" orientation, Rubio's presence in India represented an exercise in strategic reassurance. The stops in Kolkata, Agra, Jaipur, and New Delhi were choreographed not merely as diplomatic engagements, but as symbols of continuity in a relationship that both sides increasingly recognise as indispensable to their geopolitical ambitions.

Since Trump's return to the White House, India had grown uneasy about Washington's tariff-heavy economic policies, renewed transactionalism in trade negotiations, and signs of outreach towards both Pakistan and China — developments that generated familiar anxieties about American reliability. India's strategic community has long understood that while the US views India as an important partner, Washington's global priorities can shift quickly depending on domestic political compulsions. Rubio's visit was therefore aimed less at announcing a new era and more at preventing strategic drift.

The most substantive outcome was the signing of the framework on critical minerals. Though technical in appearance, the agreement carries profound geopolitical implications. In many ways, it captures the central logic underpinning contemporary India-US engagement: the search for resilient supply chains outside Chinese dominance. Rare earths and critical minerals today occupy the same strategic space that oil did during the Cold War.

China's near-monopoly over critical mineral processing has emerged as a maj-

or vulnerability for the West and its partners. The US has increasingly sought "friend-shoring" arrangements with trusted strategic actors, and India is uniquely positioned in this framework. New Delhi possesses significant mineral potential, a growing industrial base, and political willingness to participate in supply-chain diversification without formally aligning against Beijing. For India, the agreement offers access to technology, investment, and integration into emerging strategic industries.

The emphasis on trade and energy cooperation during Rubio's visit also reflected a mutual recognition that economic tensions cannot be allowed to overwhelm broader strategic convergence. Rubio's effort to reassure Indian leaders about progress towards a broader trade arrangement was politically significant, even if concrete outcomes remain limited.

Energy emerged as another important dimension of the discussions. With instability in West Asia, global energy markets remain deeply volatile. The US sees India not only as a major energy consumer but as a strategic market for American LNG and oil exports. New Delhi, meanwhile, continues its delicate balancing act — seeking energy security through diversified imports while avoiding excessive geopolitical entanglement. The conversation on energy cooperation highlighted how India-US ties are increasingly driven by pragmatic calculations rather than ideological affinity.

Defence and strategic cooperation remained central to the visit's agenda. Dis-

cussions on maritime security, strategic technologies, and counter-terrorism underscored the expanding scope of bilateral engagement. The invitation extended by Rubio to Prime Minister Narendra Modi to visit the White House signalled Washington's desire to maintain political momentum at the highest levels.

Yet what is striking about the relationship today is the degree to which it has moved beyond traditional defence cooperation into newer domains of technological and geopolitical competition.

India also used the opportunity to raise concerns about tighter US visa rules, a politically sensitive issue. Unlike many other strategic partnerships, India-US ties possess a substantial societal dimension that often cushions political disagreements. Rubio's acknowledgment of people-to-people ties reflected an understanding in Washington that immigration curbs, if mishandled, could generate unnecessary friction.

Rubio's participation in the Quad Foreign Ministers' Meeting added a wider Indo-Pacific dimension to the visit, helping inject fresh momentum into a grouping that had appeared subdued in recent months. The announcements on maritime security, port infrastructure, undersea cables, and energy security highlighted its gradual transformation into a platform for practical cooperation. The proposed joint port project in Fiji, for example, reflects the Quad's growing emphasis on infrastructure diplomacy in the Pacific Islands, a region where Chinese influence has expanded steadily over the past decade.

Importantly, the Quad continues to avoid the language of formal alliance-building. This flexibility is what gives the bloc durability. India, in particular, remains deeply uncomfortable with treaty-based security structures that could constrain its strategic autonomy. Instead, the Quad functions as a mechanism for issue-based coordination among like-minded democracies seeking to shape the Indo-Pacific balance without provoking military confrontation. The advancement of the Quad Critical Minerals Initiative reinforced the strategic logic visible in the bilateral India-US agreement. Across Indo-Pacific, supply chains have become instruments of geopolitical competition. Control over technology, infrastructure, and strategic resources is now central to statecraft.

The broader significance of Rubio's visit lies in what it reveals about the changing nature of global politics. The India-US partnership today is driven not by sentimentality but by converging structural interests. Both countries recognise the challenge posed by China's rise, both seek resilient supply chains, technological competitiveness, and a stable Indo-Pacific maritime order. Yet both remain cautious about overcommitment.

For India, strategic autonomy continues to define foreign policy thinking. New Delhi values closer ties with Washington but remains unwilling to become part of any overt treaty-based engagement. For the US, India is indispensable but also frustratingly independent. This tension is unlikely to disappear.

Rubio's visit may not have altered the strategic landscape overnight, but it reinforced the underlying trajectory of one of the 21st century's most consequential partnerships.

**New Delhi values closer ties with Washington but remains unwilling to become part of any overt treaty-based engagement**

- **Key Terms and Explanations**

- **‘America First’ and Protectionism**

- “America First” refers to a foreign-economic policy that prioritises domestic jobs and industries, often via tariffs and trade renegotiations.
- For India this translated into higher US tariffs, pressure on market access and tough bargaining on trade and digital rules, even as the strategic side of ties continued to grow.

- **Friend-shoring / De-risking**

- Friend-shoring means relocating or diversifying supply chains away from geopolitical rivals to “trusted partners”.
- In the US strategy, India is seen as an “indispensable partner” for friend-shoring in critical minerals, semiconductors, pharma and digital services, thereby reducing overdependence on China.

- **Critical and Emerging Technologies (CET / iCET)**

- Technologies like semiconductors, AI, quantum, space, 5G/6G, cyber and defence platforms that will define future economic and military power.
- India–US initiatives such as the Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology (iCET) seek joint research, co-development and secure supply chains in these areas.

- **Indo-Pacific and Maritime Security**

- The Indo-Pacific is the integrated maritime space from the east coast of Africa to the western Pacific.
- India and the US coordinate on freedom of navigation, maritime domain awareness, submarine tracking and port visits to balance China’s growing naval presence.

- **Non-Allied but Closely Aligned / ‘No Treaty Alliance’**

- India emphasises “strategic autonomy”, avoiding formal alliances that may constrain independent decision-making.
- The argument in the article is that Indo-US ties are durable precisely because they are driven by converging interests, not by a NATO-style treaty.

- **Defence Interoperability and Foundational Agreements**

- Interoperability means militaries can operate together smoothly through compatible equipment, communication systems and procedures.
- Agreements such as logistics support, secure communications, and geospatial information-sharing deepen operational coordination and reflect growing trust.

- **Geopolitical Balancing and Hedging**

- Balancing means aligning with partners to counter a stronger rival (here largely China).
- India also hedges by maintaining ties with Russia, Iran, and the Global South, signalling it is not a camp follower of Washington despite deepening partnership.

- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**

- **Rubio's Visit as Strategic Reassurance, Not Grand Breakthrough**
  - The visit is portrayed as more about signalling continuity and reassurance than announcing big deals.
  - Public events in multiple Indian cities are symbolic gestures, underscoring India's importance in US grand strategy and calming anxieties after trade and tariff tensions.
- **Shift from Sentiment to Structure in Indo-US Ties**
  - Earlier phases of the relationship were often justified in terms of shared democratic values and personal chemistry between leaders.
  - The article argues that today's partnership rests more on structural convergences: China factor, technology and supply-chain security, energy and critical minerals, and Indo-Pacific maritime concerns.
- **Friend-shoring and Supply-Chain Diversification as New Pillars**
  - The US is consciously trying to de-risk its supply chains by relying on trusted partners; India is uniquely placed due to market size, political willingness and demographic potential.
  - Rubio's focus on trade, minerals and energy cooperation is framed as recognition that economic and technological integration with India is no longer optional but strategically necessary for Washington.
- **India's Strategic Autonomy within Deepening Engagement**
  - Despite closeness, India resists being drawn into a formal alliance or treaty-bound obligations, especially on issues like freedom-of-navigation operations or sanctions on Russia and Iran.
  - New Delhi wants ties with Washington to grow without being converted into a rigid alliance that could constrain independent choices in its neighbourhood.
- **Quad and Broader Indo-Pacific Architecture**
  - The piece underlines that the Quad now operates less as an embryonic security alliance and more as a mechanism for coordinated action among "like-minded democracies" on infrastructure, technology, and supply chains.
  - The Indo-US bilateral relationship gains depth from being embedded within this wider plurilateral architecture, making it harder for short-term bilateral irritants to derail cooperation.
- **Domestic Political Concerns and Immigration as Managing Variables**
  - Rubio's signalling on immigration and people-to-people ties is interpreted as an attempt to defuse politically sensitive issues in both countries.
  - The argument is that while such issues create "unnecessary friction", they are peripheral when compared to the core structural interests binding the two countries together.
- **Core Thesis**
  - In essence, the article's thesis is: India-US relations have entered a stage where structural drivers—China's rise, technology and supply-chain security, energy and critical minerals, Indo-Pacific strategy—make the partnership durable, even if trade quarrels, political rhetoric, or leadership changes create noise on the surface.

- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**

- **Pre-Independence and Early Cold War (up to 1960s)**
  - Limited contact, with US seeing India primarily through the colonial prism and early Cold War lens.
  - Post-1947, India's non-alignment and economic socialism contrasted with US alliance politics and capitalism, creating early distance.
- **1962 War and Limited Security Convergence**
  - The Sino-Indian war forced a brief security alignment; the US provided some military aid.
  - However, this faded once the immediate crisis passed and due to differences over Pakistan and Vietnam.
- **1970s–1980s: Estrangement and Mutual Suspicion**
  - US tilt towards Pakistan, India's 1974 nuclear test and later closeness with the Soviet Union deepened mistrust.
  - Technology denial regimes and sanctions constrained cooperation; India saw the US as interventionist, the US saw India as obstructionist.
- **Post-Cold War Re-engagement (1990s)**
  - Economic liberalisation in India and collapse of USSR forced both sides to rethink.
  - Despite friction over the 1998 nuclear tests and sanctions, intensive diplomacy led to the 2000 "Next Steps in Strategic Partnership".
- **2005 Civil Nuclear Deal and Strategic Breakthrough**
  - The nuclear agreement effectively recognised India as a responsible nuclear power outside the NPT, ending decades of nuclear isolation.
  - This opened doors for defence sales, technology transfers and deeper institutional dialogues (e.g., 2+2 meetings).
- **2010s: Defence, Indo-Pacific and Diaspora as Growth Drivers**
  - India designated a "Major Defence Partner", concluding multiple foundational agreements for logistics and secure communications.
  - Indo-Pacific strategy, growing Chinese assertiveness and strong Indian diaspora in the US created robust multi-stakeholder constituencies for the relationship.
- **Trump Era and Rise of Structural Economic Concerns**
  - Tariff hikes, withdrawal of GSP benefits, and sharp rhetoric produced anxieties in India about US reliability on trade.
  - However, defence, Indo-Pacific cooperation and high-level visits continued, demonstrating that strategic logic overrode tactical trade disputes.
- **Post-Covid and Ukraine War Phase**
  - Pandemic exposed supply-chain vulnerabilities, pushing friend-shoring and diversification where India emerged as a key partner.
  - Ukraine war tested the relationship as India maintained defence and energy ties with Russia, yet Washington accepted India's distinct position to avoid jeopardising the larger strategic partnership.
- **Current Phase: Critical Minerals, iCET and Quad 2.0**
  - Cooperation now extends to critical minerals, cutting-edge technology and undersea domain awareness.
  - Quad summits and sectoral working groups have institutionalised India's role as a central Indo-Pacific actor, with Rubio's visit and new frameworks on critical minerals reinforcing this trajectory.

# INDO-US STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

*From Ideological Distance to Structural Pragmatism*



## KEY TERMS

- Strategic Reassurance:** Actions that build confidence in enduring security cooperation.
- Friend-shoring:** Shifting supply chains to trusted, reliable partner countries.
- Strategic Autonomy:** Freedom to pursue national interests while engaging globally.
- Transactionalism:** Issue-based, outcome-oriented engagement driven by interests.
- Critical Minerals:** Rare earths and minerals essential for clean energy & technology.

## PHILOSOPHICAL BASE

- Structural Realism / Neorealism**  
States act to maximise security and power in an anarchic system.
- Pragmatism over Idealism**  
Policies shaped by interests, not ideological affinity.
- Strategic Autonomy**  
India balances multiple partnerships without formal alliances.

## NEW FEATURES

- Critical minerals as the new oil.
- Infrastructure diplomacy in Pacific Islands.
- Non-treaty deterrence through cooperation.
- Geo-economics and technology security as core pillars.

## MULTIDIMENSIONAL UPSC LENS

- |   |   |  |   |   |  |
|---|---|--|---|---|--|
| <b>Social</b><br>Diaspora bridge strengthens people-to-people ties. | <b>Political</b><br>Deepens trust but requires policy continuity. | <b>Legal/ Constitutional</b><br>No treaty alliance ensures constitutional sovereignty. | <b>Ethical</b><br>Shared values of democracy and rule of law. | <b>International</b><br>Enhances role in global groupings and regional stability. | <b>Economic</b><br>Trade, FDI and innovation drive mutual growth and jobs. |
|---|---|--|---|---|--|

## CORE THESIS

The Indo-US partnership is now driven more by **converging structural interests** than by ideological sentimentality.

## HISTORICAL EVOLUTION



## FROM STRUCTURAL DRIVERS TO STRATEGIC OUTCOMES



## MAIN DRIVERS OF CONVERGENCE

- China factor:** Shared concern over China's rise.
- Indo-Pacific security:** Rules-based order and freedom of navigation.
- Resilient supply chains:** Reduce over-dependence, build trusted networks.
- Critical minerals:** Secure access for clean energy & advanced technologies.
- Technology cooperation:** AI, semiconductors, space, cyber, and emerging tech.
- Quad coordination:** Like-minded partnership for regional stability.

## AREAS OF CONVERGENCE vs AREAS OF FRICTION

### AREAS OF CONVERGENCE

- ✓ Critical minerals
- ✓ Maritime security
- ✓ Tech collaboration
- ✓ Supply chains
- ✓ Quad

### AREAS OF FRICTION

- ✗ Tariffs and trade
- ✗ Visa issues
- ✗ US transactionalism
- ✗ India's refusal of treaty alliance
- ✗ Global distractions

## WAY FORWARD

- Institutionalize dialogue across political transitions.
- Diversify and deepen friend-shoring for resilient supply chains.
- Address visa and mobility frictions pragmatically.
- Make Quad deliver public goods for the region.

## NCERT & UPSC LINKAGES

- Class 12 Political Science:** US Hegemony; Alternative Centres of Power
- Class 12 Geography:** International Trade
- GS Paper 2:** International Relations, diaspora, global groupings
- GS Paper 3:** Economic security, supply chains, technology and infrastructure

## EXAM READY TAKEAWAY



Use the framework:  
**CONVERGENCE**  
+ **AUTONOMY**  
+ **FRICTION**  
+ **WAY FORWARD.**

## Logical and Philosophical Base

### Realist Logic of Power Balancing

- The core assumption is realist: states seek security and power in an anarchic international system.
- China's rise, assertive behaviour in the Indo-Pacific and technological race push India and the US together irrespective of ideological or personal factors.

### Institutionalism and Complex Interdependence

- The article points to dense networks—defence agreements, technology frameworks, trade and investment, diaspora, Quad, supply-chain coalitions.
- These create “complex interdependence” where decoupling is costly, ensuring continuity even if there are conflicts on specific issues.

### Strategic Autonomy vs Alliance Dependence

- Philosophically, India's stance flows from Nehruvian non-alignment reinterpreted as “multi-alignment” or “strategic autonomy”.
- The article endorses the idea that a flexible, interest-based partnership may deliver more stability than rigid alliance expectations that neither side can meet.

### Pragmatic Nationalism over Value Idealism

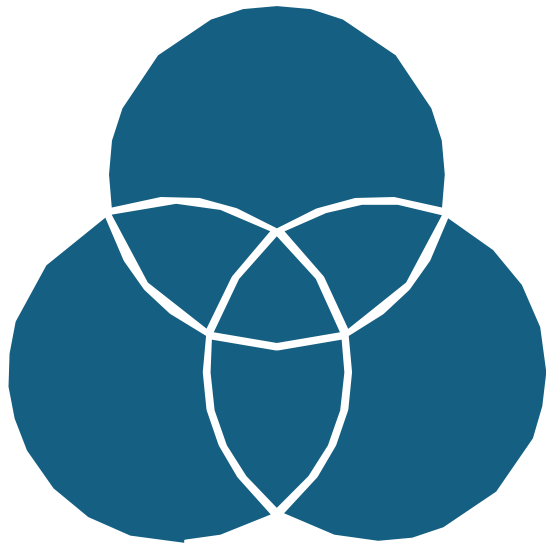
- Instead of emphasising democracy promotion or human-rights rhetoric, the logic foregrounds national interests: markets, technology, security, supply chains.
- This reflects a broader shift in global politics where even democracies prioritise strategic calculations over ideological evangelism.

### Philosophy of ‘Convergence without Congruence’

- The implicit principle is that India and the US need not agree on everything (e.g., Russia, Iran, data regulations) to maintain a deep partnership.
- Philosophically, this promotes a pluralist view of world order where multiple power centres cooperate on overlapping interests while retaining distinct world-views.

## • **Multidimensional Analysis**

- **Social Dimension**
  - Large Indian diaspora in the US strengthens soft power, remittances, and networks for technology and education.
  - However, hate crimes, racial incidents, restrictive immigration policies or negative media narratives can create social anxieties and political pressure in India.
- **Political Dimension**
  - Bipartisan support for India in the US Congress and broad political consensus in India make the partnership relatively stable.
  - Yet human-rights concerns, democracy indices, religious freedom reports and domestic political polarisation in either country can periodically strain political optics.
- **Legal Dimension**
  - Extradition, mutual legal assistance, intellectual property, data protection, and anti-terrorism cooperation require robust legal frameworks.
  - Conflicts may arise when US extraterritorial laws (sanctions, export controls) clash with India's sovereign decisions on defence deals or energy imports.
- **Ethical Dimension**
  - Questions arise over defence exports to conflict zones, use of surveillance technologies, and alignment with civil liberties.
  - Ethical debates around AI, biometric data, and big-tech regulation will influence trust in the digital and technology aspects of the partnership.
- **International Dimension**
  - Indo-US ties are central to emerging Indo-Pacific architectures and minilateral groupings, influencing the choices of ASEAN, Africa and Latin America.
  - India's continued engagement with BRICS, SCO and the Global South shows that the partnership is nested within a multi-polar framework, not a binary bloc.
- **Economic Dimension**
  - Bilateral trade has grown substantially, with services exports, digital economy and investment flows becoming vital growth engines.
  - At the same time, trade disputes, labour and environmental standards, and concerns over market access (agriculture, e-commerce, pharma) remain recurring themes.



- **Linkages with NCERTs**

- **Class 9–10 Social Science (Democratic Politics, Contemporary India)**
  - Chapters on democracy, foreign policy, and India’s external relations provide basic ideas on how democracies cooperate and differ.
  - Useful for framing people-to-people ties, diaspora issues and basic foreign-policy orientation.
- **Class 11 Political Science – “Indian Constitution at Work”**
  - Chapters on federalism, separation of powers, and role of Parliament help understand how treaties and international commitments fit within constitutional structures.
  - The discussion on fundamental rights and directive principles is relevant for technology, privacy and ethical aspects of Indo-US cooperation.
- **Class 11 Political Science – “Contemporary World Politics”**
  - Chapters on US hegemony, globalisation, and alternative centres of power are directly relevant to India–US relations, non-alignment and multipolarity.
  - The evolution of non-alignment to strategic autonomy links neatly to India’s current stance vis-à-vis Washington and Beijing.
- **Class 12 Political Science – “Contemporary World Politics” and “Politics in India since Independence”**
  - Coverage of Indo-US relations, nuclear issue, non-alignment, reforms in foreign policy and India’s role in world politics directly map onto the historical evolution discussed above.
  - Chapters on coalition politics and economic reforms help understand domestic drivers behind external engagement.
- **Class 11–12 Economics (Macro and Indian Economic Development)**
  - Topics like balance of payments, trade policy, FDI, liberalisation, and globalisation are crucial to understand trade frictions, friend-shoring and supply chains.
  - Chapters on infrastructure, human capital and technology link to India’s attractiveness as a partner and constraints in absorbing investment.
- **Class 11–12 Geography (India: Physical Environment; India: People and Economy)**
  - Chapters on mineral and energy resources, transport, ports and industrial regions link with critical minerals, logistics and Indo-Pacific maritime routes.

- **Linkages with UPSC CSE Syllabus**

- **GS Paper 1**

- Post-independence consolidation and foreign policy: evolution from non-alignment to strategic autonomy, nuclear deal, emerging multipolarity.
- World history themes like Cold War, US hegemony and the rise of new power centres provide the background context.

- **GS Paper 2**

- Bilateral relations: India–US strategic partnership, Indo-Pacific, Quad, supply-chain initiatives, people-to-people ties.
- International institutions and groupings: role of Quad, NATO, WTO, and emerging economic frameworks in shaping the relationship.

- **GS Paper 3**

- Economy: trade policy, FDI, technology partnerships, critical minerals, digital economy.
- Security: internal and external security challenges, defence cooperation, maritime security in Indian Ocean and Pacific.
- Science & Tech: cooperation in AI, quantum, space, cyber, semiconductors and their regulatory challenges.

- **GS Paper 4 (Ethics)**

- Ethical issues in international relations: balancing national interest with global justice, human rights, sanctions regimes and arms exports.
- Technology and ethics: AI, surveillance, data privacy and cross-border regulation.

- **Way Forward**
- **Institutionalise ‘Structural Convergence’**
  - Strengthen 2+2 dialogues, iCET, critical minerals working groups, and supply-chain councils with clear deliverables and timelines.
  - Promote parliamentary oversight and periodic white papers so domestic stakeholders in India understand the logic and limits of the partnership.
- **Manage Trade and Regulatory Frictions Proactively**
  - Use early-warning mechanisms and sectoral dialogues (pharma, agriculture, digital services) to anticipate disputes.
  - Negotiate a limited but ambitious trade package focused on services, digital trade, and investment facilitation rather than a mega-FTA that may be politically unviable.
- **Embed Environmental and Social Safeguards in Critical Minerals and Infrastructure**
  - Co-develop standards for sustainable mining, local community benefit-sharing, and rehabilitation.
  - Support technology transfer in recycling and circular economy so that the partnership is seen as promoting green development, not resource extraction.
- **Deepen People-to-People and Knowledge Partnerships**
  - Expand student exchanges, joint research centres, and scholarships in STEM, climate and social sciences.
  - Ease visa norms for high-skilled professionals while ensuring fair labour and anti-discrimination protections.
- **Preserve Strategic Autonomy while Enhancing Coordination**
  - Clearly articulate India’s red lines on military alliances, sanctions and third-country conflicts; communicate them candidly to Washington.
  - At the same time, coordinate positions on maritime security, terrorism, cyber norms and crisis management to avoid misperceptions.
- **Use the Partnership to Serve the Global South**
  - Cooperate on vaccines, climate finance, digital public infrastructure and disaster relief in South Asia, Africa and Indo-Pacific islands.
  - This will align Indo-US ties with India’s self-image as “voice of the Global South” and reduce suspicion among other developing countries.

- **UPSC GS-2 Mains**

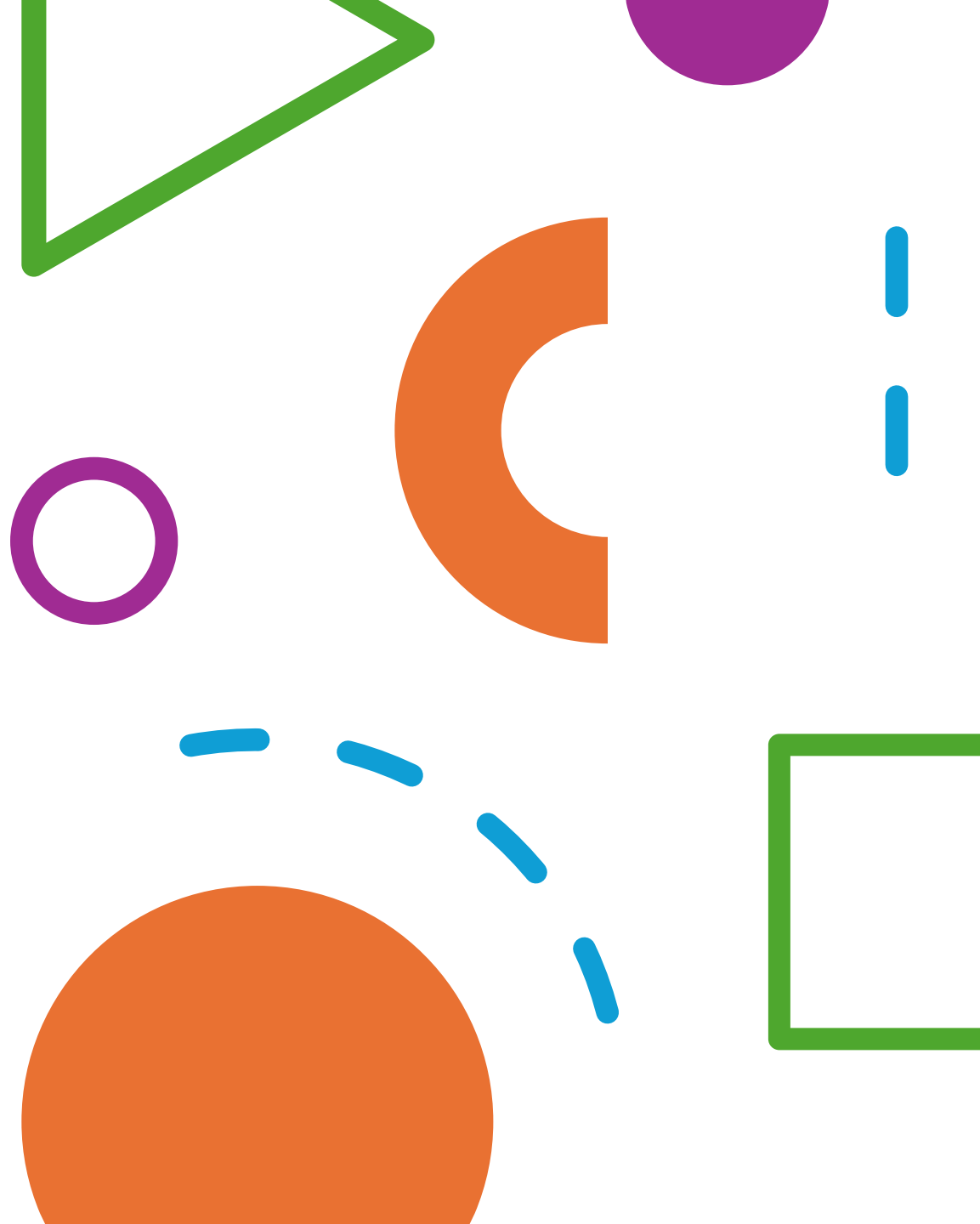
- 2013: Question on the evolution of India–US relations since the Cold War and implications of the civil nuclear deal.
- 2015: Question on Indo-US defence cooperation and its impact on India’s strategic autonomy.
- 2017: Question on “Act East” and the role of Indo-US partnership in the Asia-Pacific.
- 2019: Question on Quad and its significance for India’s maritime strategy.
- 2020: Question on how emerging technology and trade disputes are reshaping India–US relations.
- 2022: Question on critical technologies, 2+2 dialogue and India’s role in the Indo-Pacific security architecture.

- **UPSC GS-1 and Essay**

- 2015 Essay: India as a “balancing power” in the changing world order (theme).
- 2018 Essay: Globalisation vs nationalism (relevant for trade frictions and “America First”).

- **UPSC GS-3**

- 2014–2023: Multiple questions on cyber security, maritime security, internal and external security linkages, and science-technology cooperation where Indo-US examples can be cited.



# What the Nordic media got wrong about India

The embedded symbolism of Swedish fighter jets escorting Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi's plane for landing at Gothenburg on May 17 was hard to miss. This was Modi's second visit to Sweden, after his maiden one in 2018 for the first-ever India-Nordic Summit. Rajiv Gandhi was the last Indian PM to have visited Sweden, in 1988. That visit had taken place under a cloud: The Bofors arms scandal was unravelling, and the Indian government subsequently blacklisted the Swedish defence company. The contrast with the present atmosphere could hardly be greater.

Gothenburg is Sweden's industrial capital. And the city's Indian population, contributing significantly to Sweden's social and economic life, now exceeds 10,000. The choice of Gothenburg over Stockholm was smart and strategic.

The EU-India Free Trade Agreement, signed in January this year, requires EU Parliamentary and Council approval, and by participating in the European Round Table for Industry at Gothenburg, alongside Swedish PM Ulf Kristersson and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, Modi provided momentum towards ratification.

Both sides avoided discussions on the Russia tension, and how leading international institutions, such as Gothenburg University's V-Dem (Varieties of Democracy), poorly assess India's democratic health, instead prioritising trade and investment, technology and innovation. Sweden added further gravitas to this visit, by conferring upon Modi the Royal Order of the Polar Star, its highest honour for a head of government.

Modi's May 18 visit to Oslo — the first by an Indian PM in over 40 years — marked a significant upgrade in bilateral ties. King Harald V conferred upon Modi the Grand Cross of the Royal Norwegian Order of Merit at a ceremony in the Royal Palace, Norway's highest civilian honour, recognising his contribution to advancing the bilateral relationship. The Oslo talks focused on green energy, maritime cooperation, trade and investment. Questions about human rights, press freedoms, and democratic governance were left outside the room — a notable diplomatic choice. Modi also convened the third India-Nordic Summit with the PMs of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden, where, among other outcomes, India received collective Nordic backing for a permanent UN Security Council seat.

The otherwise substantive visit was not without controversy. *Aftenposten*, Norway's largest newspaper, published a cartoon depicting the Indian PM as a snake charmer with a fuel-station pipe as the snake. The piece was titled "A sneaky and slightly annoying man". We are told it was political satire. One is entitled to ask: What, precisely, was being satirised? The snake charmer is not exactly a commentary on Modi's policies, his treatment of minorities, his record on press freedom, or India's foreign policy. It is a colonial-era caricature of India itself as the land of rope tricks, mysticism, and superstition, deployed against a visiting State leader in 2026. If *Aftenposten*

wished to criticise Modi, resorting to old colonial tropes was certainly not the best way forward.

Criticising Modi is not racism. Holding any country accountable on press freedom, minority rights, and democratic backsliding is not racism — and such scrutiny should be applied with equal rigour to nations of the Global North.

But representing the elected leader of the world's most populous democracy as a snake charmer is racism. It is the racialisation of political critique, and it deserves to be named as such. The *Aftenposten* cartoon did not emerge from nowhere. It emerged from a culture in the Nordic countries that has never fully reckoned with what it means to look at the non-European world through a lens shaped by centuries of unexamined racial privilege.

Then came the journalist episode. Dagbladet's Helle Lyng Svendsen publicly challenged Modi's refusal to take questions from the press at joint appearances. When India's external affairs secretary (West) Siby George responded at length, she was seen leaving the room before he had finished. It is a gesture that captures something structural: The assumption that accountability is a one-way transaction, that scrutiny flows southward, and that explanations from the scrutinised need not be heard to their conclusion. Since then, Svendsen has appeared across several Indian media channels. I remain unconvinced by her grasp of India, its politics, or the significance of what transpired in Oslo.

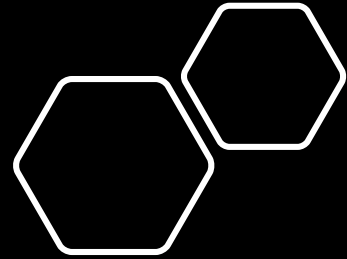
Europe is navigating its own democratic turbulence: The electoral advance of the Far Right, unresolved questions about arms sales, harsher immigration policies, and surveillance practices. Crown Princess Mette-Marit of Norway has been named in the Epstein files and her son, Marius Borg Holby stood trial in Oslo on multiple charges, including rape. The assumption that European journalists occupy a position of moral high ground in encounters with Global South leaders certainly deserves more scrutiny.

In a volatile world with wars continuing in West Asia, parts of Africa, and between Russia and Ukraine, India's economic trajectory offers a credible and stable alternative both to China and to an increasingly unreliable US. Several European heads of State have travelled to New Delhi in recent months. That an Indian PM also made the journey to Sweden and Norway speaks of how reciprocal and substantive India's relationship with the Nordic countries has become. India's growth model over the coming years will be built on trade, technology, and innovation partnerships with key European nations, and the EU-India Free Trade Agreement will be mutually beneficial to both sides.

India is not the exotic Orient. It is not a curiosity whose PM, representing such a large population, can be caricatured as a snake charmer in 2026. The Nordic leaders know it, their media needs to be better informed.



Swati Parashar



- **Key Terms and Explanations**

- **India–Nordic Relations**

- The Nordic region generally refers to **Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Finland and Iceland**. These countries are small in population but highly influential in areas such as clean technology, innovation, maritime governance, welfare policy, human rights, gender equality, digital governance and climate diplomacy. For India, Nordic countries are not merely distant European states; they are valuable partners in **green transition, Arctic research, blue economy, defence technology, innovation, shipping, education and sustainable development**.

- **Strategic Partnership**

- A strategic partnership means a relationship that goes beyond normal diplomatic interaction. It includes long-term cooperation in areas such as defence, trade, technology, energy, climate change, maritime security and global governance. In this context, India's engagement with Sweden and Norway reflects the widening of India's European diplomacy beyond traditional partners such as France, Germany and the United Kingdom.

- **EU–India Free Trade Agreement**

- A Free Trade Agreement seeks to reduce tariffs, improve market access, facilitate investment and create predictable trade rules. For India, an EU trade agreement matters because the European Union is a major market for Indian goods and services. For Europe, India offers a large consumer base, skilled labour, digital capacity and an alternative production ecosystem in an era of supply-chain uncertainty.

- **Nordic Model**

- The Nordic model combines **market capitalism with strong welfare systems**, high taxation, social security, labour protections, gender equality and trust-based governance. For UPSC, it is useful in essays on welfare state, inclusive growth, social democracy and public policy.

- **Global South**

- The Global South refers broadly to developing and post-colonial countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America. It is not simply a geographic term. It reflects a historical experience of colonialism, economic dependency, unequal global institutions and the demand for a fairer world order.

- **Orientalism**

- Orientalism means the habit of representing Asian and African societies through exotic, backward, mystical or irrational stereotypes. The image of India as a land of snake charmers, superstition and poverty belongs to this colonial imagination. Such depictions reduce a complex civilisation and modern democracy into a caricature.

- **Racialised Political Critique**

- Political criticism becomes racialised when criticism of a leader, policy or government is expressed through stereotypes about the race, culture or civilisation of a people. Criticising democratic backsliding, press freedom or human rights is legitimate. But using colonial imagery to represent an Indian leader shifts the critique from politics to prejudice.

- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**

- The central thesis revolves around a dual transformation — a remarkable upgrade in India-Nordic relations marred by persistent colonial-era stereotypes in sections of the Nordic media. The analysis can be broken down into these core points:

- **Strategic Symbolism and Relationship Upgrade**

The fighter jet escort, the choice of Gothenburg (Sweden's industrial hub with a 10,000-strong Indian diaspora) over Stockholm, and the conferral of the highest civilian honours all highlight that both Sweden and Norway now view India as a first-tier partner. This is a sharp departure from the past, epitomised by the 1988 Bofors scandal that led to a blacklisting and a decades-long chill. Today, trade, investment, technology, and green energy dominate the agenda, signalling a purely pragmatic and future-oriented approach.

- **Diplomacy of Trade Prioritisation over Normative Concerns**

Both sides consciously avoided discussions on Russia-Ukraine tensions, India's democratic indicators (as assessed by V-Dem), human rights, and press freedom. This "leave the difficult topics outside the room" strategy was a deliberate diplomatic choice to protect the economic deliverables — particularly the EU-India FTA ratification process. Modi's participation in the European Round Table for Industry alongside the Swedish PM and European Commission President provided political momentum, showing that India's market and investment potential are considered more important in the short term than public moral scrutiny.

- **Colonial Stereotypes as Racism, Not Satire**

The Aftenposten cartoon and the headline "A sneaky and slightly annoying man" are critiqued not as political dissent but as racialised mockery. The snake charmer is not a commentary on any specific policy — it's a colonial trope that paints the Indian leader, and by extension India, as an exotic curiosity. The argument draws a clear line: criticising Modi's record on minorities or press freedom is legitimate; representing an elected leader through a dehumanising colonial lens is racism. This racialisation of political critique, rooted in unexamined Nordic privilege, is a structural problem, not an isolated incident.

- **Asymmetry in Accountability**

The journalist episode where a Norwegian reporter walked out while an Indian official was responding illustrates a one-way scrutiny. The assumption is that the powerful must answer, but the answering voice is not valuable enough to be heard in full. This is linked to a broader point: European journalists often claim moral high ground, yet their own region is dealing with far-right surges, controversial arms sales, surveillance, and even royal scandals. The article suggests that accountability should be a two-way, humble process, not a civilising mission from the North to the South.

- **India as a Credible Global Alternative**

In a volatile world, India's economic trajectory, large market, and relatively stable politics offer a reliable partner for Europe, distinct from China's assertiveness and an increasingly unreliable US. The visits reinforce that the relationship is now reciprocal — European heads travel to India, and the Indian PM travels to Europe — and built on mutual benefit, not dependency.

- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**

- To appreciate the significance of the current warmth, one must trace the ups and downs of India-Nordic relations, the legacy of stereotypes, and the changing global order.

- **Pre-Independence to 1980s: Distant but Cordial**

Sweden and Norway maintained diplomatic relations with independent India from the beginning, with shared interests in multilateralism and UN peacekeeping. But trade remained modest, and political engagements were sporadic. Rajiv Gandhi's 1988 visit to Sweden was the first by an Indian PM in decades, but it took place under the shadow of the Bofors kickbacks scandal — a defence deal gone wrong that severely damaged trust.

- **The Bofors Scandal and Its Aftermath (1980s–1990s)**

Allegations that Swedish firm Bofors paid bribes to secure a howitzer contract with India erupted in 1987. The Indian government blacklisted the company, and bilateral relations entered a deep freeze. The scandal poisoned the public perception of Sweden in India, and for years, high-level visits were avoided. It became a symbol of corrupt defence deals and Northern corporate malpractice.

- **Revival and the India-Nordic Summit (2000s–2018)**

With economic liberalisation and the rise of Indian IT and pharmaceuticals, engagement picked up slowly. Sweden's Ericsson, Volvo, and ABB expanded in India. Norway's Telenor invested in telecom. Prime Minister Modi's first visit to Sweden in 2018 for the first-ever India-Nordic Summit marked a paradigm shift: the five Nordic PMs came together with India, giving a platform for regular, institutionalised dialogue. Defence ties were restored, and Bofors gradually ceased to dominate headlines.

- **Growing Diaspora and Economic Integration**

By 2026, the Indian community in Gothenburg alone exceeded 10,000, contributing to Sweden's tech and industrial sectors. This demographic presence created a political constituency for closer ties. The EU-India FTA, under negotiation since 2007 and finally signed in January 2026, provided the concrete economic scaffolding for a strategic partnership.

- **The Changing Global Context**

Russia's war in Ukraine, tensions in West Asia, an unreliable US under recent administrations, and China's aggressive posturing made India an indispensable partner for the EU and Nordics. The search for resilient supply chains and green technology collaboration pushed India and the Nordics closer, setting the stage for the grand gestures of 2026.

- **Persistence of Colonial Stereotypes**

Historically, Nordic countries have sometimes viewed the non-European world through a lens of exoticism and a "civilising" gaze, even while promoting aid and human rights. The 2026 cartoon is a modern manifestation of deep-rooted Orientalist imagery that has survived despite the official narrative of egalitarianism.



**AXIA**  
IAS ACADEMY  
RISE ABOVE THE REST  
AXIA COMPETITIVE EXAM CENTRE

### SWEDEN VISIT: Gothenburg



Second PM Visit  
Gothenburg as Industrial Capital  
EU Round Table momentum  
EU-India FTA ratification



Royal Order of the Polar Star  
(Sweden)

### NORWAY VISIT: Oslo



First PM Visit in over 40 years  
Focus on Green Energy, maritime cooperation, trade & investment



Grand Cross of the Royal Norwegian Order of Merit  
(Norway)

## UPSC CSE ANALYSIS: DECOLONIAL DIPLOMACY & India-Nordic Relations (Realpolitik vs. Orientalism)

3rd India-Nordic Summit & Collective UNSC seat backing

### OUTDATED CARICATURES & COLONIAL TROPS (Orientalist Perception)



Fuel seat ripe acts a snake charmer's snake (no people)

Exoticism, Rope Tricks, Mysticism

Media Responsibility  
(GS IV)

Criticism of "Aftenposten" Cartoon & Journalist Episode

### EUROPE'S OWN TURMOIL

Far-Right Electoral Advance, Arms Sales controversies, Immigration Policies, Surveillance practices

Epstein files & Crown Princess

Trial in Oslo for son

Hypocrisy of Global North Scrutiny: moral high ground assumption

### PRAGMATIC PARTNERSHIP (Economic Realism & Realpolitik)



Swedish jet escort



Gomanonia fighter escort



Green energy: Trade, Tech, Innovation, Sovereign Wealth  
Strategic Counterweight (GS II)



Maritime cooperation

Decolonial Diplomacy

### INDIA'S POSITION:

Credible Stable Alternative in a Volatile World (to China and unreliable US)



Trade



Technology



& Innovation



Partnerships

Indian diaspora of over 10,000



Gothenburg industrial hub

### WAY FORWARD

- Finalizing FTA with Mutual Respect
- Countering Stereotypes through Cultural Diplomacy
- Developing Indigenous Metrics for Governance
- Mature Media Engagement

### UPSC CSE LINKAGES

- GS II (International Relations, Diaspora)
- GS IV (International Ethics, Media Ethics)
- ESSAY (Multi-Alignment, Shifting Power, Post-Colonialism)

1988 Bofors Scandal friction

Current pragmatism

- **Logical and Philosophical Base**
  - **Realist Logic: Interest Drives Engagement**
    - From a realist perspective, India and Nordic countries are deepening ties because interests are converging. India needs technology, investment, energy transition tools and diplomatic support. Nordic countries need access to India's market, skilled talent and geopolitical diversification. In a world where China is viewed with caution and the United States appears less predictable, India becomes an attractive partner.
  - **Liberal Institutional Logic: Trade and Rules Reduce Uncertainty**
    - Liberal theory argues that trade, institutions and agreements create mutual dependence and reduce conflict. India–Europe economic engagement, free trade frameworks, innovation platforms and summit diplomacy reflect this logic. They create predictable channels for business, standards, investment and cooperation.
  - **Constructivist Logic: Image and Identity Matter**
    - Constructivism teaches that international relations are not shaped only by material power but also by ideas, identity and perception. How Europe imagines India matters. If India is seen as a modern democratic power, cooperation expands. If India is seen through colonial stereotypes, mistrust grows. Similarly, India's self-image as a confident civilisational state shapes its demand for respect.
  - **Post-Colonial Philosophy: Representation is Power**
    - Post-colonial thought argues that colonialism did not end only with political independence. It survives in language, images, knowledge systems and media representation. A cartoon or stereotype may appear small, but it carries historical weight. When a post-colonial country is reduced to exotic imagery, it reproduces unequal civilisational hierarchy.
  - **Democratic Philosophy: Criticism Must Remain Legitimate**
    - A democratic society cannot reject scrutiny merely because it comes from outside. Press freedom, minority rights, civil liberties and institutional independence are legitimate concerns. The philosophical challenge is to distinguish between **principled criticism** and **prejudiced representation**. The first strengthens democracy; the second weakens mutual respect.
  - **Ethics of Reciprocity**
    - The deeper ethical base is reciprocity. If Western journalists, institutions and governments examine India, India and the Global South can also examine Europe. Moral authority cannot be monopolised by geography. Democracy, human rights and dignity must be universal, not selectively invoked.
-

- **Multidimensional Analysis**

- **Social Dimension**

- The issue is deeply social because it concerns representation, identity and dignity. A society is not harmed only by military defeat or economic exploitation; it is also harmed when it is repeatedly represented as backward or exotic. For Indian students, this is a useful example of how colonial stereotypes survive in modern media. The Indian diaspora becomes important here because it challenges outdated images by contributing as doctors, engineers, researchers, entrepreneurs, students and professionals. The social message is clear: India must be represented as a complex society, not a cartoonish civilisation.

- **Political Dimension**

- Politically, India's engagement with Nordic countries reflects the widening of its European diplomacy. It also shows India's aspiration to be treated as a major power, not merely as a developing-country recipient of advice. The support of Nordic countries for India's global role, including multilateral reforms, strengthens India's diplomatic position. However, political engagement must remain balanced. India should neither accept unequal moral lecturing nor reject all democratic criticism as foreign interference.

- **Legal Dimension**

- Trade agreements, investment protection, intellectual property, data flows, labour mobility and climate standards all have legal implications. India must negotiate carefully to preserve policy autonomy. Media controversies also raise legal-philosophical questions about free speech, hate speech, racial stereotyping and dignity. Liberal democracies must protect satire, but media institutions also carry responsibility to avoid racist imagery.

- **Ethical Dimension**

- The ethical question is not whether leaders can be criticised. They can and must be. The question is whether criticism uses fair reasoning or prejudiced symbolism. Ethical public discourse requires accuracy, proportionality and respect for human dignity. Similarly, India's response must also be ethical: firm against racism, but not intolerant of scrutiny.

- **International Dimension**

- The issue belongs to the larger transformation of world politics. India is becoming a key actor in a multipolar world. Europe is seeking partners beyond China. Nordic countries bring influence in climate, technology and governance. India brings scale, market, talent and geopolitical weight. This creates a relationship that can shape green transition, Arctic governance, maritime cooperation and global institutional reform.

- **Economic Dimension**

- Economically, the partnership can help India in manufacturing, clean energy, digital systems, green shipping, innovation and investment. Nordic companies can benefit from India's market and skilled workforce. The EU-India trade framework can deepen this further. But India must ensure that trade benefits are not limited to large corporations. MSMEs, start-ups, workers and students must also gain.

- **Linkages with NCERTs**

- **Class 12 Political Science – Contemporary World Politics** (Chapter 2 “The End of Bipolarity”, 4 “Alternative Centres of Power”, 6 “International Organisations”) The EU as an alternative centre of power, its FTA with India, and the Nordic role in a multipolar world are directly linked. The UNSC reform and India’s bid feature in Chapter 6.

- **Class 12 Political Science – Politics in India Since Independence** (Chapter 6 “The Crisis of Democratic Order”, 8 “Regional Aspirations”) While not directly, the Bofors scandal’s impact on Indian politics is discussed here, helping to understand why that 1988 visit was clouded.

- **Class 10 Political Science – Democratic Politics II** (Chapter 7 “Outcomes of Democracy”, 8 “Challenges to Democracy”) The debates around indices like V-Dem, democratic backsliding, and how democracy is measured link to the idea that democracy has different dimensions beyond mere elections. The cartoon example can illustrate the challenge of social diversity and dignity.

- **Class 9 History – India and the Contemporary World I** (Chapter 6 “Peasants and Farmers” may not directly fit, but the concept of colonialism and Orientalism is better covered in **Class 12 History** Theme 10 “Colonialism and the Countryside”, though more directly, the optional History texts on colonialism. For NCERT linkage, note **Class 8 History – Our Pasts III** (Chapter 2 “From Trade to Territory” and the idea of colonial attitudes towards India). The Orientalist image of India is a legacy of that period.

- **Class 11 Sociology – Understanding Society** (Chapter 4 “Culture and Socialisation”, 5 “Doing Sociology: Research Methods”) The concept of stereotypes, prejudice, and the social construction of the “other” are dealt with here. The snake charmer image is a classic example of a cultural stereotype.

- **Class 12 Economics – Macro & Indian Economic Development** (Chapter on International Trade) FTAs, trade balance, and foreign investment are covered, making the EU-India FTA a relevant contemporary case.





- **Linkages with UPSC CSE Syllabus**
- **GS Paper II – International Relations**
  - This is the strongest linkage. The topic connects with bilateral, regional and global groupings involving India, effect of policies of developed countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora, international institutions and global governance reform. India–Nordic engagement can be used as an example of India's multi-vector diplomacy in Europe.
- **GS Paper II – Governance and Democracy**
  - The issue also connects with democracy, accountability, media freedom and institutional values. Questions may not directly ask about Nordic countries, but the theme can enrich answers on democratic scrutiny, global indices, civil liberties and India's engagement with international criticism.
- **GS Paper I – Post-Colonialism, Society and Diaspora**
  - The colonial stereotype aspect links with modern Indian history, colonial mentality, cultural identity and Indian diaspora. It is useful in essays and GS I answers involving globalisation, Indian society and post-colonial identity.
- **GS Paper III – Economy, Technology and Environment**
  - Trade agreements, green technology, innovation, clean energy, maritime cooperation, Arctic research and blue economy connect directly with GS III. India–Nordic cooperation can be quoted in answers on sustainable development and technology partnerships.
- **GS Paper IV – Ethics**
  - The issue gives excellent material for ethics answers: dignity, fairness, media responsibility, freedom of expression, prejudice, accountability, moral hypocrisy and public reasoning. It can also be used in case studies involving satire, racism and diplomatic sensitivity.

- **Way Forward**
- **Build Substance Beyond Symbolism**
  - High-level visits, honours and summit declarations create momentum, but the real test lies in implementation. India and Nordic countries should create time-bound working groups on green hydrogen, offshore wind, battery storage, clean shipping, Arctic research, cyber security, start-ups and skill mobility. Diplomacy must produce measurable outcomes.
- **Deepen India–Nordic Green Partnership**
  - India should seek affordable technology transfer, joint manufacturing and co-financing rather than merely importing expensive green solutions. Nordic expertise in clean energy and India's scale can together create globally relevant models of sustainable development.
- **Protect Strategic Autonomy**
  - India should cooperate with Europe without being drawn into rigid bloc politics. On issues such as Russia, China, Arctic governance and sanctions, India must preserve independent judgment while communicating its position clearly.
- **Strengthen Domestic Democratic Credibility**
  - The best answer to selective criticism is not only diplomatic rebuttal; it is stronger domestic institutions. A confident India should strengthen press freedom, judicial independence, minority confidence, parliamentary debate and transparency. This reduces the space for external criticism and improves India's moral authority.
- **Promote Decolonised Media Literacy**
  - Indian missions abroad, diaspora organisations, universities and cultural institutions should engage with foreign media and academia to correct outdated stereotypes. The goal should not be censorship, but better understanding of modern India.
- **Encourage Reciprocal Dialogue**
  - India and Europe should create spaces where democracy, rights, migration, racism, technology ethics and media representation are discussed mutually. The conversation should not be framed as Europe teaching India; it should be framed as democracies learning from each other.
- **Use Diaspora as Knowledge Bridges**
  - Indian professionals and students in Nordic countries can become ambassadors of India's modern reality. Structured diaspora networks in innovation, policy research, university collaboration and entrepreneurship should be encouraged.

- **UPSC CSE Mains – GS Paper II: International Relations**

- **2023**

“Indian diaspora has scaled new heights in the West. Describe its economic and political benefits for India.”

This directly links with the role of the Indian community in Nordic countries as economic contributors, cultural bridges and soft-power assets.

- **2023**

“The expansion and strengthening of NATO and a stronger US-Europe strategic partnership works well for India. What is your opinion about this statement? Give reasons and examples.”

This connects with India’s engagement with Europe while maintaining strategic autonomy.

- **2015**

“Discuss the impediments India is facing in its pursuit of a permanent seat in the UN Security Council.”

Nordic backing for India’s UNSC claim can be used as a contemporary example of support for global governance reform.

- **2013**

“Economic ties between India and Japan while growing in recent years are still far below their potential. Elucidate the policy constraints which are inhibiting this growth.”

Although about Japan, the logic applies to India–Nordic and India–EU ties: potential exists, but standards, market access, regulatory barriers and investment concerns remain.

- **2019**

“What can France learn from the Indian Constitution’s approach to secularism?”

This is useful for understanding how India can also contribute normative ideas to Europe, rather than only receiving criticism from Europe.

- **2014**

“With respect to the South China Sea, maritime territorial disputes and rising tension affirm the need for safeguarding maritime security to ensure freedom of navigation and overflight throughout the region. In this context, discuss the bilateral issues between India and China.”

This can be linked indirectly to maritime cooperation and blue economy partnerships with Nordic countries.

- **2016**

“Evaluate the economic and strategic dimensions of India’s Look East Policy in the context of the post-Cold War international scenario.”

Students can use the same framework to understand India’s newer “Look North Europe” or “Engage Nordic” approach.

- **UPSC CSE Mains – GS Paper I and Society**

- **2019**

“Are we losing our local identity for the global identity? Discuss.”

This links with globalisation, diaspora and representation. India must globalise without allowing its identity to be reduced to stereotypes.

- **2013**

“Critically examine the effects of globalization on the aged population in India.”

Not directly related, but useful to understand the social consequences of globalisation and welfare models, including lessons from Nordic societies.

- **UPSC CSE Mains – GS Paper III**

- **Questions on renewable energy, sustainable development, technology and climate finance** are highly relevant. India–Nordic cooperation can enrich answers on green transition, clean technology, climate adaptation, circular economy and blue economy.

# A colonial ghost that haunts Jan Vishwas

**T**he Jan Vishwas (Amendment of Provisions) Act, 2020 is a landmark legislation. Criminal offences have been replaced with civil penalties across 80 central laws. Businesspeople will no longer face imprisonment for these offences but only pay fines. Some first-time offenders will be warned and given the chance to set things right.

The Act's structure is lean — five operative sections and all the amendments tacked into a schedule. At first glance, it is a masterpiece in legislative drafting. But then there is section 4 — the section that modernises the Act. Section 4 is the Act's "savings clause", a standard and necessary legal precaution that ensures that new laws do not inadvertently disturb existing legal structures. The problem lies in what the section says.

Its first limb states that any amendment made by the Act "shall not affect any other enactment in which the amended or repealed enactment has been applied, incorporated or referred to". This means if some other law (Act X) refers to a law (Act Y) that this Act has changed, Act Y does not get updated for Act X. Consider what this means in practice. The Act decriminalises several offences under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940. But the Representation of the People Act, 1951 relies on some of those offences under the 1940 Act to disqualify individuals from becoming MPs or MLAs. Even though the Jan Vishwas Act removes these offences from the Drugs Act, the savings clause freezes the cross-references in the Representation Act in place.

Assume a person committed an offence under the amended Drugs Act and paid a fine and now decides to run for office. A rival may try to get him disqualified, arguing that because the Representation Act refers to the older version of the Drugs Act, the criminal penalty still exists for candidates.

The third limb of the section is more expansive, saving every "principle or rule of law, or established jurisdiction" that was derived from any law that the Act amends. The whole point of the Act is to shift jurisdiction from criminal courts to administrative adjudicators and to shift the burden of proof from "beyond reasonable doubt" (the standard required for criminal offences) to the "balance of probabilities" (the standard required for civil adjudication). But the third limb of section 4 appears to preserve the old criminal jurisdictions as well as the old legal principles. The Act opens the door, and

its savings clause promptly bolts it shut again.

So, where did this clause come from? It was copied from the Jan Vishwas Act, 2023. That borrowed the clause from repealing and amending Acts, which repeal obsolete laws. Those Acts, in turn, got it from the UK's 19th century statute law revision Acts. It was originally crafted by Richard Bethel, 1st Baron Westbury, Lord High Chancellor of Great Britain from 1852-1865. Westbury designed the clause for the delicate task of clearing centuries of obsolete legislative debris without accidentally upending settled law. It ensured that despite repealing hundreds of enactments, nothing would break the legal system.

The Jan Vishwas Act, however, is not a housekeeping exercise. It is not trying to leave the law unchanged. In fact, it is trying to do the opposite. Adopting Westbury's savings clause in this context not only makes little sense but also undermines the intent of the Act. There is also an irony in the Act's ambition to decolonise the Indian legal system while simultaneously adopting a Victorian legislative relic.

Courts will refuse to read the savings clause in this manner, as judges generally avoid interpretations that lead to absurdity. But legal arguments are made by parties with interests. If clause 4 permits ambiguity, litigation will follow. Businesses could face challenges and regulators could face jurisdictional contests, requiring courts to resolve questions that should have been answered in Parliament.

That this was not a clerical error is troubling. The drafters changed the phrase "notwithstanding that" in the savings clause of the 2023 Act to "despite the fact that" in the 2020 Act, indicating that they read the clause, modernised its grammar, and yet retained its flawed substance. The Select Committee of the Lok Sabha then sat 48 times and reviewed every clause. When clause 4 came up, it was adopted unchanged.

Every word inserted in a statute is a commitment, and equally, every ambiguity is an invitation to litigation. This savings clause in the Act, and in every other similar Act which will follow, may create the very clutter it was intended to prevent. Over 150 years after it was first drafted, the spectre of the Westbury continues to haunt India's statute book. It is time we finally exorcise this ghost.



Aditya Prasanna Bhattacharya

Aditya Prasanna Bhattacharya is at University of Cambridge. The external views are personal

- **Key Terms and Explanations**

- **Jan Vishwas Act, 2026:** A central legislation that amends 80 existing laws to convert numerous criminal offences into civil wrongs. The goal is to reduce fear of imprisonment among honest businesspersons and streamline regulatory compliance by imposing monetary penalties instead of jail terms.
- **Decriminalisation:** The process of removing criminal liability (imprisonment, criminal record) from an offence. Example: Earlier, minor labelling errors under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act could attract a prison term; after decriminalisation, only a fine is levied.
- **Civil Penalty:** A monetary fine imposed for a regulatory violation, adjudicated under civil procedure where the standard of proof is “balance of probabilities” (more likely than not), not “beyond reasonable doubt.”
- **Savings Clause:** A provision in a statute that preserves existing rights, obligations, legal principles, or references from the earlier legal regime despite the new law’s amendments. It is a legal safety net to prevent unintended disruption.
- **Cross-reference / Incorporation by reference:** When one statute (Act X) refers to provisions of another statute (Act Y) to define an offence, penalty, or eligibility. Example: The Representation of the People Act, 1951, refers to certain offences under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940, as grounds for disqualification of legislators.
- **Westbury Savings Clause:** Named after Richard Bethell, 1st Baron Westbury (Lord Chancellor 1861–1865), it was originally devised for statute law revision Acts in the UK, meant to tidy up obsolete laws without affecting any substantive legal position. Its hallmark is the phrase saving “any principle or rule of law, or established jurisdiction” and any incorporation of repealed enactments in other laws.
- **Standard of Proof:** ‘Beyond reasonable doubt’ is the high threshold in criminal trials; ‘balance of probabilities’ is the lower civil standard where the judge decides what is more likely true.

- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**

- At the heart of this issue is a stark contradiction between what a law intends to do and what its actual text accomplishes. Understanding this dichotomy is crucial for analyzing the effectiveness of governance.
- **The Conflict of Intent and Text:** The primary objective of such reformative legislation is to shift jurisdictions from criminal courts to administrative adjudicators and lower the burden of proof. However, improperly drafted "savings clauses" can effectively freeze the old, harsher laws in place, completely nullifying the intended reform.
- **The Trap of Cross-References:** When an Act amends a parent law (e.g., the Drugs Act) but its savings clause states that other laws relying on the parent law (e.g., election laws) will not be affected, it creates a dangerous legal limbo. A person might pay a civil fine under the new law, but still be treated as a "criminal" under electoral laws because the cross-reference remains frozen in time.
- **The Danger of Blind Copy-Pasting:** Much of the flawed drafting stems from lifting Victorian-era legal templates and inserting them into modern reformative laws. A clause designed in the 19th century to safely repeal obsolete laws is fundamentally unsuited for a modern law that actively seeks to change substantive rights and penalties.
- **The Failure of Institutional Scrutiny:** When phrases are grammatically modernized but their flawed legal substance is retained, it points to a systemic lack of rigorous application of mind. Furthermore, when Parliamentary Select Committees pass such clauses without debate, it highlights a gap in the legislative oversight process.

- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**

- To understand why our statute books look the way they do today, we have to trace the lineage of our legislative drafting practices back to the colonial era.

- **The Victorian Origins (1860s):** The template for standard savings clauses was crafted by Richard Bethell (Lord Westbury) in 19th-century Great Britain. His goal was to clear centuries of dead laws without breaking the legal system, necessitating a very broad, conservative savings clause.

- **Post-Independence Inheritance (1947 Onwards):** Upon independence, India inherited not just British laws, but British methods of drafting them. The General Clauses Act, 1897, and the standard templates for repealing and amending laws continued to utilize Westbury's language to maintain continuity.

- **The Modern Reform Era (Post-1991 to Present):** As India liberalized, the focus shifted to the "Ease of Doing Business." The state recognized that jailing business owners for minor procedural lapses was counterproductive. This birthed the push for massive decriminalization exercises, culminating in overarching amendment acts.

- **The Current Paradox:** Today, India is actively trying to "decolonize" its legal system (e.g., replacing the IPC with the BNS). Yet, the persistence of the Victorian savings clause shows that while the titles of our laws are changing, the archaic mechanics driving them remain stubbornly entrenched.



# COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS: JAN VISHWAS (AMENDMENT OF PROVISIONS) ACT, 2026

Modern Intent vs. Colonial Gaps: Understanding the Savings Clause Dilemma.

## THE ACT'S LANDMARK PROMISES.

**JAN VISHWAS (AMENDMENT) ACT, 2026: CORE PROMISES**



- 80 CENTRAL LAWS AMENDED
- CRIMINAL → CIVIL PENALTIES
- BUSINESSPEOPLE AVOID JAIL
- FIRST-TIME OFFENDERS WARNINGS

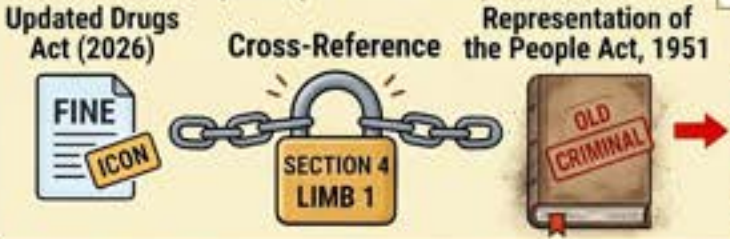
## THE CORE INTENT VS. IMPACT DIAGRAM.



## LIMB 3: PRESERVING OLD PRINCIPLES



## LIMB 1: FREEZING CROSS-REFERENCES (Example RPA, 1951)



## THE VICTORIAN RELIC PARADOX.




## CONSEQUENCES OF AMBIGUITY



- Increased Litigation
- Regulator-Business Conflict
- Jurisdictional Disputes
- Courts resolving Legislative gaps

## THE WAY FORWARD.



**EXORCISING THE WESTBURY GHOST: SOLUTIONS.**

- Pre-Legislative Public Consultation
- Specialized Drafting Units
- AI-Assisted Cross-Reference Mapping
- Smart Savings Clauses

- **Logical and Philosophical Base**

- **Logic of Savings Clauses:** They embody the principle of legal continuity—*nova constitutio futuris formam imponere debet, non praeteritis* (a new law ought to be prospective, not retrospective). They protect vested rights and prevent accidental abolition of remedies. However, this logic assumes the new law is not intended to disturb existing arrangements. In *Jan Vishwas*, the very intention is to disturb the criminal penalty regime.
- **Fallacy of False Equivalence:** Treating a decriminalisation law like a repealing act is a category mistake. The ends are entirely different; therefore, the means (the savings clause) must be tailored. Applying a one-size-fits-all Westbury clause violates the principle of legislative coherence.
- **Intentionalism vs. Textualism in Statutory Interpretation:** If courts follow a purposive approach (Heydon's rule), they will read down the savings clause to align with the Act's objective. But a literalist textualist reading would give effect to the plain words, causing absurd results. This tension creates doctrinal unpredictability.
- **Rule of Law Concerns:** The rule of law demands that the law be clear, consistent, and capable of being obeyed. A statute whose heart and saving clause are at war fails this test. Citizens, especially businesses, cannot plan their conduct if they face two parallel regimes.
- **Philosophical Assumptions About Criminal Law:** Criminal law is grounded in moral blameworthiness; civil penalties are about regulatory compliance. By preserving "principles or rules of law" derived from the criminal framework, the clause implicitly upholds the stigmatising morality of the old regime, undercutting the philosophy that minor economic defaults should not carry moral opprobrium.
- **Decolonisation of Legal Thought:** The uncritical adoption of Westbury's clause symbolises a colonial hangover in legislative drafting. True decolonisation requires not just changing content but also discarding borrowed forms that no longer serve our context.

## • **Multidimensional Analysis**

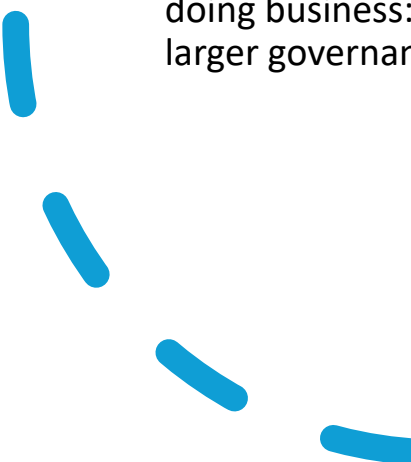
- **Social:** The Act aims to reduce the stigma of criminality for minor regulatory lapses, promoting a culture of trust between citizens and the state. However, if the savings clause keeps criminal consequences alive for political aspirants and business rivals, it perpetuates social exclusion and litigation as a weapon of political vendetta. The social capital generated by a forgiving regulatory regime gets dissipated.
  - **Political:** Decriminalisation is part of the larger “Minimum Government, Maximum Governance” narrative and ease of doing business promise. A flawed savings clause can become a political liability if high-profile disqualification cases surface. Opposition parties can attack the government for sloppy law-making. Conversely, it may also become a tool for political defamation by filing disqualification petitions based on the old criminal law, injecting legal uncertainty into electoral politics.
  - **Legal:** This is primarily a legal puzzle of internal inconsistency and cross-statute referencing. It raises fundamental questions about *contemporanea expositio* (interpretation based on contemporary context), the *generalia specialibus non derogant* principle, and the applicability of the mischief rule. It tests the court’s role in correcting legislative clumsiness. The issue will shape Indian jurisprudence on savings clauses for decades.
  - **Ethical:** Is it ethical for the state to promise decriminalisation but allow a drafting sleight of hand to preserve criminality for certain purposes? This smacks of legal deception. The state has a duty of candour and coherence towards its citizens. The failure to fix the clause proactively is an ethical lapse in governance, prioritising form over substance.
  - **International:** Many common law jurisdictions (UK, Australia, Canada) have moved away from indiscriminate use of Westbury-style savings clauses in reform legislation. The Jan Vishwas case could be studied internationally as an example of how not to draft omnibus bills. On the other hand, India’s bold decriminalisation model, if cleaned up, could serve as a template for developing countries seeking to rationalise colonial-era business laws.
  - **Economic:** The core purpose is economic growth through regulatory streamlining. The savings clause introduces a hidden cost—litigation risk premium—that affects investment decisions. Small businesses, unable to afford legal counsel, will be most vulnerable to harassment under the ambiguous dual regime. The economic gains of decriminalisation may thus be skewed in favour of those with better access to legal advice.
-

- **Linkages with NCERTs**

- **Class 11, Indian Constitution at Work** – Chapter on ‘Legislature’: Explains the law-making process, role of Parliamentary committees. The failure of the Select Committee to detect the savings clause error illustrates how legislative scrutiny can break down. It helps students understand that bills are not perfect and must be examined critically.
- **Class 11, Indian Constitution at Work** – Chapter on ‘Judiciary’: Discusses judicial review and interpretation principles. This issue shows how courts use mischief rule, literal rule, etc. to resolve statutory contradictions.
- **Class 12, Political Science (Contemporary World Politics)** – Not directly; but the idea of decolonisation of legal systems links to the broader theme of challenging colonial legacies.
- **Class 12, Indian Society** – Chapter on ‘Social Justice’: The notion that a criminal record stigmatises individuals can be connected to social exclusion. Decriminalisation of minor offences is a social justice measure for small businesspersons.
- **Class 12, Legal Studies** (if available) – ‘Legislative Drafting’ and ‘Statutory Interpretation’ units; the Westbury clause and its misuse is a perfect case study for aspirants interested in law optional or legal aspects of governance.



- **Linkages with UPSC CSE Syllabus**

- **GS Paper 2:** Governance, transparency and accountability; Parliament and State legislatures—functioning, scrutiny; Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors; Issues arising out of their design and implementation. The Jan Vishwas Act is a policy intervention whose design flaw (savings clause) affects implementation. It tests the effectiveness of parliamentary oversight.
  - **GS Paper 3:** Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilisation of resources, growth, development; Effects of liberalisation on economy, changes in industrial policy. Ease of Doing Business is a major theme; decriminalisation is part of regulatory reform. The legal uncertainty caused by a flawed clause directly impacts industrial policy outcomes.
  - **GS Paper 4 (Ethics):** Public/Civil service values and ethics in Public administration; Challenges of corruption. Ambiguous laws breed discretionary corruption—inspectors may threaten action under the old criminal provisions. The ethical principle of legislative candour is violated when the state’s promise is betrayed by a hidden clause.
  - **Essay Paper:** Possible essays on “Law as an instrument of social change,” “The colonial shadow on Indian institutions,” “Ease of doing business: Intent vs. Implementation,” “When laws contradict themselves.” The Jan Vishwas savings clause is a microcosm of larger governance challenges.
- 

- **Way Forward**

- **Immediate Legislative Correction:** Introduce a Jan Vishwas (Amendment) Bill, 2027, to replace Section 4 with a carefully drafted savings clause. The new clause should: (a) state that references in any other law to the earlier penal provisions shall be construed as references to the corresponding civil penalty provisions after amendment; (b) explicitly transfer all criminal jurisdiction for those offences to the designated adjudicatory authority; and (c) clarify that any order passed under the new civil regime shall be a full bar to criminal proceedings for the same act.
- **Pre-legislative Impact Assessment Mandate:** Before any omnibus amendment, a detailed cross-referencing map must be prepared showing how each amendment affects other statutes. The Ministry of Law should create a digital “Statute Book Navigator” that flags dependencies automatically.
- **Strengthening Parliamentary Committees:** Provide expert legal researchers to standing and select committees. Build technical capacity to examine the internal consistency of bills, not just political merits.
- **Drafting Manual Reforms:** Update India’s Legislative Drafting Manual to expressly warn against using boilerplate savings clauses in reform legislation. The manual should mandate a purposive analysis of each standard clause.
- **Judicial Harmonisation Doctrine:** In the interim, the Supreme Court could seize an appropriate case to lay down a principle that savings clauses in reformist statutes must be read down to advance the legislative purpose. This would prevent frivolous litigation and provide clarity until Parliament acts.
- **Capacity Building for Regulators:** Train regulatory officials and newly empowered adjudicators on the new civil penalty framework so that there is no administrative vacuum, reducing the temptation to fall back on the old criminal system.
- **Public Awareness:** The government should issue explanatory circulars clarifying that decriminalised offences no longer carry criminal consequences for any purpose, including disqualification, to remove market uncertainty.

## All Previous Years' UPSC Questions

**GS 2 Mains (2021):** "The quality of legislation in India has declined over the years due to the bypassing of Parliamentary Committees." Discuss.

**GS 2 Mains (2019):** "Parliament's power to amend the constitution is a limited power and it cannot be enlarged into absolute power." (While on constitutional amendment, it reflects on the limits and precision of legislative power).

**GS 2 Mains (2017):** "Examine the role of Parliamentary Committees in ensuring accountability of the executive to the legislature."

**GS 3 Mains (2018):** "How are the principles followed by the NITI Aayog different from those followed by the erstwhile Planning Commission in India?" (Connect to modern policy design vs. archaic methods).

**GS 2 Prelims (2017):** Questions regarding the 'Ease of Doing Business' index and the specific reforms India is taking to improve its rank.

**SWAMISPEAK** India's solar crisis has been failure of planning, coordination and infra

# Victim of its Stellar Success



Swaminathan S Anklesaria Aiyar

On two occasions in May price of electricity on Indian Energy Exchange fell to zero. How can something so crazy happen when the country is in the grip of a severe energy crisis? Because India has been installing solar energy faster than local demand can absorb it, and the surplus can neither be stored (lack of battery storage) or transmitted to zones needing power (insufficient transmission lines). So, even as India boasts of record expansion of solar capacity more is being shut down.

The worst problem is in Rajasthan, a desert state with enormous solar potential but limited industrial demand. Since the summer of 2025, solar and wind projects there have suffered severe curtailment, with some forced to shut down completely during peak daylight hours. An IET report revealed that the state had been curtailing up to 80% of solar generation for weeks because of low demand.

Rajasthan simply cannot absorb all the power it generates, while the national grid lacks sufficient infrastructure to carry the surplus to power-deficit regions. Meanwhile, fresh solar installation is rising faster than ever.

Policymakers have focused overwhelmingly on adding renewable generation capacity without simultaneously building transmission systems, storage facilities and demand management mechanisms needed to integrate that power into the national grid. Solar parks have grown explosively in Rajasthan and Kutch in Gujarat because of abundant sunshine and vast tracts of cheap desert land.



## Reinvent the wheel

But consumers are in industrial and urban centres hundreds of kilometres away. Without storage batteries, daytime surplus can't be stored and released in the evening, during peak demand time. Without adequate transmission

India's strategy has treated generation, transmission, storage, demand management as silos, not parts of an integrated ecosystem



lines, solar generation can get stranded.

Cool-based power stations in Rajasthan can reduce generation up to a point. But shutting them down completely is undesirable since a cold restart is expensive and uses much fuel oil. When solar generation first began, adjusting thermal load was easy. But now that renewable capacity has shot up, Rajasthan cannot cope.

Delays in commissioning critical transmission lines — especially the 765 kV Khetri-Narvala double circuit line, the 765 kV Bhadla II-Sikar II line, and the 400 kV Narvala-Moharami Bagh line — have exhausted available transmission margins. More than 4 GW of renewable capacity lacks proper evacuation capability and the gap keeps rising.

Rajasthan has over 35 GW of solar capacity, 27% of the national total. Since last summer, 3-6 GW of solar capacity has been curtailed, with some projects experiencing complete daytime shutdowns. Industry estimates place financial losses at ₹200 cr so far.

Kutch is India's other solar hotspot. Adani Group is building the world's biggest renewable park at Khavda, with 26 GW of solar and 4 GW of wind capacity. Ambani's Reliance Industries Ltd (RIL) is building another massive renewable park nearby on 5,50,000 sq km of desert land.

RIL is simultaneously building solar equipment as well as storage batteries and electrolyzers to produce green ammonia from sea water in its major industrial complex at Jamnagar. So far, Gujarat's solar surplus has been marginal. But care must be taken to avoid Rajasthan's fate.

A worrying aspect is that even projects designed to relieve congestion have not solved the problem. Curtailments reportedly intensified after the Khetri-Narvala line became operational on December 22. Instead of easing congestion, Grid India cited multiple technical constraints limiting renewable evacuation from Rajasthan.

These included voltage oscillations at RE complexes, low short-circuit ratios at pooling stations, loading constraints on the Bhadla-Bikner 400 kV corridor and high loading on the 765 kV Bikaner-Khetri line. Transmission planning underestimated the comp-

lexity of integrating massive intermittent renewable capacity into the grid.

India's renewable strategy has tended to treat generation, transmission, storage and demand management as separate silos, instead of parts of an integrated energy ecosystem. Solar projects were approved faster than evacuation systems could be built. Developers invested billions, assuming transmission infrastructure would arrive on schedule. Instead, projects in Rajasthan have been deferred by 18-20 months because of transmission delays, only to face further postponements.

The solution requires much more than simply adding batteries, though storage remains important. We must fast-track critical transmission infrastructure while synchronising renewable generation approvals with evacuation capacity. Delays in land acquisition, environmental clearances and regulatory approvals for transmission projects must be minimised.

Demand management is equally critical. India needs incentives for electricity consumption during solar peak hours. Time-of-day pricing could encourage industries and agricultural users to shift consumption to midday when solar generation is highest. Demand-response programmes could help smooth grid fluctuations and absorb excess RE.

Regulatory reforms are also necessary to ensure solar projects remain profitable. Renewable projects require stronger 'must-run' protections, compensation mechanisms for curtailment, and contractual safeguards recognising transmission delays as a 'change in law' event under power purchase agreements. Better forecasting and scheduling systems must coordinate renewable generation with grid demand more intelligently.

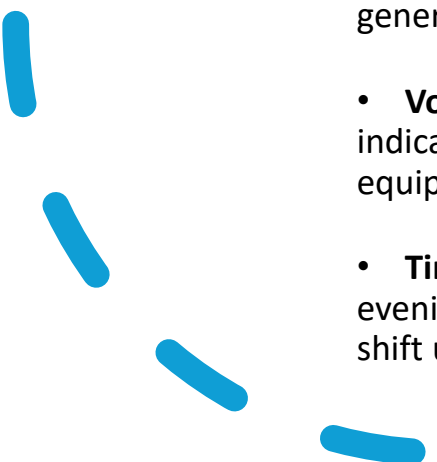
India's solar crisis is not a failure of renewable technology or installation. It is a failure of planning, coordination and infrastructure. Let us correct this for the with.

Solar parks have grown explosively in Rajasthan and Kutch. But consumers are in industrial and urban centres hundreds of kms away





- **Key Terms and Explanations**

- **Indian Energy Exchange (IEX):** India's premier electricity trading platform where power is bought and sold in real time and on a day-ahead basis. When supply far outstrips demand during certain hours, prices can crash—even to zero—because sellers offer power at low rates to avoid generation being completely wasted.
  - **Curtailement:** The deliberate reduction of output from a power plant, often renewable ones like solar, when the grid cannot absorb the electricity. In Rajasthan, this has reached up to 80% of solar generation during peak daylight hours, meaning that even though the sun is shining and panels are ready, the electricity is simply not taken.
  - **Grid Integration:** The process of connecting a generation source to the larger electricity network and ensuring stable, reliable operation. Integration becomes complex with intermittent renewables like solar and wind, which fluctuate with weather, requiring advanced forecasting, flexible backup, and strong transmission links.
  - **Transmission Evacuation Infrastructure:** The network of high-voltage lines and substations that “evacuate” power from generating stations to load centres. Key projects mentioned—765 kV Khetri–Narela double circuit, 400 kV Narela–Maharani Bagh—are critical arteries whose delays cause renewable energy to become stranded.
  - **Green Ammonia:** Ammonia produced using renewable energy to extract hydrogen from water (electrolysis) and then combining it with nitrogen. It is a way to store and transport renewable energy in chemical form, useful for industries and power generation, and is being explored by Reliance Industries at Jamnagar.
  - **Voltage Oscillations and Short-Circuit Ratio:** Technical grid stability issues. A low short-circuit ratio at pooling stations indicates weak grid strength, making it difficult to handle variable renewable output without voltage swings that can damage equipment or trigger blackouts.
  - **Time-of-Day Pricing and Demand Response:** Economic tools where electricity tariffs change by the hour. Higher prices during evening peaks and very low or even negative prices during midday solar surplus encourage factories and agricultural pumps to shift usage to sunny hours, absorbing excess generation.
- 

- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**

- **Core thesis:** India faces a paradox of energy crisis and renewable surplus because policy has concentrated heavily on adding generation capacity without commensurate investment in transmission, storage, and demand-side management. This is a failure of integrated planning, not of renewable technology itself.
- **Evidence of mismatch:** In May, wholesale power prices on IEX touched zero twice. Rajasthan, which hosts over 35 GW solar capacity (27% of national total), has curtailed 3–4 GW since the previous summer, with some plants shut completely during daytime, causing estimated financial losses of ₹250 crore.
- **Transmission bottlenecks:** Despite commissioning of some lines, Grid India flagged multiple technical constraints—voltage oscillations, weak short-circuit ratios, loading limits—that continue to restrict renewable evacuation. Even after the Khetri–Narela line went live, curtailments reportedly intensified, proving the complexity was underestimated.
- **Flawed sequencing:** Developers invested billions on the assumption that evacuation would be ready on time. Instead, projects in Rajasthan have been deferred by 18–20 months, only to encounter further delays. Approvals for generation continue to outpace those for transmission, creating a widening gap.
- **Thermal power dilemma:** Coal-based plants in Rajasthan can only ramp down to a point. Frequent shutdowns are expensive and fuel-intensive to restart. As renewable capacity has soared, the state has run out of the flexible thermal backup needed to balance the grid.

- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**

- **Pre-independence and early planning:** India's electricity sector grew through state-owned utilities under the Electricity (Supply) Act, 1948. Generation, transmission, and distribution were vertically integrated within states, with limited inter-state exchange. Renewables were negligible.
- **1990s liberalisation:** Opening up of generation to private players, but transmission remained a centrally planned monopoly. The Electricity Act, 2003 introduced open access, power trading, and unbundling, setting the stage for a national market. However, renewable energy was still a niche.
- **National Solar Mission (2010):** Launched as part of the National Action Plan on Climate Change, it aimed to establish India as a solar leader. Initial targets were modest, but competitive bidding and falling costs led to explosive growth. The focus was on installing megawatts, not on evacuation or grid balancing.
- **Paris Agreement and revised targets:** By 2015, India pledged 175 GW of renewable capacity by 2022 (later raised to 500 GW by 2030). Ultra-mega solar parks were rolled out in desert regions like Rajasthan's Bhadla and Gujarat's Kutch, prioritising land availability and solar irradiation over transmission readiness.
- **Green Energy Corridors:** Phase I (2015–2020) and Phase II aimed to build intra-state and inter-state transmission for renewables. However, execution lagged due to land acquisition, forest clearances, and court cases. The gap between generation commissioning and evacuation readiness widened.
- **2022–2025 surge and curtailment crisis:** Post-COVID, solar additions accelerated dramatically. By 2025, Rajasthan alone had over 35 GW. Summer 2025 saw unprecedented curtailment, zero prices on exchanges, and public acknowledgement by Grid India of systemic technical constraints. The crisis became undeniable.



## INDIA'S SOLAR POWER PARADOX: FROM SURPLUS TO CURTAILMENT (A PLANNING BREAKDOWN)

### 1. EXCESS GENERATION

The "Crazy" Part - Solar Boom



**RAJASTHAN'S SURPLUS:**  
> 35 GW Solar  
(27% National Total)



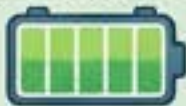
**EXPLOSIVE CAPACITY EXPANSION:**  
Kutch & Rajasthan Solar Parks



**ZERO PRICE ON IEX (May):**  
Signal of Local Oversupply

### 2. THE BOTTLENECK

The Problem - Grid Gaps



**STORAGE LACK:**  
No grid-scale battery storage to hold daytime power.



**TRANSMISSION GAPS:**  
Delayed critical high-voltage (765kV) lines (e.g., Khetri-Narela, Bhadla II-Sikar II)



**TECHNICAL CONSTRAINTS:**  
Voltage oscillations, Low short-circuit ratios.



**PLANNING SILOS:**  
RE approvals separate from evacuation capacity planning.



### 3. THE IMPACT

The Result - Waste & Loss



**MASSIVE CURTAILMENT**  
(e.g., up to 80% solar generation shut down in Rajasthan during peak hours)



**FINANCIAL LOSSES**  
~₹250 cr so far in Rajasthan.

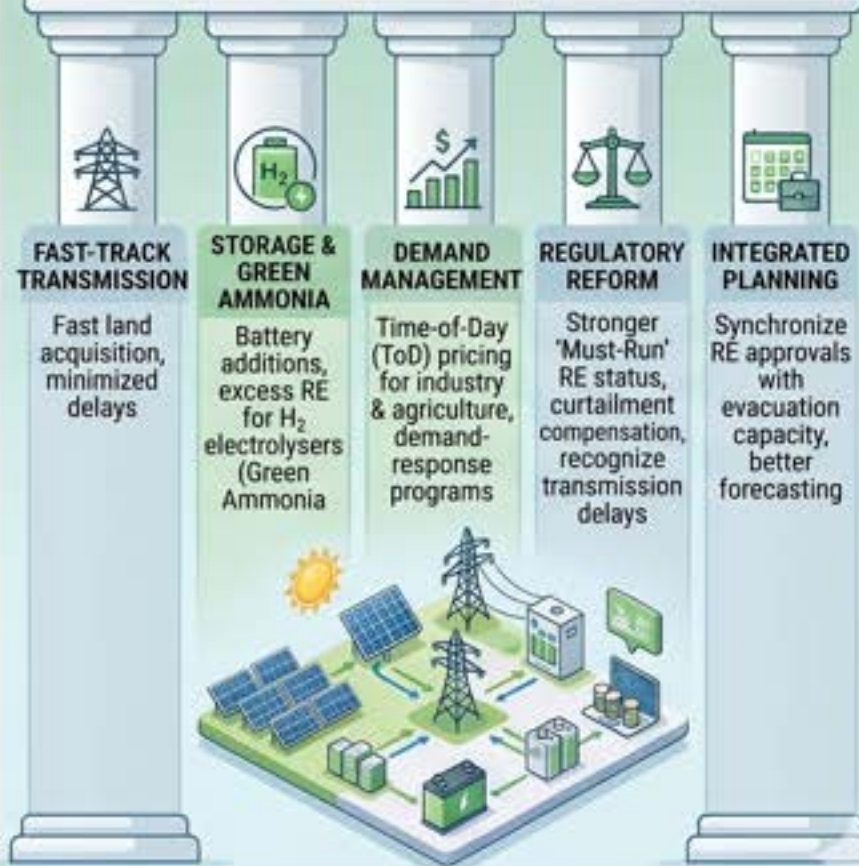


**PROJECT DEFERRALS**  
Projects delayed by 18-20 months.

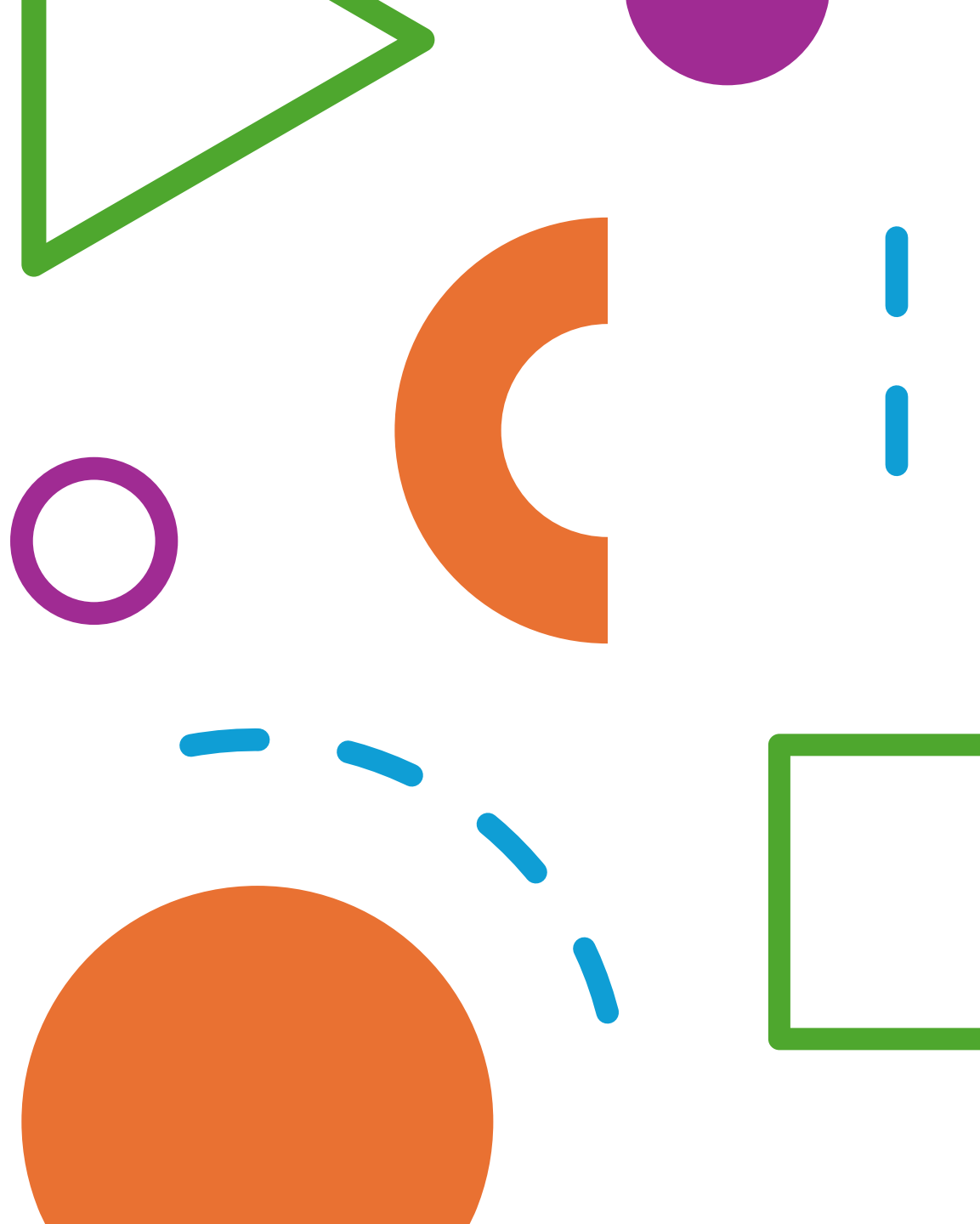
### SOLUTIONS

A Strategic Framework - AXIA IAS ACADEMY Insights

#### PATHWAYS TO AN INTEGRATED ENERGY ECOSYSTEM



- **Logical and Philosophical Base**
- **Siloed vs. systems thinking:** The underlying logic of the article draws from systems theory. It argues that policymakers have treated generation, transmission, storage, and demand as independent components, ignoring their dynamic interdependence. In complex adaptive systems, optimising one part in isolation can sub-optimize the whole—here, maximising solar installation without grid readiness has caused waste and financial distress.
- **Planning fallacy and optimism bias:** There is an implicit critique of cognitive biases in infrastructure planning. Planners consistently underestimated the time, cost, and technical difficulty of transmission lines while overestimating the grid's ability to absorb intermittent renewables, a classic manifestation of the planning fallacy.
- **Tragedy of the commons in reverse:** Usually the tragedy involves overconsumption of a shared resource. Here, a shared transmission grid is being underutilised for its load-balancing potential because individual state actions (Rajasthan approving more generation than it needs, other states not building enough import capability) lead to collective inefficiency.
- **Utilitarian vs. rights-based ethics:** The article implicitly pits the utilitarian goal of maximising clean energy for national good against the rights of solar developers who have invested capital expecting a stable regulatory environment. When curtailment is forced without compensation, it violates the principle of legitimate expectations under administrative law.
- **Ecological modernisation philosophy:** The piece does not challenge the goal of large-scale renewables; it reinforces the belief that technological and institutional fixes can resolve environmental problems. The failure, it argues, is not in the vision of green growth but in its incomplete execution.



## • **Multidimensional Analysis**

- **Social:** Large-scale curtailment and stranded assets in Rajasthan affect local employment in construction and maintenance. Conversely, reliable, cheap daytime power could revitalise rural industries, cold storage for farm produce, and water pumping if transmission and demand management are in place. Equity demands that surplus states do not bear the cost while deficit states benefit.

- **Political:** Federal tensions arise when a state like Rajasthan hosts generation but faces grid constraints due to infrastructure delays involving other states (e.g., Delhi's Maharani Bagh line). The politics of free electricity for agriculture also hinders time-of-day pricing. Strong political will is needed to push through transmission projects against local NIMBY (Not In My Backyard) protests.

- **Legal:** Electricity Act, 2003 mandates open access and non-discriminatory transmission, but enforcement is weak. Curtailment without compensation may violate Article 14 (arbitrary state action) and Article 19(1)(g) (right to carry on business). Regulatory commissions must create legally enforceable grid codes with curtailment compensation, as appellate tribunals have hinted in previous judgments.

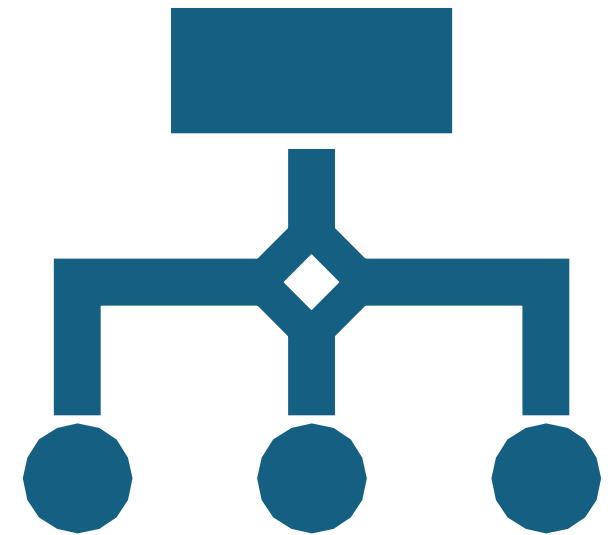
- **Ethical:** It is ethically untenable for a nation grappling with energy poverty to waste clean, zero-marginal-cost solar energy while coal-dependent regions face power cuts. The principle of intergenerational equity, a cornerstone of sustainable development, demands that infrastructure be built today to prevent the loss of a renewable resource for future generations.

- **International:** India's leadership in the International Solar Alliance and its net-zero 2070 pledge create expectations. International investors in Indian renewable parks are watching the curtailment situation closely. If grid bottlenecks persist, the cost of capital for Indian green projects will rise, slowing the energy transition and inviting criticism at climate negotiations.

- **Economic:** Stranded solar generation represents massive capital waste and higher power procurement costs for discoms forced to back down cheap solar and buy thermal. A perverse outcome is that average electricity costs rise. The article's estimate of ₹250 crore loss may be conservative; when scaled to 2030 targets, the macroeconomic drag could be significant. Solving transmission unlocks cheaper power, boosting manufacturing competitiveness.



- **Linkages with NCERTs**
- **Class 10 Geography – ‘Minerals and Energy Resources’ (Chapter 5):** Discusses renewable and non-renewable energy sources, solar energy potential in India, and challenges of energy distribution. The curtailment crisis directly illustrates why simply having resources (sunlight in Rajasthan) is insufficient without means of transport.
- **Class 12 Geography – ‘India: People and Economy’ – ‘Energy Resources’ (Chapter 7):** Covers power sector, transmission networks, and the concept of the National Grid. It helps students appreciate the infrastructure backbone that the article argues is missing.
- **Class 11 Economics – ‘Indian Economic Development’ – ‘Infrastructure’ (Chapter 8):** Explores energy as critical infrastructure, the challenge of transmission and distribution losses, and policy reforms. The article is a live case study of infrastructure bottlenecks arising from uncoordinated planning.
- **Class 10 Science – ‘Sources of Energy’ (Chapter 14):** Introduces solar cells, their advantages, and limitations like intermittent supply, directly connecting to the need for storage and grid management.
- **Class 12 Political Science – ‘Environment and Natural Resources’ (Chapter 8):** Contextualises India’s climate commitments and the politics of energy transitions, linking to the centre-state dynamic in renewable deployment.





- **Way Forward**

- **Establish an Integrated Renewable Energy Zones (IREZ) Authority:** A statutory body with representation from Centre, states, transmission companies, and developers to synchronise generation, transmission, and storage planning. Approvals for new solar parks should be conditional on committal of evacuation capacity with fixed timelines and financial guarantees.
- **Fast-track critical transmission lines through a special task force:** Projects like the 765 kV Khetri–Narela line and its downstream links should be declared ‘critical national infrastructure’, bypassing routine bureaucratic delays. Pre-fabricated tower designs, consolidated land pooling, and a single-window environmental clearance portal for transmission can cut timelines dramatically.
- **Implement mandatory time-of-day tariffs and demand-side flexibility:** All high-tension industrial and agricultural consumers should be moved to smart meters with dynamic pricing by a fixed date. Daytime rebates for agricultural pumpsets, combined with solar pump installations, can absorb surplus while reducing groundwater over-extraction if managed with water-use fees.
- **Create a Grid Curtailment Compensation Fund:** Financed partly by a small cess on thermal generation and partly from the central budget, this fund would compensate renewable developers when curtailment exceeds a threshold due to transmission inadequacy. This internalises the cost of grid delays and pressures utilities to build evacuation capacity.
- **Mandate co-located storage with future ultra-mega solar parks:** Battery storage or pumped-hydro should be a component of park design, not an afterthought. Green hydrogen/ammonia hubs can be developed where industrial clusters exist nearby, turning desert solar into exportable energy molecules.
- **Strengthen forecasting and scheduling with AI-based grid management:** Deploy machine learning models for intra-day solar and wind prediction, integrated with automatic generation control. This reduces the need for thermal backup and makes the grid more receptive to high renewable penetration.
- **Regulatory reforms for must-run clarity:** The Central Electricity Regulatory Commission should issue a binding regulation specifying that renewable curtailment due to transmission inadequacy is a compensable ‘deemed generation’ event, removing ambiguity and legal disputes.

- **UPSC Mains GS3:**

- 2023: “Explain the role of the National Solar Mission in achieving India’s renewable energy targets. What are the challenges in land acquisition and grid integration for large solar parks?” (15 marks)

- 2022: “India’s energy transition is constrained by transmission and distribution inefficiencies. Discuss the measures required to modernise the power sector.” (10 marks)

- 2021: “Describe the major challenges in the transmission and evacuation of renewable energy in India. How can the Green Energy Corridor project address them?” (10 marks)

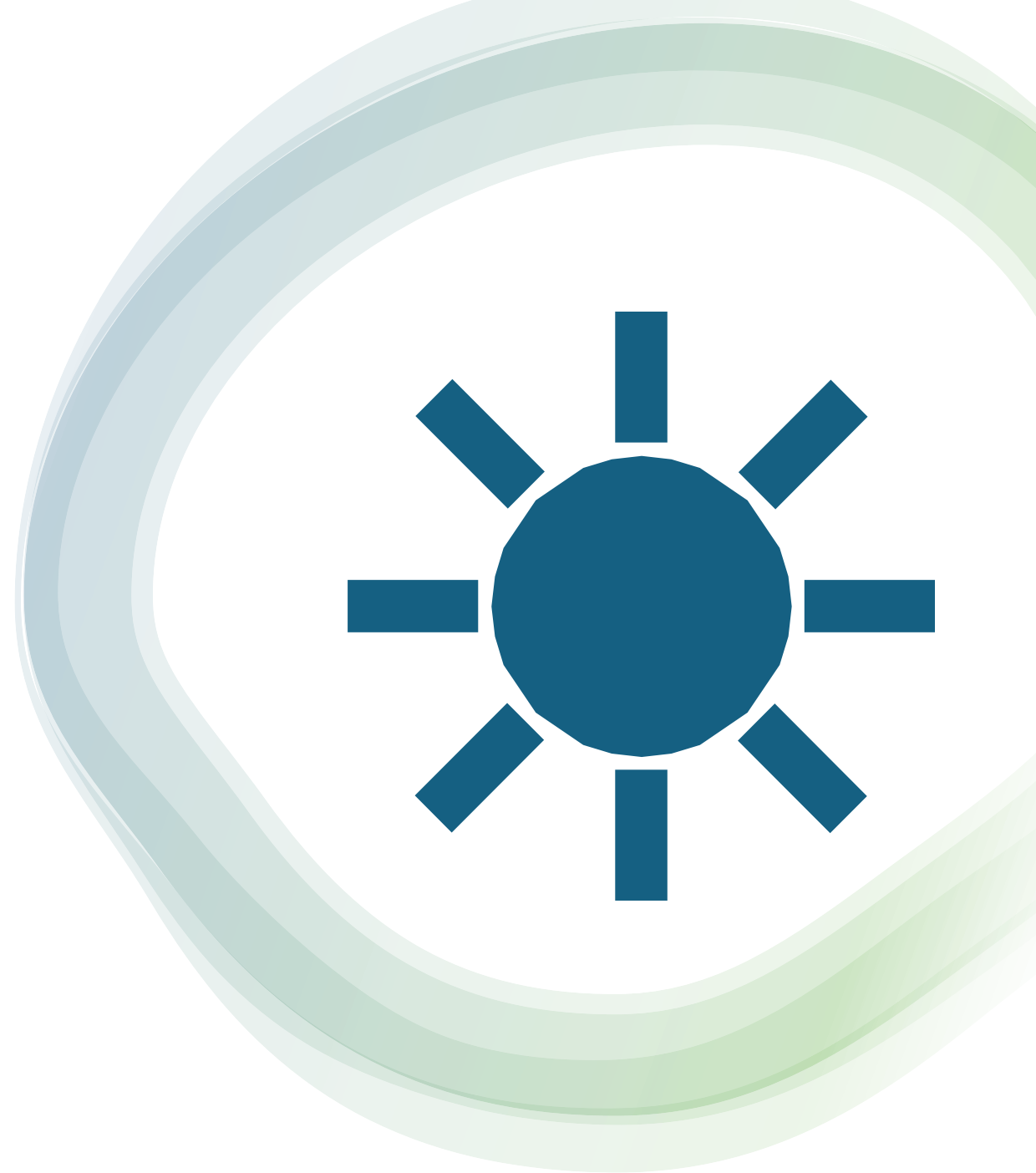
- 2019: “Examine the role of super grids in achieving 500 GW renewable capacity by 2030.” (10 marks)

- 2018: “What is the significance of energy storage systems in the integration of renewable energy into the grid?” (10 marks)

- 2016: “Discuss the factors inhibiting the growth of the solar energy industry in India.”

- **UPSC Mains GS2:**

- 2020: “Electricity is a concurrent subject. How has this affected the implementation of power sector reforms and the creation of a national market for electricity?” (15 marks)





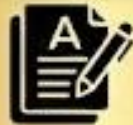
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