GEOJURISTODAY
BOLSTERING THE INDIA WAY

VOLUME I ISSUE 01

JUNE–JULY 2026

THE G.R.F MONTHLY

INDIAN INSIGHTS INTO A CHANGING WORLD

THE REPUBLIC IN REVIEW

LAW, POLICY AND INDIA'S INTERESTS, EXAMINED EVERY MONTH

INSIDE

20 | INDIA'S FIRST CASTE CENSUS SINCE INDEPENDENCE
SHANTANU

TATA'S DHOLERA SEMICONDUCTOR FAB
JAYANTH

THE BRAHMOS EXPORT MOMENT
SIDDHANT CHOUHAN

REGULATING ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE
PAVIN ABRAHAM

BOOK REVIEW

HUNTINGTON'S CLASH OF CIVILIZATIONS, READ THROUGH THE IRAN–ISRAEL WAR
SAMRIDHI SETH

GEOJURISTODAY RESEARCH FOUNDATION · WWW.GEOJURISTODAY.IN

The Geojuristoday Research Foundation

www.geojuristoday.in · geojuristoday@gmail.com

VOLUME I · ISSUE 01

Contents

Message from the Founder's Desk Rudraksh Aneja 3

Letter from the Editor-in-Chief Samridhi Seth 4

Note from the Managing Editor Kuvamjeet Singh 6

I NITI · नीति · GOVERNANCE & PUBLIC POLICY

The Delimitation Bill, 2026: Redrawing Representation Before Women's Reservation Takes Effect Shivangi 8

The Jan Vishwas (Amendment) Bill, 2026: How Far Can Decriminalisation Go? Aastha Gupta 14

II SAMAJ · समाज · SOCIETY & LAW

India's First Caste Census Since Independence: What Happens After the Numbers Arrive? Shantanu 20

Regulating Artificial Intelligence: Is India Moving Towards a Dedicated AI Law? Pavin Abraham 25

III ARTHA · अर्थ · ECONOMY, MARKETS & INDUSTRY

Tata's Dholera Semiconductor Fab: Is India's Chip Strategy Entering Its Execution Phase? Jayanth 30

The India–US Trade Deal Debate: Market Access, Energy and Strategic Trade-offs Devender 34

IV SHAKTI · शक्ति · SECURITY & DEFENCE

India's Ballistic Missile Defence Milestone: Strengthening Deterrence or Changing It? Vaibhav Patidar 39

The BrahMos Export Moment: Defence Manufacturing Meets Foreign Policy Siddhant Chouhan 44

V VISHWA · विश्व · INDIA IN THE WORLD

India–UK CETA Enters into Force: The First Test of India's New Trade Strategy Aman Rawat 51

VI BOOK REVIEW OF THE MONTH

Examining Huntington's Clash of Civilizations through the Iran–Israel Conflict Samridhi Seth 56

FROM THE FOUNDER'S DESK

THE FIRST OF MANY: A MONTHLY RECORD OF A CHANGING INDIA

Dear Readers,



Rudraksh Aneja, Founder and Director, The Geojuristoday Research Foundation.

It gives me great happiness to initiate the inaugural edition of The G.R.F Monthly. What began as a conversation about the gap between the news we consume and the understanding we actually need has taken the shape of a publication, and it is a privilege to place that first issue in your hands.

This will now be a monthly undertaking. Every edition will carry the same five standing sections, the same insistence on context over commentary, and the same expectation that our writers argue from evidence rather than instinct. A monthly rhythm is a discipline as much as a promise: it obliges us to return each month with work that has been researched, reviewed and argued through before it reaches print.

Geojuristoday has received immense love from students, practitioners, scholars and readers who simply wanted a more considered account of the world. That response built this platform, and it is the reason a monthly review of this ambition is possible at all. To everyone who read, wrote, questioned and shared our work along the way, thank you.

Our hope for this publication is a simple one: that it makes fruitful contributions to the fraternity and to the industry it writes about. If a policymaker finds a sharper question here, a student a clearer framework, or a practitioner a fact they can rely on, this effort will have been worth it. We begin with that intention, and we intend to keep it.

Rudraksh Aneja

FOUNDER AND DIRECTOR · THE GEOJURISTODAY RESEARCH FOUNDATION

FROM THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

AN AGE OF INFORMATION, A SHORTAGE OF UNDERSTANDING

Dear Readers,



Samridhi Seth, Editor-in-Chief.

Welcome to the inaugural edition of the Geojuristoday's Monthly Newsletter. Over the past few months, as this newsletter slowly took shape, I found myself coming back to the same thought. We don't live in an age of information scarcity. We live in an age of information overload. Every day brings countless headlines, breaking news alerts, opinions and hot takes. Despite having more information than ever before, meaningful analysis often feels harder to find.

Public discourse is increasingly driven by headlines, algorithms and ideological echo chambers, leaving little room for nuanced conversations about the issues that shape our society. I wanted Geojurist to be different. I wanted it to be a place where ideas are explored rather than reacted to, where developments are understood in context rather than in isolation, and where curiosity is valued just as much as conviction.

When I created the tagline, "Indian Insights into a Changing World," I wanted it to reflect the purpose of this publication: to examine a changing world through an Indian lens, and to understand what those changes mean for India. India is evolving rapidly, and so is the world around us. Developments in governance, technology, economics, society, national security and international affairs are deeply interconnected, and each has a direct bearing on India's future. My hope is that Geojurist helps people make sense of these changes.

"Our objective is simple: to bridge the gap between current affairs and informed analysis."

To bring that vision to life, the newsletter has been organised into five sections. NITI explores law, governance and public policy. SAMAJ examines society, education and culture. ARTHA focuses on the economy, business and development. SHAKTI covers defence, national security and strategic affairs. VISHWA looks at India's foreign policy and the changing global landscape. Together, these sections aim to provide a holistic understanding of the developments shaping the lives of Indians today.

No publication is built by one person, and this one is no exception. I have been fortunate to work alongside an enthusiastic team of writers and editors who have put in countless hours of research, discussion, writing and revision to bring this first edition to life. As Editor-in-Chief, I am grateful for their dedication and excited about what we can build together in the months ahead.

This is only our first issue, and there is much to learn and improve. I hope Geojurist becomes a publication you return to every month, not only to stay informed about what is happening, but to better understand why it matters. Thank you for being part of the beginning of this journey. Happy reading.

HOW THIS ISSUE IS ORGANISED · FIVE STANDING SECTIONS

NITI · निति	Law, governance and public policy.
SAMAJ · समाज	Society, education, culture and the law that shapes them.
ARTHA · अर्थ	The economy, business and development.
SHAKTI · शक्ति	Defence, national security and strategic affairs.
VISHWA · विश्व	India's foreign policy and the changing global landscape.

Samridhi Seth

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF · THE G.R.F. MONTHLY

FROM THE MANAGING EDITOR

A PUBLICATION IS THE SUM OF THE HOURS BEHIND IT

Dear Readers,



Kuvamjeet Singh, Managing Editor.

It is with immense pride and gratitude that I present this edition of our magazine; truly, it is a surreal experience to see it finally come true. Every publication is more than a collection of articles, it is a reflection of countless hours of research, thoughtful discussion, careful editing, and the shared commitment of a dedicated team striving to produce work of lasting value.

Curating this edition has been a rewarding experience. Throughout the process, our editorial team sought not merely to inform, but to encourage critical thought, meaningful dialogue, and a deeper appreciation of the subjects explored within these pages. Every contribution was selected and refined with the belief that informed perspectives have the power to inspire constructive conversations and broaden understanding.

This publication stands as a testament to the dedication, creativity, and professionalism of every member of our team. I extend my sincere appreciation to our writers, editors, designers, reviewers, and everyone who worked tirelessly behind the scenes to bring this vision to life. Their passion and perseverance have transformed an idea into the publication you now hold.

We hope that these pages challenge your perspectives, enrich your understanding, and encourage you to engage more deeply with the issues that shape our world. Thank you for your continued support and for being a valued member of our growing community of readers.

Kuvamjeet Singh

MANAGING EDITOR · THE G.R.F MONTHLY

SECTION ONE

NITI

निति

Governance & Public Policy, the constitutional arithmetic of representation, and a state learning to govern by trust rather than by threat.

NITI · 01 · CONSTITUTIONAL LAW

The Delimitation Bill, 2026: Redrawing Representation Before Women's Reservation Takes Effect

April's defeat was not a numbers problem. It surfaced a federal fault line that fifty years of frozen delimitation had kept dormant.

BY **Shivangi**



The Constitution Amendment Bill fell 54 votes short of the constitutional threshold in the Lok Sabha, taking the companion Delimitation Bill and the UT Laws Amendment Bill down with it.

In September 2023, India's Parliament passed the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam, the Constitution (106th Amendment) Act, reserving one-third of seats in the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies for women. However, the reservation was tied to a delimitation exercise that could not precede the first census after the Act's commencement, a census not due until 2027.

To short-circuit the wait, in April 2026 the government introduced a three-bill legislative package to use 2011 census data for delimitation and expand the Lok Sabha from 543 to 850 seats. The Constitution Amendment Bill was defeated in the Lok Sabha, falling 54 votes short of the constitutional threshold. These results reflect something beyond merely parliamentary arithmetic. They surface a federal fault line that fifty years of frozen delimitation had kept dormant, and raise questions about whether the path to operationalising women's reservation is as straightforward as the political consensus around it once seemed.

FIGURE 1 · THE THREE-BILL PACKAGE, AND WHAT REMAINS OF IT

Constitution Amendment Bill

Would have delinked women's reservation from the post-2027 census trigger under Article 334A. **Defeated, 54 votes short.**

Delimitation Bill

A new Delimitation Commission chaired by a Supreme Court judge, working off 2011 data. **Fell with the amendment.**

UT Laws Amendment Bill

Consequential changes for the Union Territories. **Fell with the package.**

A Bargain That Outlived Its Purpose

India's parliamentary seat allocation traces back to the 1971 Census. The Constitution (42nd Amendment) Act, 1976 froze seat allocations to avoid penalising states that had implemented population control policies, a concern driven primarily by southern states that had achieved demographic stability ahead of their northern counterparts. The Constitution (84th Amendment) Act, 2001 extended that freeze until the first census after 2026. What was designed as a temporary incentive has quietly hardened into a fifty-year-old map, one that governs a country whose demographic reality bears little resemblance to 1971.

The 106th Amendment, brought into force in April 2026, added a new dimension to this longstanding question. By linking women's reservation to a post-commencement census and subsequent delimitation under Article 334A, the amendment made it necessary to finally confront what fifty years of constitutional freezes had postponed. Once a routine electoral exercise, delimitation has now become the gate through which one of India's most consequential democratic reforms must pass. Until India decides how it wants to redraw its political map, the question of women's reservation cannot move forward, because Article 334A explicitly makes its commencement contingent on a delimitation exercise undertaken after the relevant figures of the first census following the 106th Amendment have been published. The two questions are not politically linked by choice; they are constitutionally inseparable by design.

FIGURE 2 · FIFTY YEARS OF A FROZEN MAP

Each freeze was justified as temporary. Together they have governed representation for half a century.

1971	The census whose figures still govern seat allocation today.
1976	42nd Amendment freezes allocations, representational stability traded for demographic responsibility.
2001	84th Amendment extends the freeze to the first census after 2026.
2023	106th Amendment passed with near-unanimity, tying women's reservation to delimitation.
Apr 2026	106th Amendment in force; the three-bill package is introduced and defeated.
2029	General elections. A post-2027-census delimitation is unlikely to conclude before them.

Beyond the Vote Count

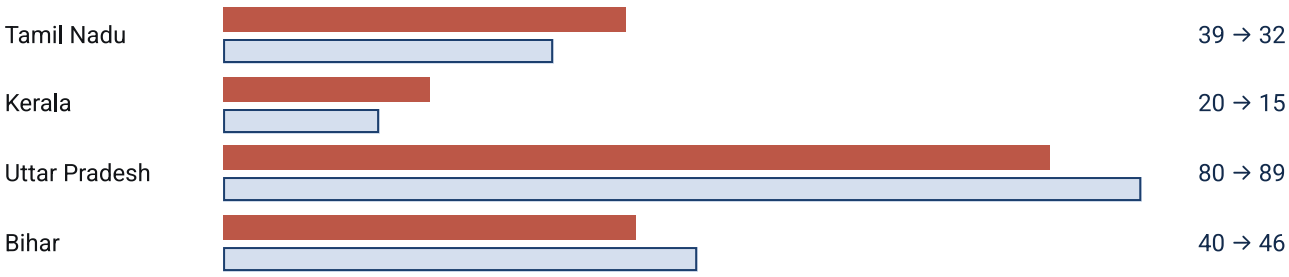
The three bills were, at their core, a reasonable attempt to resolve a genuine constitutional deadlock, proposing a new Delimitation Commission chaired by a Supreme Court judge and amending Article 334A to delink women's reservation from the post-2027 census trigger. Their defeat left women's reservation and delimitation precisely where they started.

And yet, the defeat was not merely a numbers problem. The government underestimated how much had accumulated beneath the surface of a fifty-year freeze. The seat arithmetic tells that part of the story. If delimitation proceeds on 2011 Census data with the current Lok Sabha strength unchanged, Tamil Nadu's seats would fall from 39 to 32 and Kerala's from 20 to 15, while Uttar Pradesh would rise from 80 to 89 and Bihar from 40 to 46, a shift in relative share that persists even at an expanded 850-seat House.

FIGURE 3 · THE ARITHMETIC BEHIND THE RESISTANCE

Seats before and after, on 2011 data at unchanged House strength

Upper bar: current allocation (1971 basis). Lower bar: projected allocation.



Southern states are not worried about losing seats; they are worried about losing political weight in a House where demographic size increasingly determines influence.

The government's counter-argument that all states would gain seats in absolute terms under the expansion model does not fully address this concern. For states that contribute disproportionately to national GDP and tax revenues, reduced legislative voice raises a federal concern as much as a political one. This is also not simply a north–south divide. The 42nd Amendment's freeze was itself a federal bargain: representational stability in exchange for demographic responsibility. Revisiting that bargain without an equivalent guarantee in return is what has made southern states resistant, not opposition to women's reservation as a principle.

This friction is further amplified by the immediate shadow of the impending 2029 general elections. If delimitation remains stalled, the constitutional mandate for women's reservation cannot be operationalised for the next national cycle. Since a delimitation exercise based on the post-2027 census is unlikely to conclude before the 2029 polls, the upcoming monsoon session is the final legislative window to delink the two processes. This timeline forces a strategic recalculation for all actors: the ruling coalition must balance its reform agenda against a ticking clock, while southern states face pressure to negotiate their future representational weight before the map is redrawn without their input. Consequently, the deadline has become the primary lens through which every federal and representational trade-off is currently being measured.

> *The 106th Amendment was passed with near-unanimity; we know the political will exists. What is needed now is the constitutional imagination to match it.*

The conversation, however, does not end at seat numbers. The constitutional implications warrant equal attention. Giving Parliament the authority to decide by law when to carry out delimitation and which census to use, while practical in intent, raises questions about the Rajya Sabha's role in a decision that directly affects states. An expanded 850-seat Lok Sabha against an unchanged Rajya Sabha of 245 would tilt the balance of a joint sitting decisively toward the lower house, precisely on a question where states' interests are most at stake. The question of judicial oversight, too, will need to be read alongside the Supreme Court's ruling in *Kishorchandra Chhanganlal Rathod v. Union of India* (2024 INSC 579), which affirmed that constitutional courts retain limited jurisdiction to review delimitation orders. Addressing these dimensions within the framework itself would spare the reform a long and uncertain journey through litigation.

SIDEBAR · UNRESOLVED BY DESIGN

Four questions inside the 106th Amendment that the delimitation debate has crowded out

The OBC sub-quota. Still unresolved. Without it, the reform's reach may not extend as far down the social ladder as its architects intended.

The excluded chambers. The Rajya Sabha and State Legislative Councils sit outside the reform, raising questions about whether gender representation is being applied consistently across India's legislative architecture.

The 15-year sunset. An element of uncertainty inside what has been presented as a generational constitutional commitment.

The strategy itself. Returning to the monsoon session with the same package and better coalition management is unlikely to be enough.

What a Durable Consensus Would Require

Building a settlement that holds will require movement on several fronts. A hybrid formula for seat allocation that weighs demographic performance and economic contribution alongside population would demonstrate that the exercise is about equitable representation rather than raw numbers. Bringing states into the conversation through the Inter-State Council before legislation is drafted would lend the process federal legitimacy. And if consensus on delimitation proves elusive in the near term, implementing women's reservation within the existing House strength as an interim step is an option worth serious consideration, one that keeps the reform moving without holding it hostage to the hardest political question in Indian federalism.

The April defeat has not closed the delimitation question; it has clarified what resolving it will require. Women's reservation, federal balance and constitutional architecture are no longer separate conversations. They are three dimensions of the same challenge, each pulling on the other. And that means the path forward cannot belong to one stakeholder alone. The government needs to arrive at the monsoon session with genuine openness to a more accommodative design and meaningful consultation. Parliament must treat the reservation framework's unresolved questions with the urgency they deserve. And for the opposition, federalism is a legitimate argument, but it requires an alternative proposal to be credible, because resistance alone is not a position, it is a delay.

India has rarely struggled to pass landmark legislation; the 106th Amendment stands as recent proof of that. What it has struggled with is the harder work that follows: building the consensus needed to make legislation real. The monsoon session will reveal whether the April defeat was a setback in pursuit of a durable settlement, or simply the first round of a much longer contest. The fundamental question that remains is whether a democracy that spent 27 years finding the political agreement to reserve seats for women can afford to spend another decade on the delimitation exercise that must come first, one that will redraw not just constituency boundaries, but the federal compact that holds the union together.

THE VOCABULARY OF THE DEBATE

Delimitation — The redrawing of constituency boundaries and the reallocation of seats between states to reflect population.

The seat freeze — The suspension of that reallocation, first imposed in 1976 and extended in 2001, which holds the present distribution until the exercise resumes.

The 106th Amendment — The women's reservation law, whose commencement was tied to the first delimitation after the next census, and so to the same clock.

Delinking — The proposal to separate women's reservation from delimitation, so the one need not wait on the other.

WATCH FOR

The monsoon session's treatment of the delinking amendment; any reference of the seat-allocation formula to the Inter-State Council; and whether an interim within-strength implementation of women's reservation is tabled as a fallback.

NITI · 02 · REGULATORY REFORM

The Jan Vishwas (Amendment) Bill, 2026: How Far Can Decriminalisation Go?

India has chosen trust over fear. The harder work is making that choice felt at the last mile.

BY **Aastha Gupta**

> प्रजासुखे सुखं राज्ञः प्रजानां च हिते हितम् ।
> नात्मप्रियं हितं राज्ञः प्रजानां तु प्रियं हितम् ।।
>
> "A king's own happiness lies in nothing but the happiness of his subjects.", Kautilya, *Arthashastra*

Kautilya wrote of the ruler's dharma in strikingly simple terms thousands of years ago. It was an early articulation of what we today call trust-based governance: the idea that the legitimacy of the state rests on the faith it can earn. Centuries later we can still observe the prevalence of such principles in our society and judicial system. It is within this lineage of Indian thought that we must view the Jan Vishwas (Amendment of Provisions) Bill, 2026.



The reform's intended beneficiary: India's 63 million MSMEs, for whom a missed filing once carried a jail term.

For decades, the Indian entrepreneur lived under a law that felt less like a protective shield and more like a colonial cudgel. As the Hon'ble Commerce Minister Shri Piyush Goyal recently stated in the Rajya Sabha, a nation progresses through trust, not through fear.

This philosophical shift, from a state of perpetual suspicion to genuine partnership, is the heartbeat of the present regime's reform agenda. By introducing these reforms, the government is not merely implementing laws; it is rewriting the social contract for a Viksit Bharat 2047.

The Anatomy of the Bill

On 27 March 2026, the Government of India marked a watershed moment with the introduction of the Jan Vishwas (Amendment of Provisions) Bill, 2026. The legislation reflects the culmination of a multi-year effort to systematically dismantle the archaic "Inspector Raj" that has long suffocated Indian enterprise. Following a rigorous review by a 24-member Select Committee, the scope of the reform was expanded to a staggering 79 Central Acts administered by 23 Ministries, marking the "next phase" of a structural revolution that began with the Jan Vishwas Act, 2023.

FIGURE 4 · THE BILL BY THE NUMBERS

79
Central Acts amended, across 23 Ministries

784
Provisions proposed for amendment in total

717
Slated for decriminalisation, for Ease of Doing Business

67
Aimed at Ease of Living for the common citizen

60
Days, the appeal timeline on the new administrative track

183
Provisions decriminalised by the 2023 Act, for comparison

Where the 2023 Act left rule notification to each ministry's own pace and treated decriminalisation as a label-swap, the 2026 Bill formalises Adjudicating Officers, appeal timelines and graded enforcement from the outset.

Significance of the Reform

A regulatory landscape dominated by criminal compliance architecture, a web of over 7,300 criminal offences, with roughly 38% of business-related clauses carrying potential jail terms for defaults as trivial as a missed filing deadline or a labelling error, created an environment of fear which deterred investment and burdened the judiciary with thousands of petty cases. The Jan Vishwas reforms matter because the preceding framework allowed regulatory burden to accumulate much as cholesterol restricts blood flow through the body, requiring a systemic cure. By replacing draconian imprisonment with rationalised administrative penalties, the government has signalled that it views the Indian citizen as a partner in nation-building rather than a presumptive offender.

Notable reforms include unlocking restrained capital by removing the threat of imprisonment across 717 provisions, empowering India's MSME sector; and providing judicial relief, with over 5 crore cases pending in Indian courts, the Bill acts as a critical safety valve, allowing the judiciary to prioritise serious crimes. It also serves as an act of decolonising the mindset by abolishing archaic provisions. For MSMEs, the Bill replaces a framework marked by fear with a correction-first model: under the MSME Development Act, 2006 and provisions of the Central Skill Board Act, registration lapses that once carried a potential jail term now receive administrative warnings and space for procedural correction. The Apprentices Act, 1961 adopts a three-stage mechanism, moving from formal advisory and warning to a financial penalty only upon persistent non-compliance.

Thus the Bill achieves genuine structural change: with over 1,000 offences across 79 Central Acts rationalised and disputes moved onto a strict 60-day administrative track, it directly eases a burdened judiciary and prisons running at 130% capacity, delivering tangible relief to India's 63 million MSMEs.

FIGURE 5 · THE FIVE LEVERS OF REFORM

Enforcement is recalibrated in five distinct legislative moves, a ladder of proportionality rather than a single switch.

01 **Imprisonment to monetary penalty.** Jail terms removed for technical defaults, cosmetics under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, minor defaults in railway carriages.

02 **Graded enforcement.** A correction-first approach: under the Apprentices Act, advisory, then warning, then a financial penalty only for persistent non-compliance.

03 **Improvement notices.** Under the Legal Metrology Act, 2009, a time-bound opportunity to rectify record-keeping errors before any penalty is triggered.

04 **In-house adjudication.** The structural core: Adjudicating Officers settle offences administratively, with a strict 60-day appeal timeline for legal certainty.

05 **Dynamic penalty framework.** Fines rise automatically by 10% every three years, so inflation does not erode deterrence.

Strict criminal liability remains for spurious drugs, food adulteration and deliberate environmental damage, fear is reserved for those who break the law knowingly.

Beyond Decriminalisation: Where the Reform Could Still Fail

The transition toward trust-based governance marks a significant shift in achieving the goal of Viksit Bharat, where the state–citizen relationship is defined by genuine partnership. But decriminalisation alone is not a panacea; it marks the beginning of a move toward higher-quality enforcement, where the spirit of trust-based governance permeates every layer of the Indian administrative machinery.

While the bold reform trajectory deserves appreciation, several fallacies could undermine its effects if left unaddressed. By turning jail terms into monetary penalties, there is a risk that deep-pocketed corporations will treat fines simply as a cost of doing business. While the 10% automatic hike aims to proof deterrents against inflation, a flat civil penalty could remain regressive, biting the small entrepreneur while merely tickling the large conglomerate. The shift toward in-house adjudication carries an institutional risk of its own, handing wide discretionary powers to executive Adjudicating Officers who may lack independent judicial training and who could, without robust oversight, enforce inconsistently or arbitrarily.

The present regime should not shy away from these critiques but lean into them, acknowledging that the sociological wager of trust requires constant calibration, so that deterrence remains robust for the powerful while relief remains genuine for the small operator.

RECOMMENDATIONS · FOUR STEPS TO KEEP THE INTENT ALIVE

1. Capacity building and a service mindset. The shift of power from courts to executive departments places a heavy burden on Adjudicating Officers. An institution should train them in natural justice and prudent enforcement so they act as guides rather than inspectors. Ministries also face stark staffing and infrastructure constraints, with *ex officio* appointees managing quasi-judicial workloads without dedicated personnel or digitised support. The absence of permanent oversight beyond the 60-day appeal window leaves a gap in long-term accountability.

2. Bridging the state-level gap, Jan Vishwas 3.0. Inspector Raj weighs heaviest in state regulation. NITI Aayog's competitive federalism framework should incentivise states, following Haryana and Goa, to pass their own omnibus decriminalisation bills, particularly in labour and agriculture.

3. A digital compliance shield and public dashboard. Integrate the National Single Window System with a proactive compliance calendar, and publish a single dashboard tracking which provisions are live across all 79 Acts.

4. An anomaly and hardship committee. A body modelled on the NDMC Act amendments should address litigation limbo and regressive penalty structures, letting citizens report remaining archaic laws.

Dr Ambedkar warned that a law's worth is measured not by its intent but by its lived effect on the citizen. On that measure, the present regime has done the hard part by rewriting the letter of nearly eighty laws. What remains is the quieter work of making sure that intended change is felt by the last person in the queue. India has chosen trust over fear, marking the true maturity of our Republic.

THE REFORM IN NUMBERS

79
Central Acts amended across the two Jan Vishwas rounds

23
Ministries responsible for notifying the rules

10%
Automatic escalation built into the monetary penalties

60
Days allowed to appeal an adjudicating officer's order

63 mn
MSMEs the reform is meant to reach

2
States with omnibus bills of their own: Haryana and Goa

TERMS USED IN THIS PIECE

Inspector Raj — The discretionary inspection-and-prosecution regime that trust-based governance is intended to replace.

Adjudicating Officer — The executive official who now decides penalties in place of a criminal court.

National Single Window System — The Centre's consolidated clearance portal, proposed here as the carrier of a compliance calendar.

Competitive federalism — NITI Aayog's framework for ranking and incentivising states, the route by which state-level decriminalisation would spread.

WATCH FOR

The pace of rule notification across the 23 ministries; the appointment and training of Adjudicating Officers; and whether any state follows Haryana and Goa with an omnibus decriminalisation bill of its own.

SECTION TWO

SAMAJ

समाज

Society & Law, a country preparing to measure itself, and a technology outpacing the rules written for it.

SAMAJ · 01 · SOCIAL JUSTICE

India’s First Caste Census Since Independence: What Happens After the Numbers Arrive?

The numbers, when they arrive, will not speak for themselves. They will need institutions to speak through.

BY **Shantanu**



February 2027: for the first time since 1931, every Indian citizen will be asked to identify their caste for official records.

When the Union Cabinet approved caste enumeration as part of the Census 2027 exercise in April 2025, it resolved, at least formally, one of the most protracted debates in post-Independence India. For the first time since 1931, nearly a century later, every Indian citizen will be asked to identify their caste for official records. The population enumeration phase, scheduled for February 2027, will produce the most granular caste dataset this country has ever generated in the modern era.

What India does with that data, how it is governed, interpreted and translated into policy, will matter far more than the fact of its collection. The numbers, when they arrive, will not speak for themselves. They will need institutions, political will and clear-eyed policy thinking to speak through.

A Century of Governing in the Dark

India's decision to exclude caste from the Census after Independence was deliberate. The architects of the young republic worried, not unreasonably, that counting communities would harden the very identities the new nation was trying to move beyond. The result was a framework that acknowledged caste through reservation while refusing to measure it. The Mandal Commission, constituted in 1979, was asked to rely on 1931 Census data to estimate that OBCs constituted 52% of India's population, a figure that has governed affirmative action policy ever since, despite being nearly fifty years old at the time of its use and nearly a century old today.

FIGURE 6 · NINETY-SIX YEARS OF COUNTING, AND NOT COUNTING

Every attempt to close the measurement gap has been partial, delayed, or unpublished.

1931	The last full caste enumeration. Its figures still underwrite policy.
1979	Mandal Commission constituted; estimates OBCs at 52% from 1931 data.
1992	*Indra Sawhney v. Union of India* fixes the 50% reservation ceiling.
2011	SECC returns over 46 lakh caste names, deemed too unwieldy to publish.
2017	Rohini Commission constituted to examine OBC sub-categorisation.
Apr 2025	Union Cabinet approves caste enumeration within Census 2027.
Feb 2027	Population enumeration phase begins.

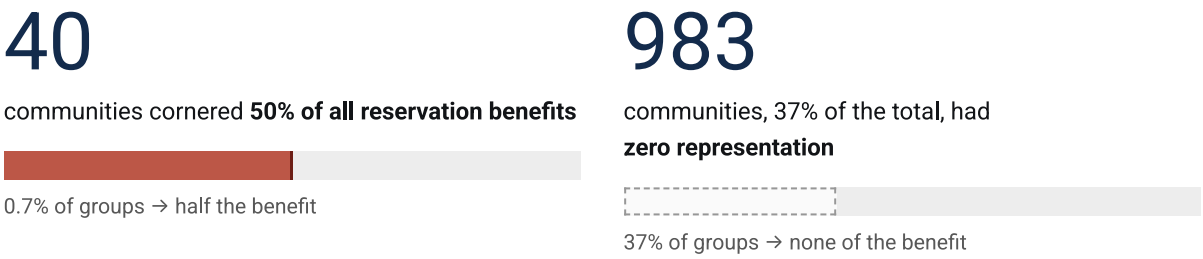
The Socio-Economic and Caste Census of 2011 was an attempt to address this gap, but its caste data was never made public, returning over 46 lakh different caste names that the government described as too unwieldy to be usable. State-level surveys in Bihar and Karnataka offered partial remedies, producing granular data that national policy had long lacked. The Bihar survey revealed that poverty was distributed deeply unevenly across communities, with some of the most marginalised Dalit sub-castes showing extreme poverty rates nearly double those of more prosperous OBC communities. The gap between a broad category like "OBC" and the lived reality it contains is precisely the problem a national caste census is designed to close. It is also why the decision remains contested: for those whose relative advantage within broad categories has gone unmeasured, the arrival of granular data is not an abstraction. It is a reckoning.

What the Data Could Change, and What It Cannot

The most immediate policy consequence of reliable caste data would be in welfare targeting. India's current framework distributes benefits through broad categories, SC, ST, OBC, that aggregate vastly different communities under the same administrative umbrella. Granular data would allow governments to direct resources to communities that are measurably more deprived, rather than those historically better organised to access them.

FIGURE 7 · HOW RESERVATION BENEFITS ACTUALLY DISTRIBUTE

The Rohini Commission's finding, across nearly 6,000 OBC groups.



In *State of Punjab v. Davinder Singh*, a seven-judge bench held that states can sub-classify Scheduled Castes for more targeted quotas. Real caste population data would give this argument, and the case against it, an empirical foundation that political debate alone cannot provide. The harder question is what happens to the 50% reservation ceiling established in *Indra Sawhney v. Union of India* (1992). If the Census reveals OBCs to be substantially more than 52% of the population, pressure to revisit this cap will intensify. This is not a question the data will answer, but it is a constitutional question the data will make impossible to defer.

On political representation, the caste census intersects with two ongoing debates: delimitation and women's reservation. No political formation in India is insulated from the consequences of a caste count, which is why the census, for all its policy merit, will also reshape electoral coalitions in ways that parties across the spectrum are already calculating.

> *The counting is the beginning. What follows, legislation, policy redesign, data governance, will decide whether 2027 becomes a foundation or a footnote.*

The Questions the Numbers Will Not Settle

The risks and limitations of this exercise deserve as much attention as its promise. The methodology remains the make-or-break question. The Census will use an open-column, self-identification approach: respondents will declare their own caste rather than selecting from a pre-approved list. The SECC 2011 used the same method and returned 46 lakh different entries, most of which could not be usefully aggregated. Without a robust master caste directory reconciling spellings, synonyms and sub-caste variations before enumeration begins, the 2027 exercise risks repeating the same failure at a greater scale.

There is also the question of what caste data in the hands of the state means for those it is meant to help. The Census Act, 1948 provides confidentiality protections for individual records, but a clear governance framework for aggregated caste tables, who accesses them, for what purposes, and under what oversight, will need to be established as the exercise progresses. Getting this architecture right will be as important as the enumeration itself.

THE WORK THAT FOLLOWS · FOUR PARALLEL TRACKS

Methodological. Publish a master caste directory before February 2027, mapping spellings, synonyms and sub-caste variations across states. Without it, people will declare their caste in a hundred different ways and there will be no way to make sense of it nationally.

Legislative. Parliament has the Rohini findings, the Supreme Court's endorsement of sub-classification in *Davinder Singh*, and the prospect of real population data to ground both. Waiting for the data before beginning this work would be a missed opportunity.

State-level. Bihar and Karnataka have shown what granular data makes possible. Other states should begin preparing the policy architecture that can absorb national data when it arrives.

Data governance. Access, purpose and oversight must be settled transparently before enumeration concludes. Data of this sensitivity, without clear rules, creates as many risks as it resolves.

Ultimately, the caste census is a necessary step, but it remains a single step in spite of its gravity. A dataset, however comprehensive, is only as useful as the institutions and frameworks built around it. The counting is the beginning; what follows, in terms of legislative action, policy redesign and data governance, will determine whether 2027 becomes the foundation for a more equitable and data-driven approach to social justice in India.

WHAT THE ENUMERATION WILL BE JUDGED AGAINST

Master caste directory — A single reference mapping spellings, synonyms and sub-caste variations across states, without which national aggregation is impossible.

The Rohini findings — The commission's work on sub-categorisation within the OBC bloc, now waiting on population data to ground it.

Davinder Singh — The Supreme Court's endorsement of sub-classification, which gives legislatures the room the data would fill.

Data governance — The rules of access, purpose and oversight that must be settled before enumeration ends, not after.

WATCH FOR

Finalisation of the enumeration methodology; publication of a master caste directory; the Supreme Court's evolving jurisprudence on sub-categorisation and the reservation cap; and how state governments respond once the data is released.

SAMAJ · 02 · TECHNOLOGY & LAW

Regulating Artificial Intelligence: Is India Moving Towards a Dedicated AI Law?

The Indian debate is no longer about deepfakes. It is about labour, capability and the security of the state.

BY **Pavin Abraham**

In just a couple of decades, AI has evolved from a specialised research pursuit into a deeply integrated technology that permeates nearly every aspect of our lives. It has become a foundational pillar of global digital infrastructure, influencing everything from digital payments and customer service to predictive analytics and digital content. However, its rapid expansion has also raised complex legal, economic and security challenges, prompting governments to reconsider whether existing regulatory frameworks remain adequate.



The IMF puts roughly 12% of India's workforce, and a similar share in IT and business-process services, at direct risk from generative AI.

While jurisdictions across the world have begun developing dedicated approaches to AI governance, India has for years maintained that its existing legislative framework is sufficient to address the risks associated with AI. That position is now increasingly being tested as international regulatory models evolve and domestic debates gather pace.

The Legislative Framework

India currently has three key pillars. The first is the IT Act, 2000 and the Intermediary Guidelines 2021, which cover platform liability and content moderation but were written without generative AI in mind. The second is the Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023, which governs personal data used to train and deploy AI systems. The third, and most recent, is the India AI Governance Guidelines (November 2025) from MeitY, a voluntary and principle-based set featuring seven "sutras" such as trust and accountability, and a "do no harm" principle for innovation.

On top of that are two pending developments. The Artificial Intelligence (Ethics and Accountability) Bill, 2025 seeks to establish a statutory AI Ethics Committee, mandatory ethical review before building applications, and fines of up to ₹5 crore for misuse. The Draft Digital India Act aims to supplant the IT Act in due course, revoking its safe-harbour clause and implementing algorithmic audits through a proposed Digital India Authority. Neither has been passed into law.

FIGURE 8 · WHAT AI-RELATED HARM LOOKS LIKE IN INDIA TODAY

The case for binding obligations does not rest on deepfakes alone.

₹22,495 cr	92,000+	12%	92 mn
Lost to cyber fraud in India in 2025 (estimate)	"Digital arrest" scams using AI-generated voices and faces	Of India's workers at direct risk of replacement (IMF)	Jobs the WEF expects AI to extinguish worldwide by 2030

Ethical supervision of AI is not a regulatory nicety; it is a response to real and rapidly escalating harms in economic, social and security sectors, harms that voluntary guidelines are structurally unable to address.

The first risk is mass labour displacement. IMF estimates suggest that approximately 12% of India's workers are at risk of being directly replaced by generative AI, including around 12% in the IT and business-process-outsourcing services industries vital to India's services-led growth, while the World Economic Forum estimates that by 2030 AI could make 92 million jobs extinct worldwide. India's IndiaAI Mission has drawn criticism because it has invested extensively in capability and infrastructure while offering comparatively little policy guidance for workforce transition and reskilling.

The second is the "AI divide." Computing infrastructure, quality data and AI literacy remain concentrated in certain cities, companies and population segments. Unchecked expansion could exacerbate current income, education, digital-access and digital-skill disparities, especially among workers in smaller cities and informal employment who cannot easily retrain.

The third is national security. The same tools driving innovation in fraud detection can spread disinformation at scale, probe critical infrastructure, manipulate public perception during elections, and defeat authentication systems protecting sensitive networks. AI becomes a national security threat not only because it can be used offensively, but because it can undermine trust in institutions, weaken state capacity and create vulnerabilities that are difficult to detect or contain once they spread.

Learning From Elsewhere

FIGURE 9 · FOUR REGULATORY POSTURES, COMPARED

JURISDICTION	PRINCIPAL INSTRUMENT	CHARACTER OF OBLIGATION
European Union	AI Act (in force since 2024), enforced through an EU AI Office	Binding and risk-based: prohibits the most harmful uses, sets clear duties for "high-risk" systems
United Kingdom	2023 "pro-innovation" White Paper; a dedicated AI Security Institute	No AI Act. Five cross-sector principles applied by the FCA, ICO and Ofcom; a standardisation bill still pending
China	Interim Measures for Generative AI Services (2023), plus rules on recommendation algorithms, deep synthesis and content labelling	Multi-layered, not a single law: security assessments, lawful training data, personal-information protection, content that does not threaten public order
India	IT Act 2000 + Intermediary Guidelines; DPDP Act 2023; India AI Governance Guidelines (Nov 2025)	Voluntary and principle-based at the AI layer; binding obligations only where data protection or intermediary law already reaches

India is moving incrementally towards a dedicated framework, though not necessarily towards a single comprehensive AI Act.

The most important recent development, however, has been multilateral. The Global Dialogue on AI Governance and the Independent International Scientific Panel on Artificial Intelligence are the first UN forums in which all 193 member states have an automatic seat on AI governance. The Panel's first report, dated 1 July 2026, highlighted the failure of current safeguards to keep pace with AI's capabilities. For the first time, India was part of these consultations alongside over 190 other states, placing its own regulatory decisions in a genuinely global frame.

At the AI Impact Summit 2026, AI models were demonstrated for more than 200 sectors, $70 billion in funding was pledged for infrastructure development, and seven regional conferences connected directly to national priorities. But shallow integration is precarious. India needs to translate this diplomatic engagement into lasting commitments: R&D investment to build local compute, talent and model capabilities rather than importing systems; incorporation of the ethics bill into the Digital India Act; and an AI policy explicitly linked to the reskilling of labour.

Taken together, these developments suggest that India is moving incrementally towards a dedicated AI governance framework, even if not a single comprehensive AI Act. Rather than replicating any one international model, India should adopt a balanced, risk-based approach that combines binding obligations for high-risk AI systems with continued support for innovation and stakeholder consultation. As AI becomes increasingly embedded across society, relying solely on voluntary guidelines will no longer be sufficient.

THE GOVERNANCE YEAR IN NUMBERS

193
UN member states now seated on AI governance for the first time

200+
Sectors in which models were demonstrated at the AI Impact Summit 2026

$70 bn
Pledged at the Summit for AI infrastructure

7
Regional conferences tied to national priorities

12%
Share of India's workforce the IMF places in AI's path

1 Jul 2026
Date of the UN scientific panel's first report

WATCH FOR

Whether the AI (Ethics and Accountability) Bill is folded into the Digital India Act; the fate of intermediary safe harbour; and any move from voluntary sutras to binding high-risk obligations.

SECTION THREE

ARTHA

अर्थ

Economy, Markets & Industry, a first fab moving from policy to delivery, and a trade negotiation running out of calendar.

ARTHA · 01 · INDUSTRIAL POLICY

Tata's Dholera Semiconductor Fab: Is India's Chip Strategy Entering Its Execution Phase?

Two decades of failed semiconductor policy, and one $11 billion test of whether the state has learned to execute.

BY **Jayanth**



India's first commercial 300mm wafer fab, at Dholera, Gujarat, notified as a Special Economic Zone, with trial production expected by late 2026.

In 2024, the Government of India greenlit Tata Electronics' proposal to establish a semiconductor fabrication facility in Dholera, Gujarat. The project, in collaboration with Taiwan's Powerchip Semiconductor Manufacturing Corporation (PSMC), ASML from the Netherlands and others, aims to create India's first commercial 300mm wafers for the world. As of now, this $11 billion project is estimated to begin trial production by late 2026, bringing Indian chips into the global supply.

Semiconductors have powered the new millennium; the technologies they enable are the Atlas on whose arms the world rests. Today we are aware of their role in AI, in defence and in war, but it is no exaggeration to say that the world as we know it depends fundamentally on semiconductors, and will continue to do so. India has long aspired to build its own manufacturing capability and capacity, but has in the past relied on imports. This new fab at Dholera is therefore a massive shift, with immense potential yet to be realised. For a country with a large and growing electronics market, the facility reduces supply chain vulnerabilities, supports the industry and generates employment: the site alone opens more than 20,000 roles.

FIGURE 10 · THE PROJECT AT A GLANCE

$11 bn	300 mm	50,000	20,000+	Late ’26
Total project investment	Wafer size, India’s first commercial line	Units targeted per month	Roles opened at the site	Expected start of trial production

Output is aimed at analog, logic, power management, display drivers, microcontrollers, automotive, AI and computing applications.

Amid the ever-present uncertainties of the current global order, its supply chains and its policies, the successful execution of this project will position India as a more resilient agent, sovereign, self-reliant and reliable. Perhaps more importantly, a case of successful execution will demonstrate that coordinated public and industrial policy, sustained public-private collaboration and targeted incentives can deliver strategic, high-technology infrastructure at scale, establishing a development path for future national industrial initiatives.

India’s Semiconductor Ambitions

The path the republic is currently treading can be traced back to the mid-2000s, when an early Semiconductor Policy under the Special Incentive Package Scheme (SIPS) sought to attract investment, but high costs, global competition and crucial infrastructure gaps led to inadequate results. This was due to the absence of a holistic environment that could sustain such facilities; subsequent attempts under the Modified Special Incentive Package Scheme (2012) and the Fab Policy (2013) were also largely unsuccessful.

FIGURE 11 · TWENTY YEARS OF TRYING

Three failed policy cycles preceded the one now under construction.

2007	Special Incentive Package Scheme. Investment sought; costs and infrastructure gaps prevail.
2012	Modified SIPS. Largely unsuccessful.
2013	Fab Policy. No fab follows.
2021	India Semiconductor Mission established under the Digital India Corporation, the central institution for evaluating proposals and providing financial support, alongside Semicon India, DLI and PLI schemes.
2024	Tata Electronics' Dholera proposal approved; the site is notified as an SEZ, streamlining approvals.
2026	Trial production expected. The execution phase begins.

Inside the Project, and Who Stands to Gain

The Dholera fab aims for 50,000 units a month, focusing on analog, logic, power management, display drivers, microcontrollers, automotive chips, artificial intelligence and computing applications. The partnerships behind the manufacturing are also advantages: PSMC provides renowned process technology, while collaborations with ASML, Tokyo Electron, Intel and others fill critical technology, infrastructure and ecosystem requirements.

Consider the stakeholders. For the government, this is a pillar of self-reliance and supply chain diversification. For private businesses like Tata, it is an opportunity to capitalise on India's market demand and incentives; their project motto, "Make in India for the World," reflects this. For global partners, it is an opportunity to establish a reliable supply amid worldwide chip demand vulnerabilities. For the public at large, it offers fresh employment, academic collaboration and progress for a society long restricted by import dependence and brain drain. Successful execution would establish a broader ecosystem that attracts further investment across domains, and would help diversify global supply chains away from their concentration in East Asia.

The Infrastructure Challenge

However, challenges remain tangible. Semiconductor fabs need very reliable power, vast quantities of water and advanced cleanrooms; specialised logistics are a prerequisite for smooth functioning. Historically, India has faced deficits in these areas. Over the past decades there has been overall growth in these sectors and import dependence has been considerably reduced under the aegis of Aatmanirbharta, but it remains to be seen whether the production ecosystem across energy, water, chemicals and gases can meet the demand of the incoming push.

TWO READINGS OF THE SAME PROJECT

The optimistic case

Momentum from Dholera and parallel projects can break the long inertia in India's semiconductor manufacturing. Legal, financial and regulatory streamlining is already bearing results.

The sceptical case

Historical delays, and the distance between mature Asian ecosystems like Taiwan's and India's starting point, paint a grimmer picture of the result.

The Human Capital Question

There remains an unanswered question for a nation where ambitions are constrained not merely by capital or technology, but by decades of brain drain and an educational ecosystem that has inadequately cultivated the specialised scientific, engineering and technical workforce required for advanced manufacturing. To fully nurture the semiconductor ecosystem, specialised higher education, STEM and training programmes are essential. Industry participants should prioritise technology absorption and investment in human capital to ensure true self-reliance.

The Tata Dholera fab represents a fresh and aware step in India's semiconductor story, and it is moving from policy to delivery. India's chip ambitions are entering a critical execution phase; beyond incentives and investments, outcomes will now hinge on pragmatic problem-solving and adaptive implementation. If India and its industries can traverse this, the rough seas of global semiconductor supply and demand will be open to free navigation.

WATCH FOR

Trial production results and timelines; additional ecosystem incentives and investments; and progress on parallel projects such as Bhiwadi in Rajasthan, which will reveal much about investor confidence.

ARTHA · 02 · TRADE & ENERGY

The India–US Trade Deal Debate: Market Access, Energy and Strategic Trade-offs

A tariff schedule is the least of it. The BTA is where India's strategic autonomy meets its energy bill.

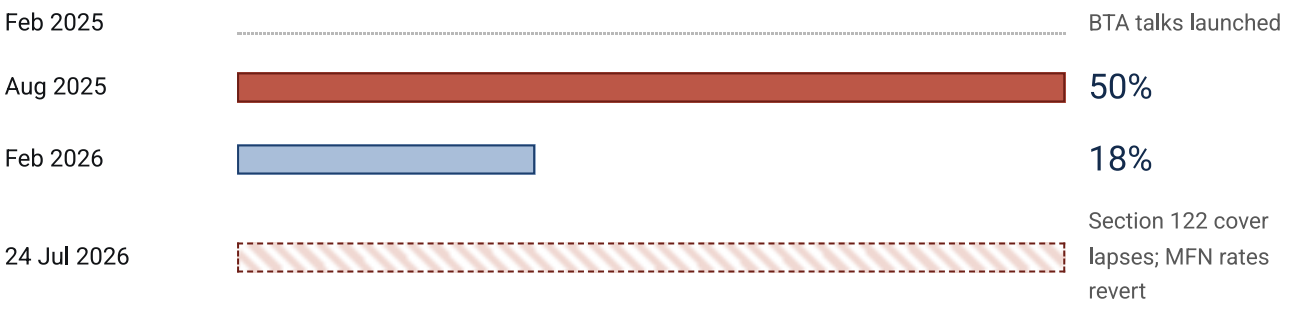
BY **Devender**

India and the United States are engaged in negotiations of a Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA), with the first tranche of the deal still outstanding just ahead of an impending deadline. India's existing preferential tariff rate in the United States, extended under a provisional arrangement through Section 122 of the U.S. Trade Act of 1974, was scheduled to expire on 24 July 2026, after which Indian products would automatically be subjected to standard Most Favoured Nation rates unless a new agreement was concluded. Beyond the specifics of trade in goods, services, investment and data governance, these negotiations put India's policy of strategic autonomy to the test as it seeks to maximise gains from all major powers without becoming beholden to any single one.

FIGURE 12 · EIGHTEEN MONTHS OF TARIFF TURBULENCE

US tariffs on Indian goods, and the deadline that now frames the talks

Bar length is proportional to the headline tariff rate.



August 2025's 50% comprised 25% reciprocal duties plus 25% tied to India's continued Russian crude purchases. The February 2026 interim agreement cut the headline rate to 18% and outlined India's intention to purchase $500 billion of US energy, aircraft, technology and other goods over five years.

Background

The BTA talks, launched in February 2025, hit turbulence fast as tensions built through the year. By August 2025 the US had imposed a 50% tariff on Indian goods, a mix of 25% reciprocal duties and 25% extra tariffs tied to India's continued Russian crude purchases, putting real strain on bilateral trade. At the same time, US bilateral deals with the EU, Vietnam and Indonesia piled on competitive pressure for Indian exporters. A breakthrough came with the February 2026 Interim Agreement, which reduced US tariffs on Indian goods to 18% and outlined India's intention to purchase $500 billion worth of US energy, aircraft, technology and other goods over five years. Although subsequent legal challenges in the United States required the administration to replace the International Emergency Economic Powers Act tariffs with an interim Section 122 tariff, negotiations continued, with both sides reporting "substantial progress" during the June 2026 ministerial round despite unresolved issues.

Market Access & Regulatory Cooperation

Market access and tariff liberalisation formed the core of the proposed agreement, as both countries sought to expand trade while protecting politically sensitive sectors. For India this is especially important, as the US remains its largest export market. Labour-intensive sectors such as textiles, apparel, gems and jewellery, and engineering goods are expected to benefit the most from lower tariffs.

Agriculture, however, remains one of the most politically sensitive areas. Although agriculture contributes only about 16% of GDP, it supports nearly half of India's workforce, making liberalisation a politically delicate issue. An earlier White House fact sheet reportedly identified pulses among the agricultural products that would receive improved access to the Indian market, but the reference was removed from the revised draft, while other products including soybean oil, tree nuts and red sorghum remained. The change reflects New Delhi's attempt to balance liberalisation with domestic political constraints, particularly given the continued sensitivity surrounding agricultural reform after the 2021 farmers' protests.

India's negotiating position therefore reflects a broader strategy of selective liberalisation: expanding market access in sectors that enhance exports and industrial growth, while preserving policy flexibility in agriculture through public procurement, stocking regulations under the Essential Commodities Act, 1955, and other interventions designed to protect farmers' incomes and food security.

The BTA also extends market access beyond goods into the digital economy and services. Both governments committed to negotiating "ambitious, mutually beneficial and robust digital trade rules." However, digital trade remains one of the most complex issues, because India's Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 prioritises data privacy and regulatory sovereignty over unrestricted cross-border data flows. This balance is equally important for India's services sector: more than half of India's IT-BPM exports are destined for the United States, while the industry supports nearly 30% of formal employment. A more predictable trading relationship would not only improve market access for digital services but also strengthen one of India's largest sources of high-skilled employment and export earnings.

Energy Security and Strategic Cooperation

FIGURE 13 · THE ENERGY ARITHMETIC BEHIND THE NEGOTIATION

Diversification is no longer a diplomatic concession; after April 2026 it is a security requirement.

85%+	44%	+31%	1/5
Of India's crude oil is imported	Russian share of those imports at its peak	Rise in US crude purchases as Russian volumes hit a 38-month low	Of world oil trade passes through the Strait of Hormuz

Energy trade, particularly India's reliance on Russian crude, has emerged as one of the toughest issues in the talks. India imports over 85% of its crude oil. Since 2022, cheap Russian oil has kept that cost low, with Russian imports adding up to 44% of the total, but that changed fast. Under US pressure to diversify, Russian imports fell to a 38-month low by December 2025, while US crude purchases jumped by nearly 31%. The negotiations gradually evolved into a broader energy partnership, with cooperation on LNG, civil nuclear power and clean energy technology growing alongside India's longer-term push for energy security.

Then came April 2026. Rising Israel–Iran tensions led the US to blockade maritime traffic tied to Iranian ports, choking off shipping through the Strait of Hormuz, a passage carrying nearly a fifth of the world's oil trade. India, which relies heavily on Gulf energy, felt the strain immediately, and its vulnerabilities exposed themselves further as tension rose. The lesson that emerges is one of self-resilience through diversification of supply chains, giving the BTA new weight: closer US ties on LNG, nuclear power and clean energy were no longer about trade numbers, but about meeting national energy requirements.

Strategic and Geopolitical Implications

The discussions have unfolded within a broader strategic context, reflecting India's efforts to balance its growing partnership with the United States while preserving relations with other key powers, including China and Russia. The protracted uncertainty over the BTA has offered opportunities to others. During periods of high US tariffs, China presented itself as a concerned partner and opportunistically sought to frame the dispute in terms of an unfair trade relationship, in an effort to improve relations with India after the 2020 border tensions. Likewise, the trade disputes gave Russia a greater opening to bolster its role as a principal defence supplier to India. The BTA process is as much about foreign policy as it is about trade, and provides a window into whether India can achieve greater economic integration with the US while maintaining its existing ties with other key partners.

THREE PRIORITIES FOR THE NEXT PHASE

1. Non-tariff barriers deserve as much attention as tariffs. Regulatory standards, certification and licensing increasingly determine actual market access.

2. Energy cooperation should move well beyond crude. LNG, civil nuclear and clean energy need real institutional footing to help India diversify supply and build long-term security.

3. Any digital trade framework must allow cross-border commerce without chipping away at India's regulatory autonomy under the DPDP Act.

The proposed BTA makes one thing clear: trade policy today cannot be separated from energy security, digital governance or geopolitics. Lowering tariffs still matters, but the deal's real success will hinge on whether it builds something more lasting than a tariff schedule. In the end, the BTA should not be judged by tariff concessions alone. What matters more is whether it deepens India–US economic integration, strengthens supply-chain and energy resilience, and lets India hold on to its strategic autonomy in a world where that is getting harder to do.

WATCH FOR

Whether the first tranche closes before MFN rates bite; the treatment of pulses and dairy in the revised drafts; and whether the energy chapter acquires institutional machinery beyond purchase commitments.

SECTION FOUR

SHAKTI

शक्ति

Security & Defence, a shield completed, a deterrence equation unsettled, and a missile that has become an instrument of diplomacy.

IV

SHAKTI · 01 · STRATEGIC AFFAIRS

India’s Ballistic Missile Defence Milestone: Strengthening Deterrence or Changing It?

Two interceptors in two days completed Phase II. The harder question is what a working shield does to mutual vulnerability.

BY **Vaibhav Patidar**



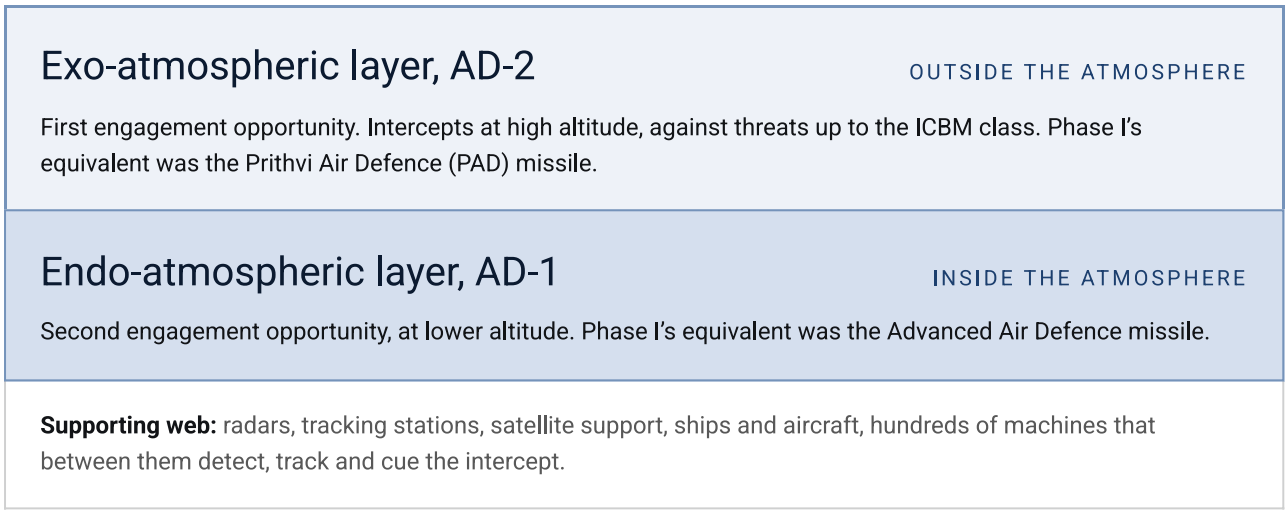
On 10 and 11 June 2026, the AD-1 and AD-2 interceptors engaged and destroyed their targets inside and beyond the atmosphere respectively, completing Phase II of the BMD programme.

India crossed an important milestone in its Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) Programme on 10 and 11 June, when two consecutive interceptors developed by DRDO successfully engaged and destroyed their respective targets, marking the completion of Phase II of the programme. As part of these tests, DRDO fired AD-1 and AD-2 to destroy targets in the endo-atmosphere (within the atmosphere) and exo-atmosphere (outer space) respectively.

"These tests have put the country in the elite group of nations having BMD capability to engage up to Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles," the Ministry of Defence said. That said, the strategic significance of these developments extends beyond technological achievement. Traditionally, nuclear deterrence rests on the principles of mutually assured destruction and mutual vulnerability. Effective ballistic missile defence has an interesting effect on the playing field, raising important questions about strategic stability: does a stronger missile defence system improve deterrence by protecting critical assets, or does it weaken deterrence by altering adversaries' calculations and encouraging new forms of military competition?

FIGURE 14 · A TWO-LAYER SHIELD, AND A SECOND CHANCE

Schematic, not to scale. If the exo-atmospheric layer misses, the endo-atmospheric layer provides a second engagement opportunity.



Evolution of the Programme

The BMD Programme aimed to develop a multi-layered system capable of countering missile threats from regional adversaries, particularly Pakistan and China. It began in the early 2000s, with Phase I focused on intercepting shorter-range threats up to 2,000 km: the Prithvi Air Defence missile for high-altitude exo-atmospheric kills, paired with the Advanced Air Defence missile for lower endo-atmospheric intercepts. Building on these capabilities, DRDO initiated Phase II to develop a more advanced shield capable of destroying Intermediate-Range Ballistic Missiles and threats up to the Intercontinental Ballistic Missile class. The successful AD-1 and AD-2 tests in June 2026 marked the completion of this phase. DRDO has now started work on Phase III, characterised by next-generation interceptors designed to destroy tougher classes of weapon: hypersonic glide vehicles travelling above Mach 5, and Multiple Independently Targetable Re-entry Vehicles (MIRVs), which release multiple warheads in a single launch.

FIGURE 15 · THREE PHASES OF THE SHIELD

PHASE I · EARLY 2000S

Up to 2,000 km

PAD for exo-atmospheric kills; AAD for endo-atmospheric intercepts.

PHASE II · COMPLETE JUNE 2026

IRBM to ICBM class

AD-1 and AD-2 interceptors, tested on consecutive days.

PHASE III · UNDER WAY

Hypersonics & MIRVs

Next-generation interceptors against glide vehicles above Mach 5 and multiple re-entry warheads.

Technological Significance

The layered architecture results in a higher interception probability: if the exo-atmospheric interceptor misses, the endo-atmospheric layer provides a second engagement opportunity, so the failure of one layer does not mean mission failure. The double-layered shield is complemented by radars, tracking stations, satellite support, ships and aircraft, a complex web of hundreds of machines that together protect Indian airspace.

These developments reflect the maturation of an indigenous technological ecosystem capable of detecting, tracking and engaging ballistic threats in real time, placing India among the handful of countries that possess these capabilities, Washington, Beijing, Moscow and Tel Aviv. Despite these achievements, hypersonic glide vehicles, MIRVs and manoeuvrable re-entry vehicles continue to challenge missile defence by reducing reaction time or overwhelming defensive systems, a fact admitted by Air Marshal Narayan Menon, who stated that “no BMD can assure 100% kills of incoming missiles.”

> *Deterrence by punishment tells an adversary the cost will be unbearable. Deterrence by denial tells them the attack will not work. India now holds both arguments at once.*

The Changing Logic of Nuclear Deterrence

Owing to the nuclear arsenals of various world powers, deterrence has helped avoid direct, full-fledged overt conflict, and has been the foundation of strategic stability among states. According to Thomas Schelling, deterrence involves influencing an adversary's intentions by communicating credible threats rather than using actual force; the strategic value of military capability lies not merely in its destructive potential but in its ability to convince an adversary that aggression will be met with massive retaliation. Mutual vulnerability and the credibility of retaliatory capability have traditionally tied the hands of nuclear-armed states. In South Asia, the same logic has shaped the nuclear relationship between India and Pakistan for decades.

India's BMD programme introduces a shift in that equation. The traditional form, 'deterrence by punishment', holds that an adversary refrains from aggression for fear of massive retaliation. BMD supplements it with 'deterrence by denial', aiming to reduce the effectiveness of an adversary's attack by detecting and destroying incoming missiles before they reach their targets. As Glenn H. Snyder argues, deterrence by denial attempts to convince an adversary that their attack is unlikely to achieve its objectives, thereby reducing the incentive to attack.

In the Indian context, BMD complements strategic nuclear deterrence by strengthening the No First Use doctrine and ensuring the survivability of second-strike retaliatory capability. By protecting critical assets, strategic command-and-control centres, critical infrastructure and political leadership, and ensuring that India can survive a first strike, it preserves the ability to retaliate effectively and cause unacceptable damage. BMD thus makes the success of incoming missile strikes uncertain, raising the cost and risk of initiating aggression at all.

FIGURE 16 · THE SECURITY DILEMMA, ALREADY VISIBLE

John Herz's insight: measures adopted for defence can be read as offensive, whatever the intent.

Pakistan

Ababeel ballistic missiles equipped with MIRVs, alongside advances in the Babur cruise missile, an effort to preserve a credible second-strike capability.

China

Hypersonic glide vehicles, manoeuvrable re-entry vehicles and other advanced delivery systems designed to penetrate layered missile defences.

Leaving aside defence and military strategy, the geopolitical implications deserve consideration. The realist perspective suggests that states operate in an anarchic international system where survival through self-help is the primary goal, compelling them to continuously enhance their security. Through his concept of the security dilemma, John Herz explains that, irrespective of defensive intent, measures adopted by one country to improve its security can be perceived by another as offensive. India's BMD, from the perspective of Pakistan and China, is therefore a potential challenge to the credibility of their retaliatory capabilities, and from this realist logic both will strive to modernise and expand their offensive missile forces in order to restore strategic balance.

India's BMD should thus be viewed as a complementary capability that enhances homeland defence while simultaneously introducing new challenges for regional strategic stability. In such a scenario, prudent crisis management and sustained strategic dialogue are the parameters by which the long-term success of this programme should be gauged.

THE CONCEPTS THIS ARGUMENT RESTS ON

Self-help — The realist premise that, in an anarchic system with no authority above states, each state must provide for its own survival.

Security dilemma — John Herz's observation that measures a state takes for its own defence are read by its neighbours as preparation for attack, so defensive spending provokes offensive spending.

Credible retaliation — The confidence an adversary has that its own missiles would survive and strike back, the thing a working interceptor shield is feared to erode.

Crisis management — The standing channels and understandings by which two nuclear neighbours keep an incident from escalating, the parameter by which this programme should finally be judged.

WATCH FOR

Phase III interceptor test schedules; Pakistani and Chinese MIRV and hypersonic milestones; and whether an India–Pakistan crisis-management channel is revived alongside the capability.

SHAKTI · 02 · DEFENCE INDUSTRY

The BrahMos Export Moment: Defence Manufacturing Meets Foreign Policy

If the first innings was combat capability, the second is diplomacy, industrial partnership and strategic export.

BY **Siddhant Chouhan**



Named for the Brahmaputra and the Moskva, BrahMos travels at three times the speed of sound, and has become India's first exported missile system.

For a while now, the international arms market has been dominated by something larger than the conventional exchange of goods. Defence exports serve as crucial foreign policy instruments for leading states, allowing them to develop alliances, expand their spheres of influence and secure regional balance. Long-term contracts carry not just guarantees of exchange but mandates for the transfer of training, technical expertise, technology, intelligence and other resources needed for the operation and maintenance of the equipment sold. The development and production of arms has become deeply intertwined with international relations, and for the major players it is a pivotal tool of diplomacy.

Historically, India has been one of the most consistent importers of foreign defence equipment. As a country with one of the largest militaries in the world, it has long been significantly reliant on foreign suppliers for cutting-edge military technology. That over-reliance made the country strategically vulnerable, in both security and economic terms, highlighting the need for Delhi to promote its domestic defence industry. India has taken significant steps over the last decade to transform that industry and promote its products at home and abroad. The rhetoric of Make in India and the Atmanirbhar Bharat initiative promoted self-reliance across sectors; as a direct result, domestic producers are now seen as critical pillars of national security, economic growth and technological development.

A Prime Example

The BrahMos supersonic cruise missile is the prime example of India's effort to present itself as a reliable supplier of cutting-edge military equipment. Launched in 1998 as a joint venture between DRDO and Russia's NPO Mashinostroyenia, the programme was intended to develop a supersonic cruise missile for the Indian Armed Forces capable of striking both land and sea targets with high precision and speed. Named after the rivers Brahmaputra and Moskva, BrahMos became one of the fastest cruise missiles in the world, travelling at three times the speed of sound. Its variants now include land-, sea- and air-launched nuclear-capable missiles with enhanced range, as well as the BrahMos-NG, which is set to demonstrate the programme's technological progression. The programme also saw increased contribution from India's public and private sectors, which helped turn BrahMos from a joint project into an indigenous one.

What fundamentally differentiates BrahMos is that potential buyers get not only a technically advanced weapon but considerable strategic benefit from it. Its speed significantly reduces time to target and presents a challenge to anti-missile defences. Its value as a multipurpose missile stems from its ability to be launched from various platforms and to strike both ground and ship targets, making it attractive to nations seeking to bolster coastal defence or sea-borne power projection. In an environment where many nations are adopting anti-access/area-denial doctrines, BrahMos provides a measure of deterrence against military expansion by rival powers, both technically sophisticated and relatively affordable.

FIGURE 17 · THREE BUYERS IN FOUR YEARS

BUYER	SIGNED	REPORTED VALUE	STRATEGIC PURPOSE
Philippines	Jan 2022; deliveries from Apr 2024	~$375 mn (₹2,700–2,800 cr)	Shore-based anti-ship variant with launchers, logistics, training and maintenance, coastal defence amid South China Sea concerns. India's first missile export.
Vietnam	May 2026	~$700 mn (₹5,800–6,000 cr), unofficial	Coastal defence batteries, training, logistics and maintenance, anti-access/area-denial in the South China Sea. Confirmed at the Shangri-La Dialogue.
Indonesia	Jul 2026	$200–350 mn signalled; ~$450 mn earlier industry estimate	Naval capability and maritime deterrence around the Natuna Islands, within a broader defence cooperation pact.

Malaysia, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Brazil and Egypt are reported to have held talks; the wider BrahMos and related missile pipeline is estimated at $10 billion-plus over the next decade if even a fraction converts.

Defence Exports as an Instrument of Foreign Policy

Arms sales create the prerequisites for long-term partnership. The export of sophisticated weaponry implies not only delivery but technical support, training of personnel, provision of spare parts and other forms of assistance; the entire life cycle of the equipment, its development and improvement, depends on continuous interaction between two militaries. Such partnerships establish lasting ties that in turn provide ample opportunity for political dialogue. France, the United States and Russia have all leveraged this to boost their standing and strengthen partnerships, and India is now beginning to do the same.

The export of BrahMos to the Philippines represents a significant milestone. Made under Government-to-Government guidelines, it is India's first-ever export of missiles and an important step in bolstering defence ties with Manila. The contract, signed in January 2022, is valued at approximately US$375 million and covers the supply of the shore-based anti-ship variant, launchers, integrated logistics support, operator training and associated maintenance packages. Deliveries commenced in April 2024, making the Philippines the first foreign operator of the system. Its successful execution has enhanced India's credibility as a supplier capable of delivering complex strategic weapon systems on schedule. For the Philippines, the acquisition provided much-needed coastal defence in view of regional security concerns in the South China Sea. For India, the agreement marked a far-reaching partnership in which training, technical expertise, maintenance and upgrades will sustain close engagement with the island nation, and it carries immense value as part of the Act East Policy.

FIGURE 18 · DEFENCE EXPORTS, FROM THE MARGINS TO A TARGET

Bar length proportional to the ₹50,000 crore target for 2029.



FY25's ₹23,622 crore ($2.8 billion) was an all-time high, roughly 34 times the FY14 figure. New Delhi's stated goal is ₹50,000 crore ($6 billion) a year by 2029.

The significance of the Philippines deal is more than a standalone export order: it acts as a proof of concept for India's broader ambition to emerge as a significant defence exporter. It also helps build confidence in the country's defence manufacturing capability, which is critical in an industry where major buyers are often hesitant to rely on a new vendor. India entered into a government-to-government contract with Vietnam in May 2026, making it the second foreign buyer after the Philippines; Defence Secretary Rajesh Kumar Singh confirmed the agreement during the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore. Although the contract amount has not been officially declared, it is reportedly around $700 million, with coastal defence batteries, training, logistics and maintenance part of the deal. The transaction underpins the Act East Policy and bolsters Vietnam's ability to implement anti-access/area-denial strategies in the South China Sea amid heightened tensions.

Indonesia became the third international buyer after signing during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Jakarta in July 2026, as part of a broader defence cooperation pact. The final contract value was not officially disclosed, but Indonesia had previously signalled a transaction likely between $200 million and $350 million, against earlier industry estimates of about $450 million. The purchase is intended to enhance the Indonesian navy's capabilities, particularly in the maritime security of crucial sea lanes, and to bolster coastal defence and maritime deterrence in areas such as the Natuna Islands.

Various other nations, including Malaysia, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Brazil and Egypt, are reported to have held talks, implying that export orders of $10 billion-plus may accrue over the next decade from the overall BrahMos and related missile pipeline if even a fraction of the potential materialises, not least because a number of nations want to reduce dependence on traditional sources of defence imports. Each potential deal will be decided on its own political and economic circumstances. Nevertheless, growing interest in BrahMos is another sign of India's emergence as a reliable supplier of cutting-edge defence technologies.

The strategic significance of these deals is difficult to overestimate. Every BrahMos sale generates revenue and provides jobs in India while enhancing the country's image as a responsible global security provider. On the foreign policy front, BrahMos exports support the Act East Policy, advance India's geopolitical interests in the Indo-Pacific and promote the SAGAR doctrine. India's defence production capability is being developed in line with strategically high-priority needs, not just the requirements of the domestic military. In effect, defence production and foreign policy are no longer separate areas of national security but two interconnected elements of becoming a global power.

Challenges Ahead

While the programme has demonstrated India's ability to compete in the global defence market, it is critical to ramp up production if India is to cement its position as a key supplier. With growing demand and new systems coming online, production lines, supply chains and human resources must scale to meet both export needs and India's own military requirements, ensuring timely delivery to buyers while securing supplies for its armed forces.

India must also compete in one of the world's most demanding export markets. Established exporters such as the United States, France, Russia and Israel have spent decades building integrated ecosystems, combining advanced technology with attractive financing arrangements, training packages, maintenance support and extensive diplomatic engagement. Relatively newer entrants such as South Korea and Turkey have made the competition harder still by offering cost-effective platforms backed by strong government support. For India, technological excellence alone will not suffice. Success will increasingly depend on cohesive lifecycle support, a fast after-sales service network, transparent export handling and sustained engagement with partner countries throughout the life of the equipment.

At the policy level, India has already laid a foundation through reforms that encourage local production and exports. The next phase should focus on strengthening this ecosystem by increasing sector participation, expanding research and development, deepening integration with global supply chains and improving access to export financing. Setting up maintenance and training facilities in friendly countries would further boost confidence among prospective buyers and reinforce long-term partnerships.

The BrahMos export is not a mere sale of an advanced missile system. It marks a shift in India's stance, where defence production and manufacturing are considered a significant part of national might, standing alongside diplomacy, economic engagement and military capability. The programme proves that indigenous technological innovation can generate influence when coupled with strong industrial capacity and persistent political will. Converted into sustained implementation, it will be remembered as a milestone in India's rise as a leading defence partner.

THE EXPORT LEDGER SO FAR

Philippines	First foreign buyer	Proof of concept for a new vendor in a market that distrusts new vendors
Vietnam	May 2026 · reportedly ~$700 mn	Government-to-government; coastal batteries, training, logistics, maintenance
Indonesia	July 2026 · signalled $200–350 mn	Signed during the Prime Minister's Jakarta visit, under a wider defence pact
In talks	Malaysia, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Brazil, Egypt	A pipeline put at $10 bn-plus over the coming decade if a fraction converts

THE FRAME AROUND THE SALE

Act East Policy — India's engagement with Southeast Asia, which these contracts now carry a hardware component into.

SAGAR — Security and Growth for All in the Region, the maritime doctrine the exports are read against.

A2/AD — Anti-access and area-denial, the strategy a coastal cruise-missile battery is bought to serve.

Lifecycle support — After-sales service, spares and training, the ground on which established exporters still hold the advantage.

WATCH FOR

Production-capacity announcements at the BrahMos facilities; whether talks with Malaysia, the Gulf or Brazil convert into contracts; and the first overseas maintenance or training facility.

SECTION FIVE

VISHWA

विश्व

India in the World, a trade agreement that reveals a doctrine, and what India chose not to open.

V

VISHWA · 01 · TRADE STRATEGY

India–UK CETA Enters into Force: The First Test of India's New Trade Strategy

What India chose not to open is as revealing as what it did. That is not protectionism, it is sequencing.

BY **Aman Rawat**



Textiles and apparel, 1,143 tariff lines, move to zero duty from rates of up to 12%, a change that lands directly on manufacturing hubs like Tiruppur.

A Deal By Design

For a country that spent decades treating trade agreements with suspicion, India's entry into force of a comprehensive trade deal with the United Kingdom on 15 July 2026 marks a quiet but significant shift. The India–UK CETA is not India's first FTA, but it is its most ambitious with a major developed economy, and the choices embedded in its design say as much about where India's trade strategy is heading as they do about the deal itself.

The tariff architecture reflects this balance. India secured near-total access for its exports to the UK market while calibrating its own opening carefully: immediate duty-free access for roughly a quarter of UK exports by value, with the rest phased in over five to ten years. This asymmetry was not accidental. It reflects a negotiating posture that prioritises export gains while buying domestic industries the time they need to adjust.

FIGURE 19 · AN ASYMMETRIC OPENING, BY DESIGN

THE UK GRANTS

99%

Tariff-free access to Indian exports, covering roughly £10 billion of goods a year.

INDIA OPENS

89.5%

Of its tariff lines, about a quarter of UK exports duty-free immediately, the rest phased over five to ten years.

By 2040, bilateral trade is projected to grow by £25 billion annually on UK estimates and $34 billion on Indian ones. Over 75,000 workers and 900 companies stand to gain, with duty savings crossing ₹4,000 crore, projections that depend on implementation.

What CETA reveals is a shift in how India thinks about trade. For decades, India approached FTAs with caution bordering on reluctance: wary of opening markets, slow to conclude deals, quick to walk away when the terms did not suit. This agreement does not abandon that caution; it refines it. India opened where it had confidence, protected where it had reason to, and phased its concessions in ways that gave domestic industry room to adjust. That is not protectionism; it is sequencing, and it may well be the most important thing this deal signals to future negotiating partners.

Terms of Engagement

FIGURE 20 · WHERE THE GAINS LAND, AND WHERE INDIA HELD BACK

SECTOR	TREATMENT	WHAT IT TURNS ON
Textiles & apparel	1,143 tariff lines to zero, from up to 12%	UK sustainability and compliance standards, which many smaller producers cannot yet meet
Leather & footwear	Duties of up to 16% removed	Certification capacity among MSME exporters
Gems & jewellery	Improved access, including lab-grown diamonds	A sophisticated consumer market where India has expanded fast
Agriculture & processed foods	Zero duty across more than 95% of lines	Sanitary and food-safety certification; export growth projected above 50% in three years
IT & professional services	Double Contribution Convention ends dual social security payments	Savings above ₹4,000 crore; UK visa pathways and recognition of qualifications
Held back	Dairy, cereals and several agricultural products protected; Make in India sectors phased only	Even Scotch whisky falls from 150% to 40% only over ten years

The gains for India are concentrated in its labour-intensive export strengths. But they are not automatic. Removing tariffs improves price competitiveness; it does not guarantee export growth. Indian firms in textiles, leather and agriculture still have to clear UK standards on sustainability, compliance and food safety, which is often harder than the tariff itself. The more lasting gains will likely come in sectors where Indian firms are already strong, and where the tariff was genuinely the last thing standing in the way.

The services dimension deserves equal attention. Alongside CETA is the Double Contribution Convention, exempting Indian employees and employers from dual social security contributions during temporary UK assignments, with savings estimated at over ₹4,000 crore. For an Indian IT firm deploying engineers to a UK client, this is not an administrative detail. It is a direct reduction in the cost of doing business, one that strengthens India's competitiveness against other technology-exporting nations at a time when margins are tight and project durations shorter. More than 75,000 professionals and 900 companies stand to benefit.

> *The agreement opens doors. Walking through them is the harder part.*

Beyond Bilateralism

The India–UK CETA does not exist in isolation. India is simultaneously negotiating with the EU, the GCC and Canada, and what it agreed with the UK will shape expectations in all of those conversations. The UK's flexibility on agriculture and mobility was what made this deal possible, and that flexibility is not guaranteed elsewhere. The EU will push harder on dairy, industrial goods and digital governance; India's data localisation framework and the EU's carbon border adjustment mechanism add further complexity. These are fault lines that tariff negotiations alone cannot resolve. Whether this agreement becomes a template or an outlier will depend on whether future partners show the same accommodation the UK did.

Gains and Gaps

The agreement's benefits will not reach everyone equally. Zero-duty access in textiles, leather and jewellery is meaningful, but only for exporters who can meet UK sustainability and compliance standards, which many smaller Indian producers currently cannot. IT professionals benefit directly from the Double Contribution Convention. Farmers gain market access, but certification requirements will shape how quickly that translates into actual growth.

WHAT IMPLEMENTATION REQUIRES · BOTH SIDES

India

Build the compliance infrastructure exporters, especially MSMEs, currently lack, certification systems, quality upgrades, sustainability standards, with a dedicated mechanism translating CETA's legal text into practical guidance. Align standards with international norms, particularly the sanitary requirements that remain a barrier after tariffs fall. Make PLI schemes prioritise export quality over volume, and bring more nuance to the data localisation position.

The United Kingdom

Move quickly on visa pathways for Indian professionals and mutual recognition of qualifications; otherwise the service commitments risk looking better on paper than in practice. Both governments also need a joint monitoring mechanism with actual targets, not periodic reviews that produce communiqués and little else.

The India–UK CETA is thus more than a bilateral trade deal; it is the first serious test of whether India's model of selective liberalisation can deliver at scale. The early indicators will come not from the agreement's text but from its implementation: whether Indian exporters meet UK compliance standards, whether the Double Contribution Convention translates into measurable cost savings, and whether the joint monitoring framework holds both governments accountable. The EU negotiations will be the real stress test, and the UK deal gives India both a reference point and the credibility of having concluded something ambitious on its own terms. In an era of rising tariffs and economic nationalism, India has demonstrated that it is possible to pursue strategic openness without sacrificing sovereign priorities, and that is no small achievement.

THE AGREEMENT AT A GLANCE

Where the gains are

Zero-duty access in textiles, leather and jewellery; the Double Contribution Convention for IT professionals; market access for farmers.

Where the conditions bite

UK sustainability and compliance standards, and sanitary certification, which many smaller producers cannot yet meet.

What comes next

Parallel negotiations with the EU, the GCC and Canada, all of which will read this text as a precedent.

Where it will be harder

Dairy, industrial goods and digital governance, plus data localisation and the EU's carbon border adjustment mechanism.

WATCH FOR

First-quarter utilisation data under CETA; UK movement on visa pathways and qualification recognition; and how the EU negotiations treat dairy, CBAM and data localisation.

BOOK REVIEW OF THE MONTH

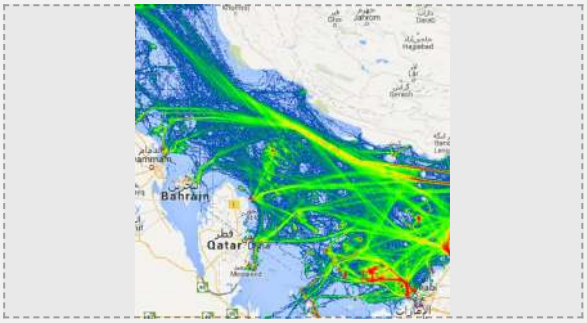
Examining Huntington's Framework of the Clash of Civilizations through the Iran–Israel Conflict

Civilizational identity explains how a war is narrated. It cannot explain what governments do once cost becomes real.

BY **Samridhi Seth**

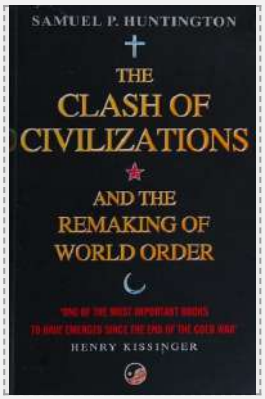
> *"The fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future."*
>
> SAMUEL P. HUNTINGTON

The twentieth century's latter half was defined by an ideological battle between two power blocs: the liberal democratic order led by the United States and the communist order led by the Soviet Union. The century's final decade began with the Soviet collapse and a unipolar world led by the US, a triumph Francis Fukuyama read in 1992 as the "end of history."



Vessel traffic density across the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz. Nearly a fifth of the world's oil trade moves through this corridor, the passage Tehran closed selectively, substituting bilateral favour for its own ships and paying partners in place of universal maritime law.

Into this moment stepped Samuel Huntington with a counterthesis so provocative it still shapes debates on global conflict. Examining the post-Cold War geopolitical shifts, he postulated that civilizations, not ideologies, would re-emerge as the principal basis for conflict, a theme echoed eerily in contemporary headlines. This civilizational lens offers insights mainstream international relations theories struggle to provide. This piece first lays out one core premise of that theory, then tests it against the most consequential civilizational flashpoint of our time. When the US and Israel struck Iran, killing supreme leader Ayatollah Khamenei, it triggered responses across the Islamic world and the Western alliances. Where the framework holds and where it breaks down is a map for navigating the world we live in.



Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (1996). The book under review.

Mapping the New Battleground

Huntington builds his theory on three concepts. First, religion is the "central defining characteristic of civilization," echoing the historian Christopher Dawson's claim that religion is civilization's foundation. Second, conflict operates at two levels: fault line wars between adjacent groups, and macro-level competition among core states. Third, kin-country syndrome describes how people turn to civilizational allies during crises.

The Israel–Palestine conflict demonstrates all three. At the micro-level it is a fault line war over territory. At the macro-level, civilizational kinship shapes responses more than institutions, with Islamic nations from Turkey to Indonesia backing Palestine while the US backs Israel on Judeo-Christian ties, and the UN stays sidelined. Two standing alliances would go on to shape how this logic played out in the Iran war: Iran's Axis of Resistance, built on shared ideological opposition to Israel and the West, and the Abraham Accords, normalizing ties between Israel and several Gulf states on interest rather than faith. Contrary to theories of globalization, Huntington argues that increased interaction paradoxically sharpens "civilizational consciousness," visible in the 2024 Dublin riots and Sweden's integration struggles. This revival intensifies civilizational nationalism, seen in India's Hindu nationalism and Turkey's reversal of secularism.

The Conflict

On 28 February 2026, the US and Israel launched Operation Epic Fury and Operation Roaring Lion, killing Ayatollah Khamenei. Iran responded through Operation True Promise IV, firing missiles at US bases and Gulf airports. From Kashmir to Karbala, protesters carried Khamenei's portrait as a martyr's image, and Pakistan's government mourned him. On day two, Hezbollah and Iraq's Iran-aligned militias struck Israel, US bases and Cyprus, invoking shared resistance. The Houthis, despite their capacity to disrupt Red Sea shipping, fired only a handful of missiles before going quiet, prioritizing standing with Saudi Arabia and the UAE over solidarity with Tehran.

FIGURE 21 · WHO LINED UP WHERE

Sentiment tracked civilizational lines. Conduct tracked interest.

Hezbollah & Iraqi militias	Struck Israel, US bases and Cyprus on day two, invoking shared resistance.	Framework holds
The Houthis	A handful of missiles, then quiet, choosing Riyadh and Abu Dhabi over Tehran.	Loyal in speech, cautious in practice
Gulf states	Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar, Bahrain, Jordan and Kuwait jointly condemned Iran's retaliation as reckless attacks on sovereign territory.	Against a fellow Islamic state, the Accords outweighed kinship
China & Russia	Vetoed the US- and UK-backed UN resolution against Iran; avoided confronting Washington directly.	Loud condemnation, quiet restraint
The Western bloc	Spain called the war a mistake; France, Germany and the UK stayed neutral; Australia backed it outright.	"Equally fictional", unity arrived with the oil price

Part of the Gulf posture predates the war: the UAE and Bahrain had already normalized ties with Israel under the Abraham Accords, and their stance tracked those relationships more than any renewed solidarity with Tehran. The split hardened at the UN, where a resolution against Iran, backed by the US and UK, was vetoed by China and Russia. The April ceasefire held through a memorandum of understanding brokered by Pakistan and China, but broke down by mid-July into direct US–Iran exchanges, with nightly strikes after Iranian attacks killed US personnel in Jordan. By late July, Pakistan and China were again pushing to revive talks. Notably, Israel has been sidelined in this phase at Washington's insistence, while Iran has struck Gulf states and US assets rather than Israel, an outcome Huntington's framework does not anticipate.

Where It Holds, and Where It Breaks

He was right about the conflict's architecture before the first missile fired. The Axis of Resistance, the Abraham Accords, the nuclear programme, decades of proxy wars along civilizational lines: all of it maps onto his framework with uncomfortable precision. Iran's selective closure of the Strait of Hormuz offers the clearest expression of Huntington's de-westernization thesis, non-Western states building parallel trade and security systems that bypass Western dominance. Tehran replaced universal maritime law with bilateral favour for its own ships and paying partners. Iraq and Pakistan's inclusion reflects civilizational loyalty, but India, China and Russia's presence points to shared interest in bypassing Western rules more than religious kinship.

Where the theory strains is the gap between how the conflict was felt and how it was handled. The Gulf monarchies were never going to mourn a leader whose missiles had just struck their airports. The Houthis stayed loyal in speech, cautious in practice. Russia and China condemned the strikes loudly, then quietly avoided confronting Washington directly. Iran, for all its rhetoric, bombed its way into isolation from the neighbours it claimed to defend.

From Diagnosis to Prescription

The civilizational map Huntington drew in 1996 remains the most useful lens for understanding why this conflict looks the way it does: who mourns, who cheers, who calculates. It explains the war's emotional geography with a clarity no other framework matches. But sentiment does not become strategy on its own; for that, you need to know where the oil is and whose planes are more powerful. This is not an argument for discarding Huntington. The current international relations scenario is better understood as a "realist skeleton" draped in civilizational vestments. Tehran framed its confrontation with Israel and the US as a struggle between Islam and infidelity, but the campaign's execution, and the calibrated restraint of partners like the Houthis, shows cold power politics beneath the surface. The more precise formulation would be that civilizational identity determines how a conflict is narrated, but it cannot fully determine what governments, or armed groups, do once cost becomes real.

HUNTINGTON'S THREE RULES, READ AGAINST THIS WAR

The Abstention Rule. The West should not intervene in other civilizations' conflicts, a lesson written in blood across Afghanistan and Iraq.

The Joint Mediation Rule. Core states from rival civilizations should cooperate to contain fault line conflicts. Pakistan and China have tried twice, the April ceasefire, and the July effort to revive talks, holding the fighting in fits and starts rather than resolving it.

The Commonalities Rule. Find and expand shared values across civilizational lines rather than fixating on divisions, a component of current Indian foreign policy.

These are not perfect rules, but useful guidelines, and in a world that has spent thirty years ignoring them, the cost is now visible. Culture ignored does not disappear. It returns, and when it does, it redefines the game's rules. This war shows that culture explains conflict's narration far better than it explains the decisions that end it.

Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (1996)

The argument that culture, not ideology or economics, would organise conflict after the Cold War, and that wars would run along the boundaries between civilizations.

Why it is read again now

Because the war examined here reproduced the alignments the book predicted, while the decisions that ended each round of it did not.

THE VOCABULARY OF THE ARGUMENT

Fault line conflict — Huntington's term for war along the boundary between civilizations, as against war within one.

De-westernization — The building of parallel trade and security systems that bypass Western rules, of which the selective closure of Hormuz is the clearest recent instance.

Axis of Resistance — The network of state and non-state partners through which Tehran projects power, and whose restraint in this war is the article's central puzzle.

Abraham Accords — The normalisation agreements that already bound the UAE and Bahrain to Israel before the war, and that explain the Gulf's posture better than solidarity does.

Realist skeleton — The reading proposed here: civilizational identity narrates the conflict, while cost and capability decide it.

VOLUME I · ISSUE 01

WHO EDITED THIS ISSUE

The researchers and editors who commissioned, read and checked the ten articles in this edition.



Aditya Patane

POLICY & POLITICAL RESEARCH CONSULTANT

Aditya Patane is a Policy and Political Research Consultant. He has previously worked with the Capacity Building Commission, Government of India.



Nikhil Sinha

MUKHERJEE FELLOW

Nikhil Sinha is a Mukherjee Fellow and an electrical engineer by education. He has a keen interest in energy policy and international affairs, and writes actively on both.



Aastha Gupta

ADVOCATE · RESEARCH ASSOCIATE

Aastha Gupta is an advocate and Research Associate at the Geojuristoday Research Foundation, with a keen interest in public policy and international affairs. She writes on issues at the intersection of law, society and ideas.



Shivangi Kaushish

RESEARCH ASSOCIATE

Shivangi Kaushish is a Research Associate at the Geojuristoday Research Foundation.



VOLUME I · ISSUE 01 · JUNE–JULY 2026

Views expressed in signed articles are those of their authors and do not necessarily represent the position of the Foundation. Correspondence and submissions are welcome.