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ANALYSIS**



JULY 6



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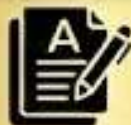
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The US declaration of freedom inspired others across the world

America's current administration would do well to remember that its 1776 words still animate struggles for independence



DAVID ARMITAGE
is professor of history, Harvard University,
and author of 'The Declaration of
Independence: A Social History'

In 2009, engine change has become a leading American export, as Nicolas Maduro and Jorge Icardeship can attest. Who could the next and the Trump administration threaten to Panama and Greenland remain credible. On the 200th anniversary of its Declaration of Independence, the US looks very different from the country that three US Secretary of State John Quincy Adams imagined on 4 July 1821. "Wherever the standard of freedom and independence has been set, it will be upheld, there will be a great heart, her benevolence and her piety be, but she goes not abroad, in search of monsters to destroy. She is the well-wisher to the freedom and independence of all," Adams enshrined the foundational principles of that Declaration, one that the scholar of government wrote: "The last great power of the government of the government." He encouraged revolutionary leaders elsewhere to throw off their imperial entanglements and assume their own position among the powers of the earth – as the US did.

At the time, US intervention was not part of the plan, as the Monroe Doctrine would confirm. But the US relationship with decolonisation has long been Janus-faced. National mythology portrays the US as the original nation against empire, one that emerged from a revolt against a legacy of British tyranny to become a beacon of liberty for oppressed peoples the world over. But a closer read of US history paints a different picture. In the mid-19th century, imperial hunger British colonies yearned to move westward into "Indian country," with unfettered rights and land speculation like George Washington at their head. They did exactly that. Within a century, the US had expelled millions of indigenous natives and expanded, displacing indigenous people.

The US then went in search of frontiers farther afield, from Hawaii and the Philippines in the late 19th century to Japan, Vietnam and Korea in the 20th century and Iraq and Afghanistan in the early 21st. Now, Central America, West Africa and perhaps even the Arctic are in its sights. The US looks more like the empire that dared not speak its name.

Yet, each administration did not necessarily shun the appeal of the US as those who sought freedom and independence. The Declaration charted a different historical trajectory than the one it pursued. While the US was girding up its army across North America, replacing the Spanish Empire in the Caribbean and Pacific, and intervening around the world, that document inspired anti-imperial movements for self-government from Vietnam to Vietnam and from Haiti to South Africa.

The Declaration of 1776 was the first of its kind. Though it did not have the word "independence," it concluded with the resounding proclamation that former British colonies were now "free and independent States."



With their Declaration, Thomas Jefferson and the Continental Congress launched into two key respects that shaped later freedom movements.

First, they expressed independence in the language of statehood, relatively novel at the time. Second, they defined it as independence, not just the ability freely to enter into commercial and diplomatic relations with similar free states.

The Declaration had two sets of rights and promises, one related to individuals – life, liberty, the pursuit of happiness, and the right to self-government – and the other to states: the "All Powers to levy War, conclude Peace, contract Alliances, establish Commerce, and to do all other Acts and Things which Independent States may of right do."

However, the past 220 years have been a tale of two Declarations, one for domestic consumption and the more subtle reading that spread widely abroad. For more than a decade after 1776, the US remained an isolated case. Great Britain did not formally recognize US freedom until September 1793. Not until 1790, following the French Revolution, did any people outside North America declare their independence, as French rebels against Louis XVI did during the revolution. From a French perspective, the US Declaration was the first of its kind. The subsequent avalanche of similar declarations truly began with Haiti on 1 January 1804. The revolution heralded the arrival of the first autonomous republic in the Americas since the US, as well as the first step of the enslaved population. It was, and remains, the largest successful slave revolt in world history.

Declarations that trace their lineage to the US original have clustered around the collapse of empires. The fall of the empire was compared to the words of freedom declarations. Most striking of all was the Chi Minh 1945 Vietnamese one, which echoed America's values of liberty in outlining rights held to be "self-evident." The last great wave of such declarations was in 1990-91, when former Soviet republics escaped Moscow's empire.

Revolution would surely have succeeded had the US never broken from Britain in 1776. But the US Declaration gave later anti-colonial movements inspiration, a template, and the language to shape their own aspirations.

Writing in 1944, the great Trinidadian historian and politician Eric Williams acknowledged that, "the emergence of the United States on the stage of the nation of the world was made only accomplished by an overturning of the colonial system. The spirit of 1776 is still alive today."

Following Williams, we might say that modern decolonisation began in 1776, with declarations of independence among its most conspicuous markers over the centuries.

Moreover, the age of declaring independence is far from over. Think of Bosnia in 2008, South Sudan in 2011 or Catalonia in 2017 – not to mention the prospect of Scotland or even Taiwan declaring independence at some future date.

As long as there are remnants of empire and the drive for self-determination, the spirit of 1776 will endure. The US, especially its current administration, would do well to remember that the desire for self-government – and an even firmer aversion to external intervention – will animate people around the world.

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- **Key Terms and Explanations**

- **Regime Change:** The purposeful, often external replacement of one government or political administration by another, frequently involving military force, covert operations, or intense diplomatic and economic coercion.
 - *Example:* The 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq, which overthrew the government of Saddam Hussein to replace it with a new constitutional system.
- **Decolonization:** The complex historical process through which colonies achieve independence from colonial empires, involving the dismantling of institutional, economic, and territorial control by foreign powers.
 - *Example:* India gaining independence from the British Raj in 1947, signaling a massive shift in global power dynamics.
- **Janus-faced:** A concept derived from Roman mythology (the two-faced god Janus) used to describe a phenomenon that simultaneously possesses two sharply contrasting, contradictory faces or aspects.
 - *Example:* A major global power advocating for democratic rights globally while unilaterally executing covert interventions that destabilize sovereign states.
- **Monroe Doctrine (1823):** A foundational US foreign policy framework which proclaimed that any intervention by European powers in the politics of the Americas would be viewed as a hostile act against the US. Over time, this evolved into a rationale for unilateral US hegemony over the Western Hemisphere.
- **Statist Reading of Independence:** An interpretation of sovereignty that prioritizes the structural powers, legal recognition, and rights of the *state apparatus* (e.g., the power to declare war, build alliances, and control trade) over the realization of individual liberties for its citizens.
- **Interdependence:** A condition in international relations where sovereign states exist not in absolute isolation, but within a web of reciprocal economic, commercial, legal, and diplomatic relationships based on mutual vulnerability and cooperation.
- **Self-Determination:** The collective right of a cohesive group of people or a nation to freely determine their own political status, form of government, and economic path without external coercion or foreign interference.

- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**

- The intersection of imperial ambition and anti-colonial movements reveals a persistent historical duality. Analyzing this dynamic uncovers several core arguments regarding state behavior and the evolving language of freedom.

- **The Central Thesis**

- The global trajectory of self-determination over the last 250 years is fundamentally dualistic. While the philosophical template of declaring independence has universally inspired anti-colonial liberation movements, the actual geopolitical behavior of dominant states frequently transitions from defending liberty to executing unilateral interventions, regime changes, and neo-imperial expansion.

- **Key Analytical Pillars**

- **The Transformation of Foreign Policy Ideals:** Early diplomatic philosophies championed non-intervention—exemplified by John Quincy Adams’ famous 1821 warning against going abroad "in search of monsters to destroy." However, structural realities like resource accumulation and strategic positioning routinely override non-interventionist rhetoric, creating a legacy of global interventions spanning from the Pacific to West Asia.

- **The Double-Edged Legacy of 1776:** The original frameworks of independence contain two distinct sets of promises:

- *Individual Rights - The inalienable rights to life, liberty, the pursuit of happiness, and individual consent to be governed.

- *Statist Powers - The sovereign authority to levy war, conclude peace, contract alliances, and establish commerce.

- Historically, global anti-colonial movements heavily prioritized the *statist* reading to gain formal entry and protection within the international system.

- **Imperial Desires Disguised as Liberty:** Major powers often exhibit a internal contradiction: projecting a national mythology as a beacon against empire while simultaneously pursuing territorial or political expansion—such as westward expansion displacing indigenous populations, or modern operations targeting strategic geographical zones like the Arctic.

- **The Universality of the Template:** Despite the interventions of powerful actors, the structural language of independence remains an autonomous, highly infectious global tool. It has consistently provided a standard template for diverse breakaway movements, from the historic Haitian slave revolt to modern self-determination claims in places like Kosovo or South Sudan.

- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**
- **Major Milestones**
- **1776: The Structural Prototype:** The formal declaration of independence introduces a novel language of statehood and interdependence, moving away from classical imperial allegiances and anchoring legitimacy in the consent of the governed.
- **1790–1804: The First Global Ripples:** The ideal spreads quickly. In 1790, Flemish rebels use translated texts to resist Austrian rule. This wave reaches a historic milestone on January 1, 1804, with the Haitian Declaration—the creation of the first autonomous republic born from the world's most successful slave revolt.
- **1821–1823: Hegemonic Consolidation:** Leaders attempt to balance revolutionary ideals with national interest. John Quincy Adams outlines a non-interventionist vision in 1821, which is quickly reshaped by the 1823 Monroe Doctrine. This doctrine limits European imperialism in the Americas while laying the groundwork for regional dominance.
- **Late 19th Century: Direct Overseas Expansion:** The pursuit of new markets and strategic territory leads to direct annexation and intervention outside contiguous borders, including the displacement of local authorities in Hawaii and the Philippines.
- **The 20th Century to Early 21st Century: Ideological Interventions:** The Cold War and its aftermath transform the nature of intervention. From Korea and Vietnam to early 21st-century campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan, actions are frequently framed as ideological battles against dictatorship or terrorism, though they often resemble classic imperial projections.
- **1990–1991: The Great Soviet Dissolution:** The collapse of the Soviet Union triggers a massive wave of declarations of independence as former republics break away from Moscow's control, demonstrating that the structural language of 1776 remains a primary tool for dismantling empires.
- **Modern Strategic Frontiers:** Geopolitical pressure shifts toward asymmetric actions, including regime change strategies in Latin America and West Asia, and growing competition over strategic corridors like the Arctic. Concurrently, regional self-determination movements continue to emerge in places like Catalonia, Scotland, and Taiwan.



FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLE & EVOLUTION (1776-1823)



STANDARD OF FREEDOM



Consent of the Governed

The first-principle of statehood to provide the Western Hemisphere and principles and enhanced of the intervention.

GLOBAL ANTI-COLONIAL (Wave of declarations)



FLEMISH REBELS (1790)
(from French translation)

The prototype of 1776 is the global linked wave or declarations.

HAITIAN REVOLT (1804)
(First Autonomous Republic, Largest Slave Revolt)

THE EMPIRE THAT DARED NOT SPEAK ITS NAME

VIETNAM (1945)
(Echoes of 1776, Ho Chi Minh)

SOVIET DISSOLUTION (1990-91)
(Collapse of Empires)

The prototype of 1776 is conserrtally snoced an term the tooonhoniss; resevere the global innarles colonied and asoentint the principle of 1776.

U.S. EXPANSION & INTERVENTIONISM (Janus-Faced Approach)



Extracting knowledge for UPSC & APSC Students.

CRITICAL ANALYSIS: THE TWO DECLARATIONS (Dual Legacy)

Declaration for DOMESTIC CONSUMPTION



Life, Liberty, Pursuit of Happiness, Consent of the Governed

STATIST READING (Spread Widely Abroad)



Statist Rights
"Full Power to levy War, conclude Peace, contract Alliances, establish Commerce, and do other Acts and Things which Independent States may of right do."

AGE OF DECLARING INDEPENDENCE IS NOT OVER

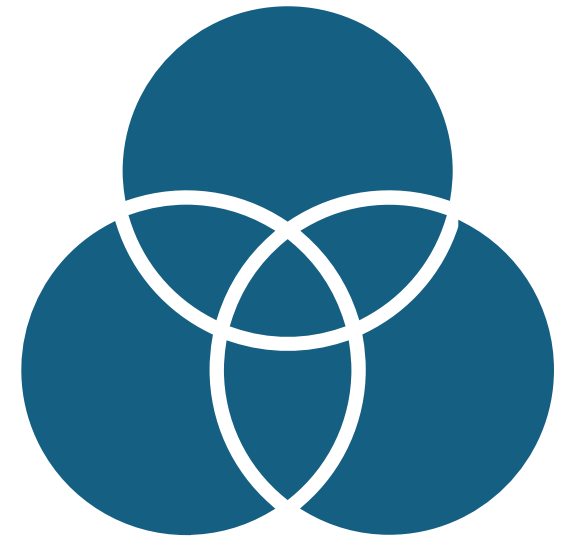
- Kosovo (2008)
- South Sudan (2011)
- Catalonia (2017)
- Scotland (2017)
- Taiwan (2013)



- **Logical and Philosophical Base**
 - **Social Contract Theory and Consent**
 - At the core of self-determination is the Lockean concept of the social contract: governments derive their legitimate authority solely from the "consent of the governed." If a state system fails to protect basic liberties, or if an external power imposes authority without consent, that government loses its legitimacy. This principle provides the moral foundation for anti-colonial revolutions.
 - **The Westphalian vs. Liberal Internationalist Conflict**
 - Modern international relations are caught in a direct philosophical conflict between two major ideas:
 - **Westphalian Sovereignty:** Grounded in absolute territorial integrity and non-interference in the internal affairs of a sovereign state, regardless of its governance model.
 - **Liberal Internationalism:** Assumes that universal values like liberty and democracy should be protected and promoted globally, which is frequently used to justify external political or military interventions.
 - **The Paradox of Statehood**
 - There is an inherent structural paradox in how statehood operates on the global stage. To protect individual freedom and prevent external domination, an independent group must build a powerful sovereign state. However, the international system is highly competitive. Once a state acquires significant power, it often begins to suppress the self-determination of weaker nations to protect its own security, access resources, or expand its sphere of influence.
-

- **Multidimensional Analysis**
- **Social Dimension**
 - External interventions and forced regime changes can severely disrupt the social fabric of a nation, often fueling deep-seated internal ethnic, sectarian, or tribal conflicts. Conversely, genuine self-determination movements can strengthen social cohesion, helping marginalized groups reclaim their cultural identity, history, and dignity from colonial or occupying forces.
- **Political Dimension**
 - The political landscape is defined by a fundamental contradiction between democratic ideals and realpolitik. While powerful nations often use the rhetoric of spreading freedom to justify their foreign policies, the practice of engineering regime changes frequently creates unstable client states, erodes institutional legitimacy, and sparks long-term regional instability.
- **Legal Dimension**
 - This issue highlights a persistent tension within international law, particularly regarding the UN Charter:
 - This structural friction makes it difficult for international bodies to consistently manage unilateral actions or evaluate the legal standing of breakaway regions like Kosovo or Catalonia.
- **Ethical Dimension**
 - The ethical dilemma centers on the selective application of international values. Powerful nations often look past human rights concerns when dealing with strategic allies, while using those same ethical principles to justify interventions against geopolitical rivals. This creates a double standard that undermines the moral authority of global governance systems.
- **International Dimension**
 - Unilateral interventions and forced regime changes frequently trigger security dilemmas. When major powers expand their spheres of influence or destabilize regional governments, it encourages rival nations to increase their military spending, form counter-alliances, and pursue asymmetric tactics, shifting the global order away from cooperation and toward fragmented, multi-polar competition.
- **Economic Dimension**
 - Geopolitical actions are often driven by deep economic motivations disguised as ideological missions. Historic territorial expansions and modern regional interventions are frequently shaped by a desire to secure vital natural resources, control trade routes, and open foreign markets. True economic interdependence requires balanced, equitable trade, but asymmetric power dynamics often turn economic relationships into tools of financial leverage and neo-colonial dependence.

- **Linkages with NCERTs**
- **Class XI Political Science (Political Theory):**
 - *Chapter on Rights:* Explores the philosophical origin of inalienable human rights vs. legal rights granted by states.
 - *Chapter on Nationalism:* Provides essential context for understanding the concept of self-determination and the challenges of aligning national identities with state borders.
- **Class XII Political Science (Contemporary World Politics):**
 - *Chapter on US Hegemony in World Politics:* Directly relates to the historical analysis of unilateral interventions, structural power, and soft power projection.
 - *Chapter on Security in the Contemporary World:* Conceptualizes the security dilemma, state sovereignty, and non-traditional security threats caused by regime instability.
- **Class XI History (Themes in World History):**
 - *Theme on Displacing Indigenous Peoples:* Offers the necessary historical background to analyze the impacts of agrarian expansion and broken treaties on indigenous populations in North America.





- **Linkages with UPSC CSE Syllabus**
- **GS Paper 1: World History**
- **Syllabus Topics:** Decolonization, anti-colonial movements, 18th and 19th-century political philosophies (including imperialism, neo-colonialism, and capitalism), and their impacts on modern societies.
- **GS Paper 2: International Relations & Polity**
- **Syllabus Topics:** Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests; global groupings and agreements involving or affecting India; and the role of international institutions in protecting state sovereignty.
- **GS Paper 4: Ethics and Human Interface**
- **Syllabus Topics:** Ethical issues in international relations and funding; the morality of unilateral humanitarian intervention vs. state sovereignty; and the ethical dimensions of foreign policy decisions.
- **Essay & Optional Subjects**
- **Essay:** Highly relevant for philosophical and geopolitical essays focusing on liberty, sovereignty, the limits of power, and the evolving global order.
- **Political Science & International Relations (PSIR):** Relevant for Paper 1B (Indian Nationalism and International Perspectives) and Paper 2A (Global Politics, Sovereignty, Imperialism, and Hegemony theories).
- **History Optional:** Relevant for Paper II (Modern World History), specifically regarding the American Revolution, European Imperialism, and the decolonization waves of the 20th century.

- **Way Forward**

- **Strengthening Democratic Multilateralism:** Global governance institutions, particularly the United Nations Security Council, need structural reforms to ensure international law is applied consistently, preventing unilateral interventions by major powers regardless of their geopolitical standing.
- **Codifying Non-Intervention and De-escalation:** The international community should reaffirm its commitment to Article 2(4) of the UN Charter. Diplomatic frameworks should prioritize regional mediation, cooperative security agreements, and economic incentives over unilateral sanctions and forced regime change.
- **Developing Clear Standards for Humanitarian Concerns:** To prevent nations from using human rights as a pretext for geopolitical intervention, the global community needs to establish clear, objective, and non-selective criteria for human rights protections. These evaluations should be managed through neutral, multilateral bodies rather than individual states.
- **Promoting Equitable Interdependence:** True stability relies on replacing exploitative, asymmetric economic arrangements with fair trade practices, secure supply chains, and mutual technology sharing. This shift helps ensure that interdependence functions as a partnership among equals rather than a tool for geopolitical leverage.



- **UPSC CSE Mains Questions**

- **GS Paper 1 (World History - 2013):** "American Revolution was an economic revolt against a mercantile policy." Critique.
- **GS Paper 1 (World History - 2015):** Explain how the New Imperialism of the late 19th century was distinct from the older forms of colonialism.
- **GS Paper 2 (International Relations - 2019):** "The European Union is an entity of interdependence, whereas the modern state system remains anchored in absolute independence." Analyse this statement in the context of changing global dynamics.
- **GS Paper 4 (Ethics - 2014):** In international relations, ethics is often subordinated to national interest. Examine the ethical dilemmas faced by states when balancing humanitarian interventions with the principle of non-interference.

- **UPSC CSE Prelims Conceptual Practice Questions**

- **Q1. Which of the following statements best reflects the philosophical foundation of the concept of 'Self-Determination' as applied in modern international politics?**
- A) The absolute right of a sovereign state to expand its territory to ensure economic security.
- B) The collective right of a distinct people to determine their political status and governance framework without external coercion.
- C) The legal obligation of developing nations to align their foreign policy with major global powers.
- D) The authority granted to international organizations to unilaterally replace unstable regimes.



India needs a second home for Asiatic lions

India's conservation of the Asiatic lion is widely celebrated as a remarkable success story. From a population which was reduced to just a few dozen in the early 20th century, the number of Asiatic lions has increased to approx. 891 today. Yet, behind this achievement lies a persistent policy failure: the inability to establish a second, geographically separate population. Scientific institutions, government bodies, and even the Supreme Court have long warned that without such a step, the species remains vulnerable to extinction from a single catastrophic event.

A second dwelling

The need for a second home for Asiatic lions is rooted in decades of government-backed research. Multiple reports of the Wildlife Institute of India have consistently emphasised that a single population confined to one landscape is inherently vulnerable. Studies conducted since the 1980s have concluded that threats such as epidemics, forest fires, or other natural disasters could potentially wipe out the entire species if it remains geographically concentrated.

This scientific consensus was formally acknowledged in the landmark Supreme Court judgment of April 15, 2013, which directed the translocation of Asiatic lions from Gujarat's Gir forest to the Kuno National Park in Madhya Pradesh. The Court made it clear that conservation must be guided by ecological principles rather than regional considerations, stating that a second population was essential for the species' long-term survival. The judgment explicitly recognised the risk that a single calamity could eliminate the entire population if it remained confined to one location.

Despite this clear directive, the translocation project has been stalled for over a decade. Gujarat has consistently resisted the relocation of lions outside the



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Reports by the Wildlife Institute of India have consistently emphasised that a single population confined to one landscape is inherently vulnerable

State, citing its success in conserving the species and raising concerns about habitat suitability elsewhere. This has created a policy impasse between scientific recommendations, judicial mandates, and State-level political considerations. While the Kuno National Park was prepared specifically to host the lions – by relocation of villages and habitat restoration among others – no lions have been introduced there.

Meanwhile, the ecological risks identified by experts have only intensified. The concentration of the entire global population of Asiatic lions within the Gir landscape makes them uniquely vulnerable to disease outbreaks. The 2018 outbreak of the Canine Distemper Virus among the population, which killed several lions and infected many others, serves as a stark reminder of this danger. Such diseases spread more rapidly in dense, socially structured populations, and their impact is amplified by the limited genetic diversity of the lions.

Government-supported studies and conservation plans have repeatedly highlighted that geographically isolated carnivore populations face extinction risks from both biological and environmental factors. In a single-site population, even non-recurring events – such as droughts, wildfires, or sudden prey decline – can have disproportionate effects. This is why conservation science advocates for a “metapopulation

approach”, where species are distributed across multiple habitats to reduce risk.

Recognising these concerns, recent policy initiatives such as Project Lion (2020) have attempted to revive the discussion on expanding lion habitats. There have been proposals to develop alternative sites such as the Barda Wildlife Sanctuary within Gujarat itself. However, experts argue that such sites, being geographically close to Gir, may not adequately address the core issue of risk diversification. A second population must be sufficiently distant to prevent the spread of disease or disaster across both populations simultaneously.

The delay in establishing a second home raises broader questions about environmental governance in India. It reflects a tension between national conservation priorities and State-level interests, where wildlife – though constitutionally recognised as a shared responsibility – can become entangled in regional identity and political considerations. The Supreme Court had clearly stated that Asiatic lions are a national heritage, not the property of any single State, yet implementation of this principle remains incomplete.

From success to security

Ultimately, the issue is whether India is willing to move from conservation success to conservation security. The current situation represents a paradox: a thriving population that remains ecologically fragile. Without establishing a second free-ranging population, the gains of decades of conservation effort remain vulnerable to reversal. The case of the Asiatic lion underscores a fundamental principle of modern conservation: numbers alone do not ensure survival; resilience does. Creating a second home is an ecological necessity; continued delay in implementing this vision risks turning a global conservation triumph into a preventable ecological vulnerability.



An Asiatic lioness with her two cubs at the Sakkarbaugh Safari breeding centre in Junagadh in 2025. VJAY SOMJI

- **Key Terms and Explanations**

- **Asiatic Lion (*Panthera leo leo*):** A lion subspecies today entirely endemic to the Gir landscape of Gujarat, India. Unlike its African counterpart, it has a distinct belly fold, a lesser mane development in males, and is adapted to dry deciduous forests and scrublands. It is protected under Schedule I of India's Wildlife Protection Act, 1972, and listed as Endangered by the IUCN.

- **Metapopulation Approach:** A conservation strategy where a single, vulnerable species is managed as a network of geographically separated subpopulations. These populations are distinct yet occasionally interact through natural corridors or managed translocations.

- *Example:* If an epidemic hits Population A, Population B remains safe due to geographical isolation, ensuring the species as a whole does not go extinct.

- **Genetic Bottleneck:** A sharp reduction in the size of a population due to environmental events or human activities (such as hunting). This leaves behind a tiny gene pool, meaning the surviving population reproduces with very limited genetic variation.

- **Inbreeding Depression:** The reduced biological fitness and survival capacity of a population resulting from breeding between closely related individuals. In Asiatic lions, this manifests as low genetic diversity, making them highly susceptible to congenital defects and uniform vulnerability to a single disease.

- **Canine Distemper Virus (CDV):** A highly contagious viral disease that attacks the respiratory, gastrointestinal, and nervous systems of carnivores. In 2018, an outbreak in Gir proved fatal to dozens of lions, demonstrating how a single pathogen can rapidly tear through a dense, geographically concentrated population.

- **Translocation:** The deliberate, human-mediated movement of wild individuals from one free-ranging population to an entirely separate, secure habitat for conservation purposes. This is distinct from reintroduction, which involves releasing captive-bred animals into the wild.

- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**

- The debate surrounding the Asiatic lion centers on a fundamental paradox: a brilliant demographic success story that masks severe ecological vulnerability.

- **The Core Thesis**

- While India has successfully rescued the Asiatic lion from the brink of extinction through community participation and strict enforcement, confining the entire global population to a single landscape violates the core principles of conservation biology. True conservation security requires risk diversification through geographical separation.

- **Key Supporting Arguments**

- **The Single-Site Vulnerability:** Having all ecological eggs in one basket leaves the species exposed to stochastic (random) catastrophic events. A catastrophic wildfire, a severe drought causing a prey crash, or a hyper-contagious epidemic could wipe out the world's remaining wild Asiatic lions in a matter of weeks.

- **The Density and Contact Factor:** The lion population has expanded well beyond the core sanctuary limits of Gir, spilling into revenue lands, coastal areas, and human-dominated landscapes. This high density increases intra-species conflict and accelerates the transmission of zoonotic and domestic diseases due to frequent contact with feral dogs and livestock.

- **The Inadequacy of Nearby Satellites:** Alternative proposals to move lions to sites within Gujarat (such as the Barda Wildlife Sanctuary) fail the test of true geographical isolation. Because Barda is located in close proximity to the Gir ecosystem, it shares the same climatic zone and epidemiological pathway, meaning a major regional disaster could easily impact both sites simultaneously.

- **The Counter-Arguments and Regional Context**

- **The Community Coexistence Model:** The state of Gujarat argues that its local communities—particularly the pastoral *Maldharis*—have developed a unique cultural tolerance for the lions. There are legitimate concerns about whether communities in other states, like Madhya Pradesh, possess the same socio-cultural readiness to coexist with a large apex predator.

- **Habitat Suitability and Anthropogenic Pressures:** Opponents of immediate out-of-state translocation raise technical concerns regarding the prey density, protection infrastructure, and historical presence of gun culture or poaching networks in alternative sites like Kuno National Park.

• **Historical Evolution of the Issue**

• The trajectory of Asiatic lion conservation reflects shifting priorities in India's environmental history, moving from royal game preservation to strict protectionism, and eventually hitting a wall of complex federal politics.

Phase / Era	Key Milestones & Conservation Evolution
Early 20th Century (Pre-Independence)	Indiscriminate trophy hunting reduces the Asiatic lion population to fewer than 50 individuals. Recognizing the crisis, the Nawab of Junagadh bans lion hunting in his princely state, laying the foundation for modern preservation efforts.
1952 – 1972 (Post-Independence)	The Indian Board for Wildlife is formed. Initially, the lion is designated as the national animal of India. However, in 1972, with the launch of Project Tiger and the enactment of the Wildlife Protection Act, national focus shifts toward tiger conservation, and the tiger becomes the national animal.
1990s (The Search for a Second Home)	The Wildlife Institute of India (WII) conducts extensive pan-India feasibility studies to find an alternative home for the lion. Kuno-Palpur Wildlife Sanctuary in Madhya Pradesh is selected as the most ecologically viable site based on prey base and habitat structure.
1995 – 2000s (Habitat Preparation)	The Madhya Pradesh government undertakes massive community rehabilitation schemes, successfully relocating over 20 villages out of the Kuno core area to create a human-free, safe sanctuary ready for lion introduction.
2013 (The Judicial Mandate)	In a landmark ruling on April 15, 2013, the Supreme Court of India orders the translocation of a batch of lions from Gir to Kuno within six months, declaring that the species is a national heritage transcending state boundaries.
2018 – 2020 (The Epidemiological Warning)	A severe outbreak of Canine Distemper Virus (CDV) and Babesiosis hits the eastern part of the Gir forest, causing dozens of lion deaths. In 2020, the Central Government launches Project Lion to focus on habitat development and disease management.
2022 – Present Era	While interstate translocation of lions remains paused due to continuous litigation and political gridlock, Kuno National Park is repurposed to host the world's first intercontinental cheetah translocation project. This shifts the immediate dynamics of the habitat while leaving the core issue of a backup lion habitat unresolved.



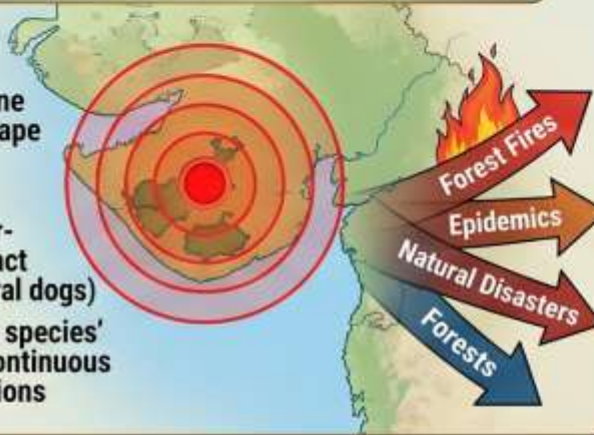
MASTERCLASS DOSSIER: THE ASIATIC LION CONSERVATION DILEMMA & ENVIRONMENTAL GOVERNANCE

QUANTITATIVE SUCCESS STORY

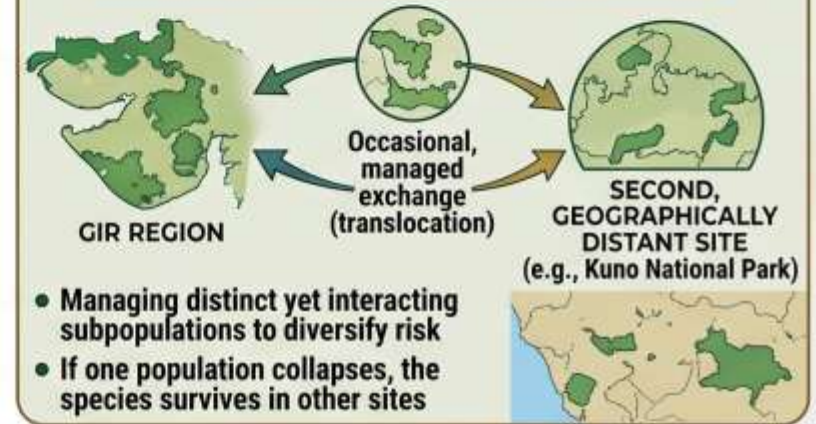


ECOLOGICAL PARADOX: THE SINGLE-SITE VULNERABILITY

- Entire global population confined to one single landscape
- High animal density and frequent inter-species contact (livestock, feral dogs)
- Gambling the species' survival on continuous stable conditions



KEY CONSERVATION CONCEPT: METAPOPULATION APPROACH



EPIDEMIOLOGICAL WARNING: 2018 CDV OUTBREAK

- Outbreak of Canine Distemper Virus (CDV) and Babesiosis
- Pathogens spread faster in hyper-dense, socially structured populations
- Amplified by limited genetic diversity due to original bottleneck



THE GOVERNANCE IMPASSE: FEDERALISM CONFLICT



UPSC CSE LINKAGES & WAY FORWARD

UPSC CSE SYLLABUS

GS2: Concurrent List, Judicial Activism, Federal Relations

GS3: Biodiversity Loss, Risk Management, Disease Ecology

GS4: Environmental Ethics, Intergenerational Equity

WAY FORWARD (Balanced Approach)

- Establish Inter-State Ecological Council
- Execute Phased Dual-Track Strategy (internal satellites vs. external translocation)
- Create Revenue-Sharing Tourism Circuits
- Launch Community Exchange Programs

- **Logical and Philosophical Base**
- **Quantitative Success vs. Qualitative Resilience:** The core debate hinges on how we define conservation success. One school of thought uses a quantitative metric (population size), viewing a climb to roughly 891 lions as an unqualified triumph. The scientific community, however, employs a qualitative metric (ecological resilience), arguing that high numbers without space and genetic diversity offer nothing more than a fragile illusion of safety.
- **Biocentrism vs. Political Anthropocentrism:** This conflict exposes a sharp mismatch between natural ecosystems and human administration. Ecologically, wild animals do not recognize state lines; their survival depends entirely on continuous habitats and risk diversification. Anthropocentrically, however, governance is rigidly bound by administrative borders, turning a wild species into an instrument of regional pride and political ownership.
- **The Fallacy of the "Single Basket":** From a risk-management perspective, the current policy framework is fundamentally flawed. It operates on the passive assumption that the current stable environment will last indefinitely, ignoring the statistical certainty of extreme environmental and biological shocks over long time horizons.



- **Multidimensional Analysis**

- **Social Dimension**

- The human footprint is deeply intertwined with lion conservation. In the Gir landscape, the *Maldhari* pastoralists have coexisted with lions for generations, creating a unique socio-ecological equilibrium where lion predation on livestock is largely tolerated as part of natural loss.

- Conversely, the preparation of Kuno National Park required the displacement of indigenous tribal communities, such as the *Sahariyas*. This creates a complex social equity dilemma: tribal populations surrendered their ancestral lands for a national conservation priority, yet the target species has still not arrived due to political disagreements.

- **Political Dimension**

- This issue highlights the friction inherent to Indian federalism when managing natural resources. Under the Seventh Schedule of the Indian Constitution, "Forests" and "Protection of Wild Animals and Birds" sit on the **Concurrent List** (via the 42nd Amendment Act, 1976).

- While the Union Government sets overarching conservation policies, the physical ownership, day-to-day management, and ground enforcement are controlled entirely by the State machinery. When a wild animal becomes deeply tied to a state's regional identity and political branding, cooperative federalism can break down, turning a shared national asset into an exclusive provincial resource.

- **Legal Dimension**

- The legal battle brings the balance of powers into sharp focus. The Supreme Court of India, acting as an ecocentric arbiter, invoked **Article 142** (complete justice) in its 2013 judgment to mandate translocation, ruling that the right of an endangered species to survive overrides any claim of state ownership.

- The prolonged delay in carrying out this order raises serious questions about judicial enforceability and the limits of public interest litigation when it runs into organized executive and regional resistance.

- **Ethical Dimension**

- From an environmental ethics standpoint, this situation tests our commitment to **intergenerational equity**. Do we have the right to gamble the future survival of an entire evolutionary lineage to protect regional monopolies or political comfort?

- Furthermore, applying the concept of **Animal Rights**, keeping a highly social, wide-ranging apex predator confined to an increasingly crowded, fragmented landscape—where disease outbreaks are a constant threat—fails our ethical duty of care and stewardship over nature.

- **International Dimension**

- As a signatory to the **Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)** and the **Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework**, India has committed to expanding its protected area networks and minimizing human-driven extinctions.

- The global community views India's wildlife management as a model for saving large mammals in densely populated countries. Failing to resolve internal political bottlenecks to protect an endangered species could weaken India's standing as a proactive leader in international conservation diplomacy.

- **Economic Dimension**

- Wildlife conservation carries significant economic value. The Asiatic lion gives Gujarat a complete monopoly on lion-based eco-tourism, drawing hundreds of thousands of domestic and international travelers annually and generating substantial revenue for local hospitality, guiding, and transport industries.

- Translocating lions to another state would break this monopoly and share the tourism revenue with a neighbor, demonstrating how economic incentives can drive political resistance to conservation strategies.



- **Linkages with NCERT Textbooks**
- **Class 10 Geography (Chapter 2: Forest and Wildlife Resources):** This chapter introduces the IUCN classification of species (Endangered, Vulnerable, Endemic) and discusses the historical factors behind biodiversity loss. The Asiatic lion serves as a perfect case study for an *Endemic* and *Endangered* species restricted to a single geographical pocket.
- **Class 12 Biology (Chapter 15: Biodiversity and Conservation):** This chapter details the difference between **In-situ conservation** (National Parks, Sanctuaries) and **Ex-situ conservation**. It outlines the primary causes of biodiversity loss, known as the "Evil Quartet," and highlights why small, isolated populations face a much higher risk of extinction from random environmental changes and genetic drift.
- **Class 11 Political Science (Indian Constitution at Work - Chapter 7: Federalism):** This section covers the division of powers between the Centre and States through the Union, State, and Concurrent Lists. It offers a real-world look at how environmental disputes can test the boundaries of cooperative federalism.

- **Linkages with the UPSC CSE Syllabus**
- **GS Paper 2: Polity, Constitution, and Governance**
- **Federal Structure and Centre-State Relations:** The operational gridlock between the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) and the State Government of Gujarat over implementing a Supreme Court directive.
- **Judicial Activism and Judgments:** The role of the Supreme Court as an environmental custodian under Article 21 (Right to a clean environment), and the challenges of executing complex environmental mandates.
- **GS Paper 3: Environment, Biodiversity, and Disaster Management**
- **Conservation and Biodiversity:** The science of population dynamics, the risks of genetic bottlenecks, and managing habitats for apex predators.
- **Disaster Management:** Assessing biosecurity threats, such as epidemics and zoonotic diseases, as slow-moving disasters that can cause systemic ecological collapse.
- **GS Paper 4: Ethics and Human Interface**
- **Environmental Ethics:** Balancing anthropocentric political pride against biocentric species survival.
- **Public Service Values:** Navigating the ethical duties of administrators when local regional sentiments conflict with broader national and ecological priorities.

- **Way Forward**

- **Forming an Independent Inter-State Ecological Council:** The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change should establish a high-level, independent council of senior wildlife biologists, constitutional experts, and administrative representatives from both Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh. This body must work out a phased, science-first implementation plan that takes the issue out of the political spotlight.

- **Adopting a Dual-Track Conservation Strategy:** Conservation planning should pursue two goals at once:
 - Continue securing internal alternative habitats within Gujarat (like the Barda Wildlife Sanctuary) to handle immediate population overflow.
 - Simultaneously execute a long-distance translocation to Kuno National Park to provide true geographical separation and isolate the species from regional disasters.

- **Creating a Cooperative Federal Revenue-Sharing Model:** To address concerns over losing tourism revenue, a joint tourism and brand-sharing framework could be designed. Gujarat could serve as the "Founding Home" and technical advisor to Kuno, creating a joint tourism circuit that protects Gujarat's economic interests while building a new sanctuary.

- **Launching Community Exchange Programs:** Before moving any animals, the government should organize cultural exchange programs between the *Maldharis* of Gir and the local communities around Kuno. Sharing generations of knowledge on lion behavior, tracking, and livestock protection will help build local confidence and prepare the new habitat for peaceful coexistence.

Civil Services Examination (Prelims)

•**Question (2019):** Consider the following statements:

- Asiatic lion is naturally found in India only.
- Double-humped camel is naturally found in India only.
- One-horned rhinoceros is naturally found in India only. Which of the statements given above is/are correct? *(Answer: 1 only)*

•**Question (2017):** In which of the following regions of India are you most likely to come across the 'Great Indian Hornbill' in its natural habitat? *(Theme: Wildlife habitats and endemic species distribution)*

•**Question (2014):** Which one of the following National Parks has a climate that varies from tropical to subtropical, temperate and arctic? *(Theme: Ecological characteristics of premier National Parks)*

Civil Services Examination (Mains)

•**GS Paper 3 (2023):** Dam design and catastrophic failures often highlight environmental vulnerabilities. Discuss how risk diversification and environmental impact assessments can mitigate large-scale ecological disasters. *(Parallel Theme: Risk Management in Ecology)*

•**GS Paper 3 (2020):** How does biodiversity vary in India? How is the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 helpful in conservation of flora and fauna?

•**GS Paper 2 (2019):** "The strength of Indian federalism lies in its ability to resolve deep-seated regional conflicts through cooperative institutional mechanisms." Critically analyze this statement in light of recent environmental and resource-sharing disputes between states.

Only Strong Macros Won't Make Aam Aadmi Better Off

Indian economy's been facing stormy weather resiliently. It's not in crisis. But this also means economic reforms don't feel urgent, which in turn means that the average Indian will not get rich like he could

Neeraj Kaushal



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Too many Cassandras have declared that Indian economy is in crisis. The label is dramatic. Its chief virtue lies in grabbing headlines and generating multiple clicks. But is it accurate? Not quite. Despite massive uncertainties resulting from Trump's devastating assaults on the world trade order, his tariff tantrums, the Iran war oil shock, and disruptions in supply chains, the Indian economy is doing no worse than normal. One may even call its state impressive, given the odds.

Note the facts for FY2026, a tumultuous year by most standards. India's GDP growth was a remarkable 7.7%. Inflation at around 2% was the lowest in five decades. Current account deficit (CAD) was a modest 0.6% of GDP. Forex reserves are a massive \$688bn, as of June 2026, following four months of a sharply increased import bill. Exports (goods and service combined) increased by 4% in FY2026 and the y-o-y increase in April-May 2026 was 15%. Inward remittances were at an all-time high, \$140bn, 3.5-4% of GDP, and 16% higher than previous year. This is not what one calls an economy in crisis.

On the fiscal front, there is a striking consolidation in GOI finances since Covid. In FY22, the central govt fiscal deficit was 9.5% of GDP and combined with state govt deficits, it had reached 12.8%. Four years later, central fiscal deficit is budgeted at 4.4% of GDP, and

combined deficit at 7.7%. One can quibble that the deficit is still too high, but one can't doubt that a consolidation in govt finances since 2022 has strengthened India's economic resilience.

Compare 2026 with past years when India was in economic crisis – in 1991 govt had to pledge its gold reserves to avoid a sovereign default, and in 2013 India was labelled one of the fragile five economies. Just look at one metric, current account deficit: in FY1991, India's CAD was 3.5% of GDP, in FY2013 it was 4.8%, in FY2026 it's only 0.6% of GDP.

Lesson: not every economic shock is a crisis. In any case, against the stormy winds of 2026, our strong macroeconomic conditions have helped. And now the crude price shock has subsided, with price falling to \$68 a barrel.

Just as one must not exaggerate the negatives, one must not exaggerate the positives either. By GOI's own admission, FY2027 will not be as good as FY2026. RBI has shaved its growth projection for FY2027 to 6.6% and raised inflation prediction to 5.1%.

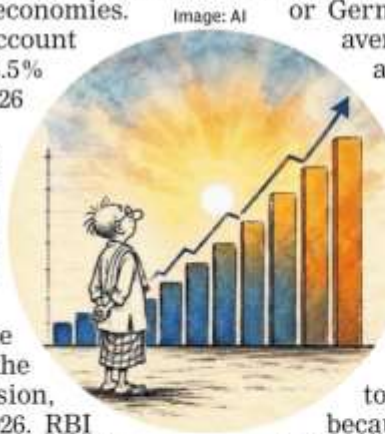
That the Indian economy is not in a crisis does not mean that everything is hunky dory. India is a low-middle income country with myriad low-middle income country problems. It has deep structural problems that require multiple reforms across many sectors. BJP govt does not have an appetite for politically difficult

reforms. Net FDI inflows over the past five years have been modest or even negative. Foreign investors are telling us they would rather be elsewhere.

What about the tremendous hoopla that one of these days India will become the third largest economy, surpassing Japan and Germany? That may happen, but one must be clear that becoming larger than Japan or Germany in GDP would not mean that the average Indian would be richer than the average German or Japanese person. The huge gap between our per capita incomes will remain so for decades to come. In purchasing power parity, German per capita income is five times India's, and Japan's is over four times. The point is not to refute India's growth story, but let's not exaggerate it.

India's management of the oil shock has a few important lessons. First, macroeconomic management is critical to deal with geopolitical risks. Second, because India is not in a crisis, the political will for difficult economic reforms (such as in the farm, labour and land sectors) is simply missing. Our govt is content with a 6-7% growth economy. It does not want to undertake a set of politically risky economic reforms. Yet, it is the lack of such reforms that will prevent India from attaining 8% growth and becoming a high-income economy by 2047 or even by 2057.

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- **Key Terms and Explanations**
- **Gross Domestic Product (GDP) Growth Rate:** The annualized percentage rate at which a country's economic output changes. It reflects the total market value of all final goods and services produced within a nation's borders. For instance, a 7.7% growth rate implies a highly dynamic domestic market expanding faster than most major global counterparts.
- **Current Account Deficit (CAD):** A metric capturing the shortfall between a country's total earnings from exports and its total spending on imports of goods, services, and transfers. A low CAD (e.g., 0.6% of GDP) means the country is comfortably living within its external means, minimizing reliance on volatile foreign capital to bridge the gap.
- **Forex (Foreign Exchange) Reserves:** Foreign currency deposits, gold, and Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) held by the central bank. Serving as an economic shock absorber, a massive reserve pool (e.g., \$688 billion) allows a country to defend its currency value and pay for essential imports even during prolonged global supply chain disruptions.
- **Inward Remittances:** Funds transferred by expatriates working abroad back to their home country. For India, these inflows act as a crucial counter-cyclical safety net, stabilizing the balance of payments and bolstering rural and semi-urban household consumption.
- **Fiscal Deficit (Central vs. Combined):** The excess of total government expenditure over non-borrowed receipts. The *Central Deficit* reflects the Union Government's balance sheet, while the *Combined Deficit* aggregates both Union and State levels. Bringing these numbers down represents "fiscal consolidation," which reduces public crowding-out of private investments.
- **Fragile Five:** A term coined by Wall Street in 2013 to identify emerging economies (India, Brazil, South Africa, Turkey, and Indonesia) that had become overly dependent on unreliable foreign investment to finance their high growth and widening current account deficits.
- **Purchasing Power Parity (PPP):** An economic metric used to compare economic productivity and standards of living between countries by adjusting for the local cost of goods and services. While India ranks exceptionally high in absolute GDP size, its PPP per capita income exposes a vast, persistent gap when compared to advanced economies like Germany or Japan.
- **Structural Reforms:** Fundamental, institutional adjustments made to the core sectors of an economy—such as land acquisition, labor laws, and agricultural marketing. Unlike macroeconomic fine-tuning (like altering interest rates), structural reforms alter the legal and operational framework to boost long-term productivity.



- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**

- The debate surrounding the Indian economic trajectory boils down to a classic conflict between macroeconomic stabilization and deep-seated structural inertia.

- **The Resilience Narrative (Macroeconomic Stability)**

- The core argument posits that labeling the Indian economy as "in crisis" is a significant exaggeration that overlooks its strong fundamentals. Despite severe external disruptions—including aggressive global trade barriers, energy market shocks, and fragmented supply ecosystems—the macroeconomic indicators demonstrate impressive resilience:

- **Growth-Inflation Balance:** Achieving a high growth rate of 7.7% alongside record-low inflation of around 2% reflects highly effective monetary and supply-side management.

- **External Sector Buffers:** A minimal CAD of 0.6% of GDP, bolstered by unprecedented inward remittances (\$140 billion) and robust foreign exchange reserves, isolates the economy from classic balance of payments shocks.

- **Fiscal Prudence:** The steady reduction of the central fiscal deficit from a pandemic peak of 9.5% down to a budgeted 4.4% underscores a disciplined return to structural stability, building long-term sovereign credibility.

- **The Structural Vulnerabilities (The Reality Check)**

- However, focusing purely on aggregate numbers risks obscuring foundational weaknesses. A balanced assessment requires acknowledging that robust macroeconomic management has not resolved persistent structural barriers:

- **The Reform Complacency Trap:** Because the country is not facing an acute financial emergency, the political imperative to enact complex factor-market reforms (land, labor, agriculture) has largely evaporated.

- **Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) Stagnation:** Modest or negative net FDI inflows over recent years indicate that international long-term capital remains cautious, pointing toward underlying regulatory anxieties and compliance burdens.

- **The Aggregation Fallacy:** Surpassing advanced nations like Japan or Germany in total GDP volume is highly probable due to sheer demographic scale. However, this milestone masks a profound per capita income disparity. A massive gap in living standards will persist for generations unless structural productivity undergoes a radical transformation.

- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**

- **Pre-1991: The Era of Controlled Trajectories**

- For decades post-independence, India operated under an inward-looking, import-substitution framework often termed the "Hindu rate of growth" (~3.5%). High tariff barriers, extensive industrial licensing ("License Raj"), and a heavily regulated financial sector insulated the domestic economy but left it structurally inefficient, uncompetitive, and deeply vulnerable to external energy shocks.

- **1991: The Watershed Balance of Payments (BOP) Crisis**

- The tipping point arrived when a combination of fiscal profligacy, political instability, and the Gulf War oil shock depleted India's foreign exchange reserves to less than three weeks of imports.
 - To avoid a sovereign default, the government was forced to physically pledge its gold reserves to foreign central banks. This crisis compelled India to dismantle the License Raj and embrace Liberalization, Privatization, and Globalization (LPG) reforms.

- **2013: The "Fragile Five" Vulnerability**

- Two decades after liberalization, India faced another major external test. Following the global financial crisis, loose domestic monetary policy led to high inflation and a dangerously wide Current Account Deficit (peaking at 4.8% of GDP).
 - When the US Federal Reserve signaled a withdrawal of quantitative easing (the "Taper Tantrum"), foreign capital rapidly exited India. This exposed a lack of deep structural resilience and earned the country a spot among the vulnerable "Fragile Five" economies.

- **Post-COVID to 2026: The Age of Macro-Resilience and Complacency**

- Following the pandemic shock, India pivoted toward disciplined fiscal consolidation and built up substantial foreign exchange buffers. By 2026, despite intense global headwinds, the economy achieved stability, leaving behind the vulnerabilities of 1991 and 2013. However, this stable environment has reduced the immediate political urgency needed to pursue challenging second-generation structural reforms.



INDIA'S ECONOMY: DISPELLING THE 'CRISIS' LABEL, REVEALING STRUCTURAL PATHS AHEAD

DISPELLING THE 'CRISIS' LABEL (FY2026)



- Strong Macroeconomic Conditions
- Economy doing no worse than normal
- Normal economic shock, not a crisis

FY2026 MACROECONOMIC INDICATORS: IMPRESSIVE RESILIENCE

GDP GROWTH:
A REMARKABLE 7.7%



INFLATION: LOWEST
IN 5 DECADES ~2%



EXTERNAL SECTOR
BUFFERS



HISTORICAL CONTEXT: 2026 vs Crisis Years

1991



Gold Pledged to
avoid sovereign default
CAD 3.5%

2013



'Fragile Five'
CAD 4.8%

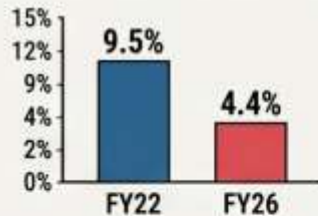
2026



SOLID MACRO
CAD 0.6%

FISCAL CONSOLIDATION

Central Govt Fiscal Deficit



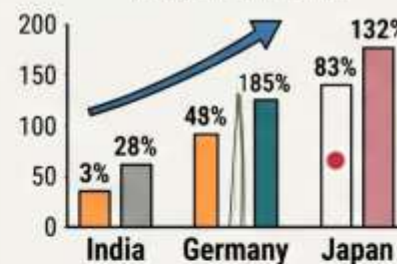
Combined Deficit



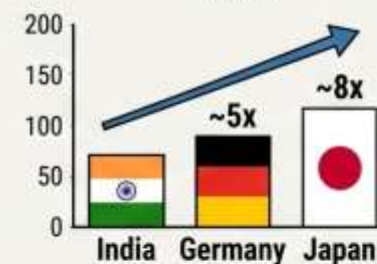
Strengthened resilience through fiscal consolidation.

THE GDP FALLACY: SIZE ≠ INDIVIDUAL WEALTH

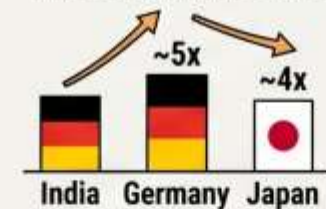
TOTAL GDP SIZE



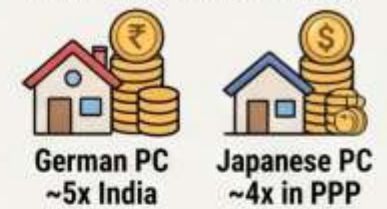
INDIA



PER CAPITA INCOME



PER CAPITA INCOME GAP



Gap in per capita incomes will remain for decades.

CAUTION & CHALLENGES



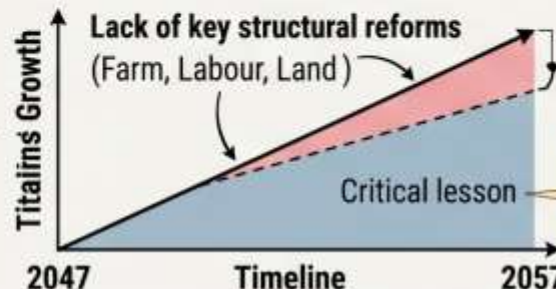
RBI Projections | FY2027

Growth 6.6% 6.6%
Inflation 5.1% 5.1%

- Net FDI inflows modest or negative over 5 years.
- Foreign investors telling us they would rather be elsewhere.

THE PATH AHEAD & THE LACK-OF-REFORM COST

Talians Growth



KEY LESSONS FOR ASPIRANTS



- Macro management is critical for geopolitical risks.



- Political will for difficult reforms is simply missing.



- Be wary of hoopla, focus on structural reforms.

- **Logical and Philosophical Base**

- **Crisis-Driven Reform Model:** This perspective operates on the assumption that in a highly diverse, polycentric democracy like India, painful economic reforms are rarely politically viable during periods of stability. Real structural transformation historically occurs only when the state is backed into a corner by an immediate, existential crisis (such as in 1991). Consequently, macroeconomic success can unintentionally create a "resilience trap" that fosters policy complacency.

- **Growth vs. Development Dichotomy:** The underlying logic highlights the fundamental difference between aggregate economic expansion and individual prosperity. A nation can grow its total economic weight through sheer population scale and concentrated capital efficiency. However, true development is measured by per capita productivity and quality of life, which depend on broad-based structural reforms.

- **Fiscal Conservatism vs. Welfare Populism:** There is an ongoing tension between maintaining strict macroeconomic discipline (reducing fiscal deficits to lower sovereign risk) and addressing the political pressures of a lower-middle-income electorate. This balance often results in a policy preference for targeted capital expenditure and digital welfare over contentious structural shifts in land or labor markets.



Multidimensional Analysis		
Dimension	Key Structural Dynamic	Core Impact / Challenge
Economic	Asymmetric factor productivity and stagnant FDI inflows.	Growth is led by capital-intensive sectors and services, leading to a form of "jobless growth" that fails to absorb the massive rural labor force.
Social	Persistent per capita income gaps and unequal wealth distribution.	A "K-shaped" economic reality emerges where aggregate growth rises, but lower-middle-income segments face limited social mobility and low purchasing power.
Political	Electoral calculations vs. long-term policy vision.	The political risk of facing backlash from concentrated interest groups blocks essential reforms in sensitive sectors like agriculture, land acquisition, and labor.
Legal / Regulatory	Complex compliance frameworks and delayed implementation of unified codes.	Even when progressive frameworks like the new Labour Codes are passed, slow implementation creates regulatory uncertainty that deters long-term foreign capital.
International	Strategic positioning within fractured global supply chains.	India benefits from geopolitical trends like the "China+1" strategy, but capturing these shifts requires lowering high tariffs and reducing logistical friction.
Ethical	Inter-generational equity regarding public debt management.	Balancing current spending with the responsibility of leaving manageable debt levels for future generations requires maintaining strict fiscal consolidation targets.

- **Linkages with NCERTs**
- **Indian Economic Development (Class XI) - Chapter 2: Indian Economy (1950–1990):** Provides essential context on the institutional rigidities, inward-looking import substitution policies, and structural bottlenecks that set the stage for subsequent economic crises.
- **Indian Economic Development (Class XI) - Chapter 3: Liberalisation, Privatisation and Globalisation - An Appraisal:** Directly connects with the analysis of crisis-driven transformations. It contrasts the structural reforms triggered by the 1991 gold-pledging crisis with the more stable macroeconomic environment seen today.
- **Introductory Macroeconomics (Class XII) - Chapter 5: Government Budget and the Economy:** Explains the mechanics of fiscal deficits, revenue deficits, and the broader implications of fiscal consolidation on sovereign resilience and private investment crowding-out.
- **Introductory Macroeconomics (Class XII) - Chapter 6: Open Economy Macroeconomics:** Essential for understanding key external metrics, detailing how the Current Account Deficit (CAD), foreign exchange reserves, and inward remittances interact to determine a nation's balance of payments stability.



- **Linkages with UPSC CSE Syllabus**

- **GS Paper III: Indian Economy and Issues Relating to Planning, Mobilization of Resources, Growth, Development, and Employment**

- This is the primary area of relevance. The data on a 7.7% GDP growth rate, low inflation, and fiscal consolidation pathways provides excellent material for analyzing resource mobilization and sustainable growth models. The discussion on stagnant FDI inflows and structural bottlenecks applies directly to questions examining why India's manufacturing sector faces growth constraints.

- **GS Paper III: Inclusive Growth and Issues Arising from It**

- The contrast between growing aggregate GDP and low per capita incomes highlights the core challenges of inclusive growth. It provides a useful framework for discussing economic disparities, the risk of a K-shaped recovery, and the limits of aggregate growth in improving broader human development indicators.

- **GS Paper II: Government Policies and Interventions for Development in Various Sectors and Issues Arising out of their Design and Implementation**

- This theme aligns with the analysis of why factor-market reforms (such as land acquisition, labor codes, and agricultural marketing) face gridlock, illustrating the complex relationship between political economy and policy implementation.

- **UPSC Essay & Optional Subjects (Economics, Public Administration, Political Science)**

- Perfect for essays exploring themes such as *"National Wealth vs. Individual Well-being"* or *"The Political Economy of Structural Reforms in Democratic Societies."* It offers a balanced perspective on how short-term political stability can sometimes reduce the urgency for long-term institutional change.



- **Way Forward**

- **Implement Phased Factor Market Reforms:** Rather than attempting politically disruptive, all-at-once overhauls, the government can leverage cooperative federalism. Providing financial incentives to states that proactively implement the four unified Labour Codes and establish transparent land-pooling banks can bypass central legislative gridlock.

- **Revitalize the Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) Strategy:** Moving beyond short-term portfolio capital requires addressing regulatory unpredictability. Ensuring tariff consistency, streamlining bureaucratic clearances, and providing stable tax frameworks will help attract long-term, Greenfield foreign investment.

- **Modernize Agricultural Productivity:** Enhancing the rural economy requires shifting focus from basic price support mechanisms toward market-driven cold chain infrastructure, agro-processing clusters, and public-private partnerships. This transition can help move surplus labor smoothly into higher-productivity industrial sectors.

- **Prioritize Human Capital Over Aggregate Metrics:** To escape the middle-income trap, India must focus on the quality of its growth. Directing fiscal savings from consolidation into advanced vocational technical training, public healthcare infrastructure, and R&D will help convert demographic scale into high per capita wealth.

- **Expand Logistics and Infrastructure Push:** Continued investment in national infrastructure projects must be paired with operational reforms to lower domestic logistics costs. Reducing these costs will make Indian manufacturing more competitive globally, helping the country fully capitalize on international supply chain diversification.





- **UPSC CSE Prelims Questions**

- **Theme: Balance of Payments & CAD (2019):** With reference to the Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in India, which one of the following is considered its major characteristic?
- **Theme: Fiscal Deficit Mechanics (2020):** Along with the Budget, the Finance Minister also places the Macro Economic Framework Statement before the Parliament. The aforesaid document is presented because this is mandated by...
- **Theme: External Sector Buffers (2021):** With reference to the Indian economy, consider the following statements:
 - Other things remaining unchanged, a market demand for a good might increase if its price rises.
 - An increase in nominal effective exchange rate (NEER) indicates an appreciation of rupee.
 - An increase in real effective exchange rate (REER) indicates an improvement in trade competitiveness. Which of the statements given above are correct?

- **UPSC CSE Mains Questions (GS Paper III)**

- **Theme: Structural Reform vs Growth (2020):** "Explain the rationale behind the Goods and Services Tax (GST) in India. To what extent has it succeeded in replacing the pre-existing tax structure and promoting economic integration?"
- **Theme: Inclusive Growth & Per Capita Reality (2022):** "Is inclusive growth possible under market economy? State the significance of financial inclusion in achieving economic growth in India."
- **Theme: Manufacturing & FDI Bottlenecks (2023):** "Account for the failure of manufacturing sector in achieving the goal of labor absorption in India. Suggest remedial measures to accelerate manufacturing growth and employment."

Don't read too much into Bangladesh PM's China visit

Bangladesh Prime Minister (PM) Tarique Rahman made his maiden foreign tour two weeks ago, four months after taking office, to Malaysia followed by China. But he has not visited India yet. New Delhi's reaction to Rahman's Malaysia and China visit was swift, sharp, but dated — mostly a litany of complaints disguised as strategic analysis. That he had bypassed India, typically the first destination for a new Bangladeshi leader, showed how vulnerable India's eastern frontier is. Another neighbour has been lost to Beijing. All this talk brings back a sense of déjà vu. In fact, we have watched this script play out before — with Male and with Kathmandu — and we will have to watch it again.

So, do first foreign visits of newly elected leaders in our neighbourhood really matter? Should we care so much about where our neighbours travel, especially at a time when the number of tourists and students coming to India from our neighbourhood is sharply declining? (Why they are not coming to India is a separate discussion altogether.)

To be clear, where a neighbouring country's leader chooses to go first tells us very little about the state of a relationship, and we must stop treating itineraries as foreign policy outcomes. If we keep treating them as such, they tend to become foreign policy outcomes, at least in our mind.

What may be more useful for us to analyse is what actually shapes such decisions in our neighbouring capitals. A newly-minted PM presiding over a struggling economy is likely to go where he/she thinks the money is. Rahman's first stop was Malaysia (not China, to be precise), to seek more jobs for Bangladeshi workers (who, for the record, we are not very keen on admitting into our country). Then came Beijing. An investment forum, meetings with Chinese lending institutions, and a reported request of around six billion dollars in infrastructure support. A close, neutral reading will show that the rationale behind Rahman's visit are more economic than strategic. A leader in Rahman's position will naturally turn to whoever can write the cheque. India was not going to accept more Bangladeshi workers or write a fat cheque like China. Then, why take offence? Now, add the Hasina factor into this mix — a visit by the Bangladeshi PM to India will invariably revive questions regarding Sheikh Hasina's extradition. As a matter of fact, we want less of those questions, not more.

A closer reading of our neighbours' post-election itineraries will, in fact, reveal a mixed record. Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake called on New Delhi before he went to Beijing. Some leaders go to neither India nor China first (the Maldives' Mohamed Muiz, for instance) and prefer a third country. To treat these itineraries as incontrovertible evidence of how seriously our neighbours take us is to read too much into things. It merely spikes our strategic community's blood pressure.

This is also the age of multi-alignment: If we practise it (which we do with great

aplomb and pride), we must expect others to do so as well. We buy Russian oil despite western pressure, we trade with China while balancing against it, and court Washington while keeping Moscow close because we wish to maximise our options in a turbulent world. Yet when Bangladesh or Nepal does precisely the same between India and China, some of our pundits call it a betrayal. Aren't our neighbours practising vis-à-vis us what we practise vis-à-vis the great powers? We must learn to recognise multi-alignment as a fact of contemporary international life, and learn to live with it. Of course, no harm in trying to change it, but there is no point in complaining when we aren't able to do so.

We must also recognise, even if we will not readily do so, another uncomfortable fact: China has become an important and, for most of our neighbours, an indispensable partner, even if it is much to our deep dislike. Look at the regional trade figures, the tourist flows, the students enrolled in Chinese universities, and the infrastructure credit. No amount of outrage on Delhi's social media will change that material reality. Insisting that our neighbours prefer India over China is, therefore, pointless; they will not, because they cannot.

But why has China become so indispensable in South Asia? Deep pockets are the obvious answer. Beijing is willing to spend on the region to tilt the balance in its favour. But there is also a more complicated reason. China is a non-resident power in the Indian subcontinent. It's relationship with the region is not punctuated by colonial memory, or religious, linguistic and ethnic entanglements. India, on the other hand, is woven into the region's history and its associated anxieties. So, our engagement of the region must be more patient and empathetic rather than one that seeks quick results.

There is much India can do instead of fretting over our neighbours' itineraries. When the Lankan economy collapsed in 2022, New Delhi reached out with support worth billions while others, China most notably, hesitated. Physical proximity makes us the region's natural first responder, notwithstanding the itinerary. It is the constant and consistent attention to the region and its complex needs that produces strategic outcomes rather than who goes where first. In fact, taking offence at where our neighbours go first will only reaffirm the caricature of India as the overbearing big brother.

Yes, Rahman did go to Beijing before New Delhi, but he will come here in time, because geography, water, trade, and a long shared border ensure that Dhaka and New Delhi have no choice but engage each other. In the meantime, we can choose to check our neighbours' itineraries and take offence or focus on the more substantive outcomes.

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- **Key Terms and Explanations**

- **Multi-Alignment & Strategic Autonomy:** Unlike the rigid cold-war era alliances, multi-alignment is a foreign policy framework where a country builds parallel, non-exclusive partnerships with multiple major powers to maximize its national interest.
 - *Example:* India purchases Russian oil, deepens technological partnerships with the United States, and maintains active trade channels with China simultaneously. Similarly, smaller South Asian neighbors seek to balance relations with both New Delhi and Beijing.
- **Neighborhood First Policy:** A core pillar of India's foreign policy that prioritizes physical proximity, connectivity, and asymmetric economic integration with its immediate neighbors. It aims to position India as a reliable, benign regional anchor.
- **Non-Resident Power:** A geopolitical actor that wields immense economic, military, or diplomatic influence within a specific geographic region without sharing physical borders or historic cultural entanglements with it.
 - *Example:* China's structural presence in South Asia, or the historical role of the United States in the Middle East.
- **Big Brother Syndrome:** A psychological and political friction point in asymmetrical relations where smaller nations perceive a larger, geographically dominant neighbor as patronizing, overly interventionist, or insensitive to their sovereign equality.
- **Extradition & Sovereign Friction:** The formal, legal process by which one state surrenders an individual to another state for prosecution or punishment. In regional diplomacy, pending extradition requests for deposed leaders can become a highly volatile domestic political issue, directly stalling bilateral engagement.
- **Asymmetric Interdependence:** A vulnerability dynamic where two nations are mutually reliant, but one is far more dependent on the relationship than the other. While India has vast strategic margins, smaller neighbors depend fundamentally on India for geography, transit routes, and essential commodities.

- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**

- **The Fallacy of Itinerary-Driven Foreign Policy**

- A common trap for strategic analysts is treating a foreign leader's first destination as an unalterable geopolitical statement. In reality, diplomatic itineraries are often tactical, driven by immediate domestic pressures rather than a permanent rejection of regional partners. Treating these schedules as final policy outcomes creates a self-fulfilling loop of distrust.

- **Economic Determinism Over Strategic Shifts**

- When a newly formed administration inherits a struggling economy, its initial diplomatic outreach is guided by immediate financial needs. A prime minister seeking employment opportunities for their domestic workforce or substantial infrastructure loans will naturally look toward capitals with deep financial pockets or specific labor demands. These choices are driven by economic survival rather than deep ideological alignment.

- **The Mirror of Multi-Alignment**

- There is a notable double standard when large nations celebrate their own multi-alignment while criticizing the exact same behavior in smaller states. If a major power can balance trade with an adversary and security partnerships with an ally, smaller neighbors will naturally apply the same logic to protect their own sovereign options between regional heavyweights.

- **The Non-Resident Advantage vs. Historical Entanglements**

- China's rising influence in South Asia is driven by more than just financial resources. As a non-resident power, Beijing enters the region without the baggage of shared colonial memories, ethnic cross-border disputes, or water-sharing anxieties.

- Conversely, India's deep, inescapable integration into the history, geography, and social fabric of its neighbors means that domestic developments on either side of the border directly impact the other, creating natural points of friction.

- **Historical Evolution of South Asian Geopolitics**

- **Phase I (1947–1980s): The Era of Rigid Bilateralism and Insulation**

- **Strategic Outlook:** Influenced by the Nehruvian worldview and later the Indira Doctrine, India viewed South Asia as its exclusive security perimeter. The primary goal was keeping external global superpowers (the US and USSR) out of the region's internal dynamics.

- **Key Milestones:** The signing of foundational bilateral treaties with Bhutan (1949) and Nepal (1950), alongside the historic liberation of Bangladesh in 1971. Foreign policy during this era prioritized hard security guarantees and strict bilateral issue resolution.

- **Phase II (1990s–2000s): Economic Liberalization and the Gujral Doctrine**

- **Strategic Outlook:** Recognizing that economic growth required a stable neighborhood, India introduced the Gujral Doctrine. This approach argued that as the largest country in the region, India should offer unilateral concessions to its smaller neighbors without expecting strict reciprocity.

- **Key Milestones:** The signing of the Ganges Water Treaty with Bangladesh (1996) and the expansion of the South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) framework, shifting the focus from hard security to regional economic integration.

- **Phase III (2013–2020): China's Infrastructure Footprint and the Encirclement Debate**

- **Strategic Outlook:** The launch of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) altered the regional status quo. Beijing transitioned from a distant diplomatic actor to an active investor in infrastructure across Pakistan, Sri Lanka, the Maldives, Bangladesh, and Nepal.

- **Key Milestones:** The development of major projects like the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and the Hambantota port lease. These shifts sparked concerns in India about a "String of Pearls" encirclement strategy, causing significant anxiety in New Delhi whenever regional leaders visited Beijing.

- **Phase IV (2021–Present): The Era of Competitive Pragmatism and Multi-Alignment**

- **Strategic Outlook:** A growing recognition that smaller South Asian states are actively using multi-alignment as a long-term foreign policy strategy. India's neighborhood diplomacy is shifting from public frustration over diplomatic schedules to project execution and rapid crisis response.

- **Key Milestones:** India's four-billion-dollar economic stabilization package to Sri Lanka during its 2022 financial crisis, and a pragmatic focus on cross-border energy grids, digital payment links, and regional infrastructure delivery.



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UNPACKING SOUTH ASIAN GEOPOLITICS: BEYOND LEADER ITINERARIES

DECONSTRUCTING THE RATIONALE



WHY CHINA VS. INDIA DYNAMICS MATTER

 CHINA 	INDIA 
NON-RESIDENT POWER (No shared colonial, ethnic baggage), Deep pockets, substantial trade, infrastructure credit.	WOVEN INTO REGIONAL HISTORY & anxieties, Geographic proximity makes it the ' FIRST RESPONDER ' (Sri Lanka 2022).

THE 'ITINERARY MISINTERPRETATION' TRAP



REGIONAL COMPARATIVE CONTEXT



SUBSTANTIVE ENGAGEMENT FOR THE FUTURE



- **Logical and Philosophical Base**

- **Structural Realism and Economic Materialism**

- The behavior of smaller South Asian states is rooted in structural realism. In an anarchic international system, state survival and economic stability take precedence over historical ties or cultural affinities.
- When a smaller nation faces fiscal pressure, its leadership behaves as a rational utility maximizer. They will look for partnerships that offer tangible resources, whether that means securing employment markets for their workforce or landing large infrastructure investments.

- **The Cognitive Dissonance of Strategic Autonomy**

- There is an underlying philosophical contradiction in how major powers view strategic independence. A large nation often views its own multi-alignment as a sophisticated, mature policy design to protect its national interest.
- However, when a smaller neighbor adopts the exact same balancing logic, it is often viewed through a patronizing lens as a strategic breach or betrayal. Recognizing that sovereign states share the same basic right to maximize their options is essential for stable regional relations.

- **The Psycho-Political Dynamics of Asymmetry**

- Geographic and economic imbalances create distinct anxieties on both sides:
 - **The Smaller State:** Fears losing its policy independence, worrying that deep integration with a massive neighbor might slowly erode its sovereign decision-making space.
 - **The Larger State:** Tends to interpret a neighbor's pursuit of independent foreign partnerships not as normal diplomacy, but as an intentional security threat or a sign of regional weakness.
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Multidimensional Analysis

Dimension	Core Tension	Strategic Implication for India
Social	Declining student/tourist inflows; cross-border ethnic ties that cut both ways.	Weakens organic, people-to-people ties, making it easier for domestic political factions to stir up anti-India sentiment.
Political	Regime change directly affects bilateral momentum; domestic political narratives often rely on using India as a foil.	Foreign policy must engage with all sides of a country's political landscape, rather than relying too heavily on relationships with specific leaders.
Legal	Complex extradition processes for former leaders; long-standing cross-border resource and border management treaties.	Turning diplomatic relationships into legal battlegrounds over specific individuals can stall broader strategic and economic cooperation.
Ethical	Balancing sovereign equality with the natural urge of a major regional power to intervene during crises.	Demands an approach rooted in non-reciprocal support and respect for strategic autonomy, avoiding the look of an overbearing power.
International	The Indian subcontinent has become a central arena for major power competition between Washington, Beijing, and New Delhi.	India cannot enforce an exclusive sphere of influence; it must out-deliver competitors on actual project execution and economic integration.
Economic	Massive trade surpluses in India’s favor; China's substantial capital advantages for funding large infrastructure.	Requires India to open up its market, build integrated regional supply chains, and create faster, more flexible financing tools.



- **Linkages with NCERTs**
- **Contemporary World Politics (Class XII – Chapter: South Asia in the Contemporary World)**
 - **Core Concepts:** This chapter explores the unique nature of South Asia, where geography connects nations but historical grievances create underlying tensions. It breaks down the internal political shifts in Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives.
 - **Relevance:** It provides the foundational background needed to understand why these nations frequently swing between pro-India and pro-China foreign policies as their domestic administrations change.
- **Politics in India Since Independence (Class XII – Chapter: India's External Relations)**
 - **Core Concepts:** This section traces the evolution of India's foreign policy principles, mapping the transition from non-alignment during the Cold War to modern pragmatic engagement. It also covers the historical origins of disputes over borders and shared river waters.
 - **Relevance:** Helps explain why India's strategic community is historically sensitive to external powers entering its immediate neighborhood.

- **Linkages with UPSC CSE Syllabus**
- **GS Paper 2: International Relations & Governance**
- **Syllabus Line:** India and its neighborhood-relations; Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.
- **Application:** Directly useful for analyzing structural updates within India's Neighborhood First policy, managing China's growing presence in South Asia, and assessing the geopolitical impacts of regime shifts in Dhaka, Male, or Kathmandu.
- **GS Paper 3: Economic Development & Internal Security**
- **Syllabus Line:** Linkages of border management with internal security; Security challenges and their management in border areas.
- **Application:** Evaluating how political stability and economic health in neighboring countries directly impact India's cross-border security, migration patterns, and integrated border management systems.
- **GS Paper 4: Ethics and Human Interface**
- **Syllabus Line:** International relations and funding (Ethical dilemmas in foreign policy).
- **Application:** Analyzing the ethics of asymmetric power dynamics. Assessing whether large nations should demand strict reciprocity from smaller neighbors, or follow a moral obligation to act as unconditional regional support anchors during economic crises.
- **Essay Paper & Optional Subjects (PSIR, Geography)**
- **Application:** Ideal for essays focusing on trans-national water management, regional economic connectivity, or modern non-alignment. For political science students, it provides an excellent case study for testing Realist and Liberal theories within a highly asymmetric geographic region.



- **Way Forward**
- **Shift from Project Announcement to Rigorous Execution**
 - India must address its historical reputation for slow project delivery by speeding up the execution of its Lines of Credit (LoCs). Setting up independent, specialized project management units will ensure that regional connectivity initiatives, digital payment rollouts, and energy grids are completed on time, offering a reliable alternative to external commercial funding.
- **Institutionalize Strategic Empathy and Subtlety**
 - Diplomatic communication must move away from public frustration over our neighbors' travel schedules. New Delhi should approach regional engagements with a sense of strategic empathy, recognizing that smaller nations face real economic pressures that require them to seek diverse financial partnerships.
 - Forcing neighbors into a rigid, binary choice between India and China often creates unnecessary political backlash.
- **Address the Decline in People-to-People Ties**
 - To reverse the falling numbers of students and medical tourists coming to India, New Delhi should simplify and digitize its visa processing systems. Expanding dedicated scholarship programs and setting up satellite campuses of premier Indian institutions across regional capitals will help rebuild organic, long-term cultural connections.
- **Offer Unilateral Economic Access**
 - As the region's largest economic engine, India can afford to offer non-reciprocal access to its domestic market. Reducing non-tariff barriers for neighboring exporters and integrating them into India's digital public infrastructure (like UPI and ONDC frameworks) will create deep, structural economic interdependencies that outlast shifting political cycles.
- **Separate Domestic Narratives from Neighborhood Diplomacy**
 - Electoral rhetoric intended for domestic audiences can inadvertently damage ties with sensitive border neighbors. Ensuring a clear separation between domestic political messaging and professional diplomatic engagement prevents cross-border relations from becoming collateral damage during election seasons.

UPSC CSE Civil Services Examination

Section A: Preliminary Examination (True/False & Objective Conceptual Direction)

1.[Prelims 2017] With reference to the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, consider the following statements:

1. (1) Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) is the specialized agency of the United Nations that coordinates it.
2. (2) India is not a party to this treaty.
3. *Which of the statements given above is/are correct?* (Focus on India's multilateral treaty commitments vis-à-vis regional ecological systems).

2.[Prelims 2020] With reference to foreign ownership of strategic assets in India's neighborhood and maritime domain, consider the commercial footprint of non-resident powers in deep-water ports.

Section B: Mains Examination (GS Paper 2 & PSIR)

•**[Mains 2023]** 'China is using its economic relations and positive trade surplus as tools to develop potential military power status in Asia', In the light of this statement, discuss its impact on India as her neighbor.

•**[Mains 2022]** Critically examine the aims and objectives of SCO. What importance does it hold for India? (Contextualized to Central and South-Asian multi-alignment).

•**[Mains 2021]** Present a comparative analysis of the SAARC and BIMSTEC organizations with reference to their objectives and features. Why has the former lost its momentum while the latter is gaining prominence in Indian foreign policy architecture?

•**[Mains 2019]** "The voice of India's 'Neighborhood First' policy seems to be falling on deaf ears among its traditional partners in the region." Evaluate this statement with suitable examples from recent political shifts in South Asia.



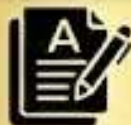
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