DAILY NEWSPAPER ANALYSIS

DATE - 11/11/2025

SOURCE
THE HINDU & INDIAN EXPRESS

CHANAKYA IAS ACADEMY
SECTOR 25 CHANDIGARH

What South Asia wants from COP30

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A decade after the Paris Agreement, the climate crisis has only intensified. South Asia bears the brunt as monsoon floods, landslides and heatwaves. These shocks unfold amid a fractured global order – multilateralism under strain, climate pledges weakened, and trade protectionism rising. The withdrawal of the United States from the Paris Agreement, yet again, has tested the credibility of global processes. Yet no single actor, however powerful, can halt collective action. Others must and are stepping forward.

Small island-states, emerging economies and coalitions of the willing have taken the lead. Increasingly, this mantle is passing to South Asia, home to nearly two billion people facing an extraordinary diversity of climate risks. Inaction is not an option.

There have been wide consultations (as COP30 Special Envoy for South Asia) with government and civil society representatives across Bhutan, Nepal, the Maldives, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. We have listened to localised concerns, recognised many areas of convergence for messages that negotiators are taking to COP30 in Brazil, and identified several opportunities for regional climate cooperation.

South Asia's concerns and priorities

We realised that South Asia's response is pragmatic and collaborative: regional coalitions, investment in renewable energy, climate-resilient agriculture and integration of climate adaptation into development planning. Its climate leadership may be emergent, but it is driven by necessity, experience and the moral imperative to protect its people and signal to the world that action cannot wait. The discussions yielded five concerns and priorities of South Asian countries.

First, implementation remains the Achilles heel of climate action. The gap between what is promised in action and finance, and what is delivered, is glaring. Whether it is in implementing the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) or delivering finance, the challenge remains. So far, only 65 countries have submitted enhanced NDCs. Further, a recent study by the Council on Energy, Environment, and Water (CEEW) revealed that out of the 203 initiatives assessed (launched since 2015), approximately 5% of the initiatives have achieved their stated goals. This underscores the need for the Global South to harness regional cooperation to create impactful and targeted initiatives.

Climate pledges require robust governance, including a clear plan and timeline for reporting progress. Willing countries can, first, strengthen a regional forum to build a common stance and advance shared action that can be recognised at platforms such as the G-20, the The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), and BRICS. Moreover, ensure governance structures are inclusive, giving voice to the underrepresented, such as subnational governments, local communities and women. Also, strengthen regional cooperation by sharing knowledge, aligning priorities and scaling technology solutions across borders. Initiatives such as India's Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI) and Nepal's Sagarmatha Sambaad focused on mountain vulnerabilities, show how focused partnerships can advance both national and regional goals.

Second, climate adaptation must stand shoulder-to-shoulder with emission mitigation. According to the ADB, South Asia could experience an increase in days exceeding 35°C – from around 100 to approximately 200 annually – by 2100. The region-specific economic and non-economic impacts are diverse – Nepal's glacial lake outburst flood, coastal threats in the Maldives, India facing sweltering heatwaves, and Sri Lanka's emerging drylands and water stress.

The support that is needed

What is required is adequate technical, institutional and financial support to develop and implement plans domestically. Mainstreaming locally-led adaptation practices can also complement scientific innovation and strengthen local ownership. Internationally, deliberations must proceed to reach consensus on fundamental, simple, and non-burdensome indicators under the Global Goal on Adaptation. These indicators must be multi-dimensional and adaptable for use at regional and national levels, focusing on tracking progress rather than penalising countries with limited capacity.

Third, ambitious action must begin by investing in trust. The past is marred by delayed finances, broken promises and diluted commitments from developed countries. The current geopolitics is not conducive to an ambitious climate outcome. Further, an easy exit from a climate agreement not only leads to increased emissions but also undermines trust in the process. Analysis by the CEEW shows that developed countries are not on track to meet their 2030 NDC target. Hence, developed countries must fulfil their existing pledges and build momentum with ambitious NDCs aligned with 1.5°C, reinstating faith in multilateralism.

Fourth, deliver climate finance that is predictable (sustainable funding), adequate (meets the needs and balanced with mitigation), fairly distributed and accessible (easy, low-transaction cost access with priority for vulnerable countries), and non-debt inducing (grants and highly concessional financing instruments).

For this, the Baku to Belém Roadmap to 1.3T ($1.3 trillion) must be underpinned by clear pathways: who delivers, how much, by when, and with what accountability. Without clarity, the $300 billion adaptation target by 2035 is meaningless. South Asian countries, particularly the Least Developed Countries, must call for a tripling of adaptation finance with operational clarity. And, South Asia's needs are urgent.

There is a need for mutual clarity, mutual cooperation and mutual implementation on climate action, as consultations across South Asia – a region that is bearing the brunt of the climate crisis – show

Dedicated regional allocations from multilateral funds such as the Green Climate Fund, the Loss and Damage Fund, and the Adaptation Fund can simplify and amplify access to predictable finance. Most importantly, design and launch a 'South Asian resilience finance facility' to mobilise and channel innovative finance to support domestic priorities and fast-track nature-based solutions.

Fifth, climate transition cannot be left to nation-states alone; non-state actors must become engines of scale. Non-state actors such as sub-national entities, the private sector, civil society, youth, academic institutions, as well as businesses can supplement state efforts toward enhancing ambition. The private sector can unlock finance. Sub-national entities can align with domestic goals and deliver. Civil society can conduct independent assessments to expedite the process of bridging domestic capacity gaps and, regionally, develop a regional compendium to share promising traditional knowledge, practices, and systems across the region. Youth can mobilise urgency, innovation and intergenerational equity into climate solutions. Businesses can mainstream sustainability into markets and value chains. If done rightly, it can reinforce a cycle of verified action that builds trust and accountability within the multilateral climate governance.

Cut off from technology flows

Ultimately, transformation hinges on the convergence of finance, technology and innovation. There are several examples of innovative solutions being deployed; however, fewer examples demonstrate their ability to deliver systemic transformations. Most of the South Asian countries are still largely excluded from international technology flows. A recent report by the CEEW shows fewer than one in three initiatives focus exclusively solely on Africa, Asia, or Latin America – most span multiple regions or are often clubbed with countries in the Global North. Financially, it is imperative to channel capital towards the climate agenda through blended finance instruments, debt-for-nature swaps and market mechanisms with an explicit focus on vulnerable regions. Digital innovation, including artificial intelligence, big data, digital public infrastructure (DPI), blockchain and remote sensing, can unlock new forms of data cooperation and efficiency.

The time for promises is now over. Delivery will be the only currency of trust at COP30. That delivery must rest on three mutuals: mutual clarity (about responsibilities and pathways), mutual cooperation (that recognises both vulnerabilities and opportunities), and mutual implementation (turning promises into practice, across borders and sectors). South Asia is leading, innovating and demanding that multilateralism be restored to credibility through delivery.

The views expressed are personal

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- A decade after the Paris Agreement (2015), the climate crisis has deepened, hitting South Asia hardest through floods, heatwaves, and landslides.
- The COP30 Summit in Belém, Brazil, focuses on implementation and adaptation amid weakening multilateralism.
- The COP30 Special Envoy for South Asia held consultations across Bhutan, Nepal, Maldives, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh to shape a regional climate agenda.
- With the U.S. again exiting the Paris deal, developing countries are leading regional climate action.

Key Points

- Implementation Deficit: Only 65 countries submitted enhanced NDCs; just 5% of 203 post-2015 initiatives met targets (CEEW).
- Regional Cooperation: Focus on renewables, resilient agriculture, and adaptation mainstreaming via BIMSTEC, BRICS, CDRI.
- Adaptation Priority: ADB warns heat days (>35°C) may double by 2100, intensifying regional health and livelihood stress.
- Finance Gap: The $100 bn annual target remains unmet; "Baku–Belém Roadmap to $1.3 T" seeks clarity on timelines and accountability.
- Technology Divide: Less than one-third of global climate-tech projects directly benefit Asia or Africa.
- Non-State Role: Subnational governments, private sector, civil society, and youth must drive scalable climate action.

Static Linkages

- Paris Agreement (2015): Legally binding UNFCCC accord to limit global warming below 2°C.
- Article 4(3): Mandates progressive enhancement of NDCs.
- Green Climate Fund (GCF): UNFCCC mechanism (2010) for mitigation/adaptation finance.
- CBDR-RC Principle: Core equity norm in global climate law.
- CDRI (2019): India-led initiative for resilient infrastructure.

Critical Analysis

Opportunities

- South Asia shows pragmatic, necessity-driven leadership.
- Emerging tools: debt-for-nature swaps, blended finance.
- Non-state actors expand accountability.
- Digital tech improves transparency.

Challenges

- Finance and trust deficits from developed nations.
- Complex fund access for LDCs.
- Weak monitoring and overlapping frameworks.
- Exclusion from technology flows.

Stakeholders

- Developing nations demand climate justice; developed nations seek transparency; civil society and business push for inclusive, sustainable pathways.

Way Forward

- Establish a South Asian Climate Cooperation Forum under SAARC/BIMSTEC.
- Launch a South Asian Resilience Finance Facility for community-based adaptation.
- Triple adaptation finance with clear accountability.
- Integrate NDCs with national development and SDGs.
- Promote technology equity via regional data hubs.
- Reinforce "Delivery as the currency of trust" through transparent reporting.

Celebrating a sage king, a celebration of India-Bhutan ties

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Jigme Singye Wangchuck, who turns 70 today, has helped nurture both the modernisation of the mountain kingdom and its relations with India

The former King of Bhutan, Jigme Singye Wangchuck, turns 70 on November 11, 2025. The father of the current King of Bhutan is popularly known as K4 (the fourth King of the Wangchuck line), while his son Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck, who sits on the throne at present, is referred to as K5.

Jigme Singye Wangchuk is held in great esteem, awe, pride and reverence by his people who often call him the Bodhisattva King. He ruled Bhutan from the age of 17 years till he abdicated in 2006 in favour of his son.

He is revered almost like a Buddha because he ruled wisely, honestly and literally dragged Bhutan into the 21st century, modernising it in many ways. Now, to mark his 70th birth anniversary, there is a huge celebration in Thimphu on November 11, for which Prime Minister Narendra Modi is visiting India's mountainous neighbour.

Two nations, their close ties

Mr. Modi has always given much importance to India's relationship with Bhutan. In 2014, on being elected Prime Minister, he had not merely spoken about Neighbourhood First but had also made Bhutan the first foreign country he visited. Now too, Mr. Modi realises the tremendous significance that the birthday celebrations has for the people of Bhutan and is ensuring that he is with them in this time of joy. His visit is an apt signal of how close the people of India are to the people of Bhutan.

It was K4 who further strengthened Bhutan's relationship with India, during his reign as king, exhibiting great understanding that independent India was a close friend of his nation for which all threats to its independence, sovereignty or way of life came from its north and not from the other direction. It was Jigme Singye Wangchuck who got India's Border Roads Organisation to build, operate and maintain the road network of his country. Today, Bhutanese firms are capable of doing this on their own and have rightly been tasked with this. Again, it was Jigme Singye Wangchuck who saw the potential of generating electricity from Bhutan's rivers and supplying it to India, thereby enabling a steady revenue stream for his nation, which in turn has lifted incomes there.

Hydropower diplomacy

Hydropower cooperation between India and Bhutan has, over the years, developed into one of the strongest and most significant pillars of the relationship between the two countries. Therefore, it is apt, symbolic of this friendship and significant in itself, that the Punatsangchhu II hydroelectric project will be formally inaugurated by Mr. Modi and K5 during the trip. The 1,020 MW project has been generating electricity for some months now, helping Bhutan in further raising its economic profile.

The Punatsangchhu II project, like many of its predecessors, was constructed as a cooperative venture between the Government of India and the Royal Government of Bhutan, with India providing the initial capital for it – this is paid off by the project from the income stream generated by the sale of electricity to India at rates which are competitive but adjusted every few years to reflect current realities.

This model has worked well till now but it has been decided that in future, the two countries must tap other sources of capital for such hydropower projects. Now that private capital is readily available in adequate quantity, future projects are to be done by private firms of India in collaboration with Bhutanese companies. Significantly, Tata Power and Adani Power have readily taken up a few of the projects on offer in Bhutan.

India continues to provide development assistance to Bhutan beyond hydropower whether it is for community development projects or larger schemes that range from infrastructure development to upgrading older institutions and even monasteries.

Issues of national security

K5 continues to seek his father's – K4's – advice on matters of national security. Whether it pertains to the territorial integrity of Bhutan or to the operational readiness of the Royal Bhutan Army (RBA), K4 is always consulted by his son. K4 has a deep understanding of not merely India and how its democracy functions but also about Communist China, what motivates and drives that nation and the implications it has for Bhutan-China relations.

India will always be grateful to K4 for having personally led Operation All Clear in December 2003 where the RBA drove out several hundred cadres of Indian insurgent groups that had taken shelter in the jungles of Bhutan just across Assam and West Bengal. On India's side of the border, the Indian Army was able to easily arrest these Indian insurgent groups and proceed against them as in the law.

Thus, November 11 is not merely the birthday celebration of a sage and wise former King of Bhutan. Mr. Modi's presence at these events in Thimphu also makes it a celebration of India-Bhutan friendship and cooperation.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- Bhutan's former King Jigme Singye Wangchuck (K4) turns 70 on November 11, 2025.
- PM Narendra Modi will attend celebrations in Thimphu, marking K4's legacy and strong India–Bhutan ties.
- The visit coincides with the inauguration of the Punatsangchhu-II Hydroelectric Project (1,020 MW) — a major symbol of bilateral cooperation.

Key Points

- K4 ruled 1972–2006, introduced Gross National Happiness (GNH) and modernised Bhutan.
- Strengthened India–Bhutan relations, including military cooperation and Operation All Clear (2003).
- Hydropower Partnership:
  - India funded and built projects; Bhutan repays through electricity exports.
  - Punatsangchhu-II now operational, to be inaugurated jointly by Modi and K5.
  - Future projects to involve private Indian firms like Tata Power and Adani Power.
- India remains Bhutan's largest trade and development partner, supporting infrastructure, education, and monasteries.
- Bhutan continues to play a key role in India's Himalayan security framework.

Static Linkages

- India–Bhutan Friendship Treaty (1949), revised in 2007 for greater Bhutanese autonomy.
- Project Dantak (1961): BRO built Bhutan's key road network.
- Hydropower exports: ~25% of Bhutan's GDP; ~90% exported to India.
- GNH philosophy: Bhutan's unique development model balancing progress and well-being.
- Bhutan adopted constitutional monarchy in 2008.

Critical Analysis

Strengths:

- Model of trust-based diplomacy and people-to-people connect.
- Hydropower ensures economic interdependence.
- Shared Buddhist culture enhances soft power.

Concerns:

- Bhutan's hydropower debt and environmental stress.
- China's influence via border talks.
- Limited economic diversification beyond hydropower.

Way Forward

- Diversify cooperation into IT, education, sustainable tourism.
- Develop green financing for new projects.
- Strengthen border connectivity under Neighbourhood First.
- Deepen people-level partnerships through culture and youth programs.

New horizons

Developing countries must take the lead in addressing the climate crisis

The 30th edition of the Conference of Parties (COP) has begun in Brazil's Belém. Coming 10 years after the historic Paris Agreement, when all signatory members of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) committed to a common goal of keeping temperatures below 2°C and "as far as possible below 1.5C", this would have been an ideal platform to take stock of the achievements so far and ramp up ambition. Instead, there is a visible sense of disarray. The United States has, yet again, withdrawn from the Paris Agreement (though not the UNFCCC) and from 2017, this break seems decisively more hostile. Wielding threats on tariffs and brinkmanship, the U.S. Administration seems actively committed to derail steps toward emission cuts, newer ways to fund adaptation and adopting clean technology. For instance, it has played a major role in recent months in scuttling a resolution by members of the International Maritime Organization (IMO) into transitioning the shipping industry away from fossil fuel use. Following Bill Gates's shift from being a vocal advocate of curbing emissions to one who no longer sees climate change as an existential threat, Mr. Trump announced it as a "vindication" of his position. There is a case that the U.S.'s isolationist policy is of diminishing relevance in an era when global investments in clean energy outpace fossil fuel investment and that businesses globally have seen the writing on the wall. But as the IMO example states, the U.S.'s abilities as a destabilising force remain formidable. That must be at the back of negotiators' minds when they began the 12-day deliberative sprint.

This COP is one of 'implementation', as the Brazil Presidency has emphasised. While the world's collective action is far short of what the Paris goals require, there is palpable optimism that the tenor of discussions from now on will visibly shift toward ironing out financial mechanisms for adaptation, preserving forests and strengthening carbon credit markets. It is likely that there will be a renewed discussion on how to make the United Nations' multilateral process more effective at delivering decisive outcomes and, perhaps, a debate on the creation of a 'climate council', as Brazil proposed earlier this year. All of this promises fresh energy and verve to a process that has come to be seen as ineffective in addressing the climate crisis. However, this is also an opportunity for the large developing economies – India, China, Brazil, and South Africa in particular – to stake claim to leadership. This might require a greater display of ambition and recalibration of past positions, particularly on financial contributions. Sans fireworks, India must begin an internal dialogue to place itself favourably for this nebulous future.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- COP30 to the UNFCCC has begun in Belém, Brazil (Nov 2025), marking a decade since the Paris Agreement (2015).
- Expected focus: Implementation, especially on finance, adaptation, and carbon markets.
- The U.S. has again exited the Paris Agreement, adopting a more hostile stance toward multilateral climate action.
- Brazil, as host, has proposed a Global Climate Council to strengthen UN mechanisms.
- Major developing nations — India, China, Brazil, South Africa (BASIC) — face calls to lead with higher ambition.

Key Points

- Paris Goals: Keep warming well below 2°C, aim for 1.5°C.
- Emissions Gap: UNEP (2024) projects a 2.8°C rise by 2100 under current policies.
- Finance Gap: Developed nations' $100 billion annual pledge still unmet; only $83.3 billion delivered (OECD 2023).
- Clean Energy Momentum: Global investment in clean energy now exceeds fossil fuel (IEA 2024).
- U.S. Resistance: Opposed the IMO's shipping decarbonisation plan, undermining collective action.
- Brazil's Priorities: Amazon forest finance, carbon market reform (Article 6), and renewed adaptation funding.
- India's Focus: Climate justice, LiFE Mission, Green Credit Programme (2023), and equitable carbon space.

Static Linkages

- UNFCCC (1992): Framework for global cooperation on climate change.
- Kyoto Protocol (1997): Legally binding targets for developed nations.
- Paris Agreement (2015): Voluntary Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs).
- CBDR Principle: Recognises unequal historical emissions.
- Article 6: Enables international carbon trading.
- India's Framework: NAPCC, eight national missions, and Clean Energy Cess.

Critical Analysis

Opportunities

- Brazil's push for implementation and finance can revive credibility.
- Clean energy investment shows market-led transition.
- Developing economies can shape new climate leadership.

Challenges

- U.S. withdrawal weakens collective trust.
- Finance gap and loss & damage fund uncertainty persist.
- Protectionist trade measures (CBAM) could hurt developing nations.
- Fragmented developing country front reduces negotiating strength.

Stakeholders

- Developed nations: Prefer voluntary, market finance.
- Developing nations: Demand predictable, grant-based aid.
- Private sector: Seeks stable carbon pricing.
- Civil society: Calls for accountability and transparency.

Way Forward

- Create accountable climate finance systems.
- Institutionalize Climate Council for tracking commitments.
- Deepen South-South clean tech cooperation.
- Align LiFE and Green Credit with global standards.
- Reform carbon market rules for equity and transparency.
- Build State-level climate resilience mechanisms.

In free fall

Sudan's hopes for a return to democracy look dim

Sudan is no stranger to violence by paramilitary forces. Yet, the rape, pillage and mass killings carried out by the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) in El-Fasher, after their capture of the city in the Darfur region in late October, were shocking even by Sudan's grim standards. The RSF, a predominantly Arab militia, known for its brutality against Sudan's African communities, unleashed a wave of atrocities, including a massacre at a maternity hospital. The RSF now controls five of Darfur's capitals, tightening its grip over the famine-stricken region. In a chilling demonstration of impunity, RSF militants posted footage of some of their crimes on social media. Born from the Arab supremacist Janjaweed militia in the early 2000s, the group had faced accusations of ethnic cleansing and genocide against non-Arab communities in Darfur. It laid siege to El-Fasher, the Sudanese army's last major stronghold in Darfur, 18 months ago, a blockade that triggered a famine in the region. More than 12 million people have been displaced since Sudan's civil war broke out in April 2023, and tens of thousands killed. According to UN experts, the country is now facing the world's worst humanitarian crisis. While both the army and the RSF have been accused of war crimes, the atrocities by the paramilitary force have increasingly been described as genocidal.

When the regime of dictator Omar al-Bashir fell in 2019, many hoped that Sudan was on the cusp of a new dawn. But hopes for a democratic transition were short lived as the military and the RSF jointly staged a coup in 2021. Mr. Bashir had raised the RSF out of the ranks of the Janjaweed and treated the group as his personal army. He used it to neutralise domestic opposition and as a parallel structure to the military. Yet, when the roots of the Bashir regime were shaken by public protests in 2019, the RSF turned against him. But once the military consolidated power in 2021 and insisted that the RSF integrate with the regular army, the alliance between the army and the RSF fell apart, plunging Sudan into civil war. Today, the military government, backed by Egypt, controls most of Sudan, while the RSF, supported by the UAE, dominates Darfur. Earlier this year, the army pushed the RSF out of Khartoum, the capital. But the fall of El-Fasher confirms that the militia remains entrenched in its stronghold. If the fighting continues, Sudan risks more death, destruction, and even a state collapse. The atrocities in El-Fasher should serve as a wake-up call for the international community. The war must be brought to an end. For that, the backers of both the military and the militia should press for talks instead of sending more weapons into Sudan.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- In October 2025, the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) seized El-Fasher, the Sudanese Army's last base in Darfur, unleashing mass killings, rapes, and destruction, including at a maternity hospital.
- Over 12 million people displaced and tens of thousands killed since Sudan's civil war began in April 2023.
- The UN calls it the world's worst humanitarian crisis.
- The RSF, backed by the UAE, controls most of Darfur; the Sudanese Army, supported by Egypt, holds other regions.

Key Points

- RSF Origins: Evolved from the Janjaweed militia accused of genocide against non-Arab communities under Omar al-Bashir.
- Political Breakdown: After Bashir's fall (2019) and the 2021 coup, tensions grew when the army sought RSF's integration, sparking war.
- Famine and Displacement: UNHCR (2025) estimates 12+ million displaced; Darfur faces famine-like conditions.
- Regional & Global Role:
  - Egypt supports the army; UAE allegedly arms the RSF.
  - External actors like Wagner Group worsen instability.
- UN & ICC Response: Calls for investigations into war crimes and ethnic cleansing.

Static Linkages

- State failure and ethnic conflict — classic signs of institutional collapse.
- Responsibility to Protect (R2P) under UN Charter 2005 mandates collective response to genocide.
- Fourth Geneva Convention (1949) bans targeting civilians and medical facilities.
- India's stance: Non-interference, but supports UN-led peacebuilding.
- Darfur conflict (2003–2008) remains a case study in genocide and humanitarian intervention.

Critical Analysis

Stakeholders & Concerns

- UN/NGOs: Humanitarian access blocked; war crimes mounting.
- Regional Powers: Egypt and UAE turning conflict into proxy war.
- Sudanese Civilians: Facing famine, displacement, and targeted violence.

Challenges

- Fragmented militias; arms inflow; no central authority.
- Weak enforcement of sanctions and ICC mandates.
- Repeated breakdown of ceasefire agreements.

Way Forward

- Diplomatic pressure for ceasefire via UN, AU, Arab League.
- Arms embargoes and accountability under ICC.
- Humanitarian corridors to secure civilian aid.
- Regional cooperation to end proxy involvement.
- India's role: Advocate peace through UN peacekeeping and Global South platforms.
- Long-term fix: Inclusive political settlement and security sector reform.

With fewer doctors becoming specialists, a crisis looms

SIVABALAN ELANGOVAN

AS POSTGRADUATE COUNSELLING for NEET begins, I am repeatedly approached by young medical graduates with the same question: "Which specialty should I choose?". I've noticed a change in their preferences. They no longer ask which branch saves the most lives or offers the greatest career growth. Instead, they ask: "Which course gives me less work, fewer litigations, and a peaceful life?"

Decades ago, most MBBS graduates were from modest backgrounds and their motivation was to build a career, serve society, and grow professionally. Today, many are from relatively secure circumstances. Their priorities are peace of mind and work-life balance. This change did not occur suddenly.

In 2019, India introduced the Competency-Based Medical Education (CBME) curriculum to produce more skilled, patient-ready doctors. The intention was noble; the impact mixed. CBME made learning structured but increasingly mechanical. Students tick boxes in logbooks, complete checklists and meet competencies, undergo frequent assessments and heavy documentation but lose the freedom to explore. The goal shifts from learning medicine to clearing exams. With overwhelming content, cognitive fatigue sets in. Curiosity fades.

Meanwhile, India's health system has shifted. The rise of corporate hospitals has reduced opportunities for independent practice. Earlier, a young specialist could open a clinic, build trust and grow. Today, that path is narrow. Corporate hospitals offer minimal room for individuality or entrepreneurship. Doctors feel like employees, not professionals shaping their careers. Ambition dulls.

Mental health weighs heavily on specialty choices. Suicide rates among doctors are higher than in the general population. Juniors watch seniors exhausted after 36-hour duties. They see strained families. The message they internalise is simple: Do not take on too much. Do not go into branches that demand your whole life. So when it comes to super-specialties, many step back. Why spend years in training for more duty hours, more risk, and little reward? Super-specialty courses like DM and MCh are demand years of hard work and commitment. But when completed, the pay does not match the effort.

A surgical gastroenterologist or cardiothoracic surgeon may perform challenging life-saving surgery every day. Yet, in the government system, their salary equals that of a doctor in primary health care. There is no recognition for the extra years, the higher skill, the constant stress.

In a recent super-specialty counselling in Tamil Nadu, more than half the seats went vacant. Government doctors in particular were reluctant. Government hospitals face a growing shortage of specialists. The poor, who rely on public hospitals, will suffer most. This is a silent public health crisis.

It is easy to accuse young doctors of lacking ambition, but that is simplistic. They are not seeking luxury; they are seeking sanity. Their reluctance is not weakness but a rational response to the system that offers little reward for sacrifice.

The old guard says, "We worked harder. We faced worse. Why not you?" But the context is different. The earlier generations saw hope. They opened clinics, built hospitals, and rose on their own terms. That path is closed. The corporate model has taken it away. Now, the choice is between being a cog in a machine or fighting burnout in the government system. If India wants strong super-specialists in the public sector, the system must reform. Acknowledge their service through higher pay scales, allowances, or faster promotions. Their workload must be regulated through clear duty hours, adequate support staff, and reduced administrative burden. The government should also provide support for career development.

Without these changes, the pipeline of super-specialists will keep drying up in government hospitals. The crisis will not stay silent. The price will be paid not only by doctors, but by millions of patients.

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If India wants strong super-specialists in the public sector, the system must reform. Acknowledge their service through higher pay scales, allowances, or faster promotions. Their workload must be regulated

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- In Tamil Nadu's recent super-specialty counselling, over 50% of DM/MCh seats remained vacant, mirroring a national trend of waning interest among young doctors.
- Long duty hours, low pay, medico-legal stress, and lack of autonomy are driving graduates away from intensive specializations.
- This reflects a systemic crisis in India's medical workforce — especially in public hospitals serving the poor.

Key Points

- CBME (2019) by the National Medical Commission (NMC) aimed to produce patient-ready doctors but turned overly mechanical with checklist-based learning.
- Corporate dominance reduced avenues for private practice and autonomy.
- Doctor mental health: Suicide rates are 2–3 times higher than the general population (Indian Journal of Psychiatry, 2022).
- Seat vacancies: NMC data (2024) show 40%+ of super-specialty seats vacant nationwide.
- Public impact: Shortage of specialists cripples tertiary care and widens inequality in access.

Static Linkages

- Directive Principles (Art. 47): Duty of the State to improve public health.
- Concurrent List, Entry 25: "Education, including medical education."
- National Health Policy 2017: Calls for expanding postgraduate capacity and incentivizing rural service.
- NITI Aayog's Strategy for New India @75: Stresses specialist retention and workforce reform.
- 2nd ARC (Personnel Administration): Recommends performance-based incentives for professionals in public service.

Critical Analysis

Pros

- CBME ensures structured learning and clinical accountability.
- Corporate hospitals increased technological access.
- Mental health awareness among doctors is improving.

Cons

- Mechanical training curbs curiosity.
- Specialist pay disparity persists.
- Burnout and litigation risks discourage high-stress branches.
- Rural hospitals face severe specialist shortages.
- Corporate employment limits entrepreneurship.

Stakeholders

- Doctors: Seek fair workload, pay, and mental health safety.
- Government: Faces shrinking specialist pool and SDG-3 risks.
- Patients: Especially rural poor, lose access to advanced care.

Ethical Angle

- Tension between public service and personal well-being.
- Denial of fair conditions violates principles of justice and dignity in healthcare.

Way Forward

- Incentivize specialists: Higher pay scales, rural allowances.
- Work-hour regulation: Enforce IMA norms and adequate rest.
- Career growth: Fast-track promotions and research incentives.
- Curriculum reform: Review CBME through student feedback.
- Mental health support: Establish institutional counselling units.
- Flexible practice: Public–private partnership models for retention.

Protest for clean air was seen, now must be heard

ON SUNDAY, THE national capital awoke to a sepia cityscape, its skyline erased under a pall of toxic air. The Air Quality Index (AQI) breached 400 in several areas — "severe" yet unfortunately routine for this time of the year. Later in the evening, however, something unusual happened. Hundreds of citizens braved the smog to show up at India Gate — parents clutching their children, students with handmade banners, elderly citizens, masked and resolute, demanding clean air. In a city where the acrid smog has smothered what was once a beloved season, the gathering was a much-needed act of affirmation — that people will no longer be passive sufferers and that clean air is not charity from the state but a right of the citizen.

For years, India's political class has treated air pollution as a seasonal inconvenience at best and fodder for a partisan and polarising politics at worst. Blame has floated from the city-state to the Centre, farmers to industries, from motorists to Opposition governments in adjoining states, a fog of evasion thicker than the smog itself. Citizens, too, have been complicit in their inertia and resignation. The India Gate protest indicates a possible and potential rupture in that paralysis. It reframes pollution not just as an administrative lapse but also as a political betrayal, and clean air as a non-negotiable right. This new civic grammar starts with the recognition that clean air cannot remain the privilege of the wealthy with access to air purifiers or the means to escape Delhi's winter haze for mountain retreats, that the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP) must commit to sustainable, workable solutions, that it is the most fundamental of equalities — the breath that unites the rich and the poor, the young and the old.

Other nations have shown what sustained public pressure can achieve. Beijing faced a similar crisis a decade ago. Yet pressure from citizens, relentless monitoring, and political will turned the tide. There are, of course, differences between China and India — in this country, policy must navigate diverse and often conflicting interests. But other countries have also shown the way — like North Macedonia, a year ago, where huge popular protests against air pollution led to a clean-up plan that is being implemented. Here, if the India Gate protest is to be more than a symbolic moment, it must ensure that pollution is afforded the same urgency, and put to the same accountability test, at least in the political framing, that is reserved for inflation, corruption or unemployment. The battle for clean air cannot be left to policy papers and court orders alone. Only when citizens refuse to inhale institutional apathy will Delhi, and India, reclaim the air they deserve to breathe.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- On Sunday, Delhi's AQI crossed 400 ("severe") across several zones.
- Hundreds gathered at India Gate, demanding clean air as a citizen's right — a rare civic mobilisation on pollution.
- The protest highlights a shift from passive tolerance to public accountability in environmental governance.
- It coincides with the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP, 2019), which targets a 40% cut in PM2.5/PM10 by 2026 (MoEFCC).

Key Points

- AQI 401–500 = "Severe": Causes respiratory distress, especially in children and elderly.
- NCAP covers 131 non-attainment cities with monitoring and reduction plans.
- CPCB 2024 Data: Delhi's PM2.5 averaged ~185 μg/m³, about 30x WHO limits (5 μg/m³).
- Judicial Oversight: SC and NGT demand coordinated pollution control.
- Significance: The India Gate protest reframes pollution as a political and rights issue, not a seasonal inconvenience.

Static Linkages

- Art. 21: Right to Life = Right to Clean Air (Subhash Kumar vs. State of Bihar, 1991).
- Art. 48A, 51A(g): Environmental protection as duty of State and citizens.
- Air Act, 1981: Legal framework for CPCB/SPCBs.
- NGT Act, 2010: Judicial enforcement of environmental laws.
- SDGs 3 & 13: Health and climate action.
- World Bank (2023): India loses ~1.4% of GDP to air pollution.

Critical Analysis

Pros:

- Reasserts citizen agency and environmental justice.
- Encourages political accountability for clean air.
- Builds public pressure for effective NCAP outcomes.

Cons:

- Fragmented responsibility among Centre, states, and local bodies.
- Weak enforcement and data opacity.
- Economic–environment trade-offs.
- Short-lived public engagement post-crisis.

Ethical Lens:

- Equity: Clean air as universal right, not privilege.
- Intergenerational justice and civic responsibility.

Way Forward

- Make NCAP targets legally binding; publish annual "State of Air" report.
- Transparent, real-time data via CPCB dashboards.
- Strengthen urban planning, EV push, and green buffers.
- Institutionalise citizen feedback systems.
- Create regional air-shed authorities for NCR coordination.

On stray dogs, SC undoes its fine balance

NEARLY THREE MONTHS after recalibrating its August 11 order on the removal of stray dogs to designated shelters and allowing the animals to be returned to their original locations after being sterilised and vaccinated (unless found to be aggressive or infected with rabies), the Supreme Court last week appeared to once again harden its position on the issue. Noting that dog bites continue to be reported "with alarming frequency", the Court ordered that stray dogs be removed "forthwith" from the premises of educational institutions, hospitals, sports complexes, bus stands and railway stations and kept in shelters after being sterilised and vaccinated. This abrupt reversal, especially on the question of releasing stray dogs back into the areas from where they were picked up, breaks from the balanced approach of the August 22 order and threatens to reignite passions on a deeply polarising issue.

Certainly, the menace posed by stray dogs, especially to children, the elderly and working class population, cannot be dismissed. According to government records, 37 lakh dog bite cases were recorded across the country in 2024. At the same time, it must be recognised that lakhs of stray dogs cannot be removed from their present homes simply by decree — and certainly not within eight weeks as directed by the Court in the latest order. The SC is right when it points out that "administrative apathy" and "systemic failure" lie at the heart of India's stray dog problem. But housing such a large number of dogs in "designated shelters", besides stray cattle and other animals, as ordered by the Court, also calls for funds and infrastructure at a scale that most local bodies in the country simply do not possess at present.

A complex web of causes has led to the explosion in the stray dog population, including regular feeding and care by animal lovers, unmanaged solid waste and irresponsible pet owners who allow their dogs to interbreed with "streeties". These must be factored in for any solution to be effective — as must the need for a considered debate that does not pit the claims of public health against a more scientific and humane approach.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- In August 2025, the Supreme Court allowed sterilised and vaccinated stray dogs to return to their localities.
- In November 2025, it reversed this stance, ordering immediate removal of strays from schools, hospitals, bus stands, railway stations, and sports complexes.
- The Court cited 37 lakh dog bite cases in 2024, highlighting public safety concerns.
- The decision departs from the earlier balanced approach and revives debate over humane control vs public health.

Key Points

- Order: Capture, sterilise, vaccinate, and shelter stray dogs within 8 weeks.
- Population: India has 6–8 crore stray dogs (Livestock Census 2019).
- Causes: Poor waste management, careless pet ownership, unregulated feeding.
- Legal Basis: Animal Birth Control (Dogs) Rules, 2023 under Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960.
- Implementation: Responsibility of Urban Local Bodies under 74th Amendment (12th Schedule).

Static Linkages

- Article 48 & 48A: Duty of State to protect animals and environment.
- Article 51A(g): Duty of citizens to show compassion to living creatures.
- Municipal Role: Public health and animal control under Constitutional mandate.
- National Health Policy 2017: Emphasises zoonotic disease prevention.
- Animal Welfare Board of India (AWBI): Nodal body under Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry & Dairying.

Critical Analysis

Pros:

- Strengthens public safety and accountability of local bodies.
- Addresses rising bite incidents and administrative apathy.

Cons:

- Limited shelter space, lack of funds and manpower.
- May violate humane and scientific ABC norms.
- Potential conflict among stakeholders.

Stakeholders:

- Public: Safety, hygiene concerns.
- Animal Welfare Groups: Fear of cruelty, disruption.
- Local Bodies: Resource constraints.
- Judiciary: Seeks balance between safety and compassion.

Way Forward

- Expand ABC infrastructure with ULB and NGO coordination.
- Use data-based mapping for bite-prone zones.
- Dedicated municipal funds and awareness on responsible ownership.
- Enforce ABC Rules 2023 with humane oversight.