



DAILY NEWS PAPER ANALYSIS

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Calcutta HC rejects govt. objections to Nicobar plea

Abhinav Lakshman
NEW DELHI

The Calcutta High Court has overruled the Union government's preliminary objections to a batch of petitions alleging that it violated the Forest Rights Act while obtaining consent for its ₹92,000-crore Great Nicobar Island project.

In an order made public on Friday, a Bench of Chief Justice Sujoy Paul and Justice Partha Sarathi Sen dismissed the Centre's argument that Meena Gupta, the petitioner in the case,

did not have the *locus standi* to approach the court in this matter. It directed the case to be listed for final hearing on June 23.

Ms. Gupta is a retired IAS officer who has served as Secretary to both the Tribal Affairs and Environment Ministries.

Over the last two years, she has filed a series of petitions challenging the Gram Sabha resolutions consenting to the diversion of forest land for the mega-infrastructure project under the 2006 Forest Rights Act (FRA); the constitution



The Centre plans to build a transshipment port, an airport, and a township on the Great Nicobar island. GETTY IMAGES

of a sub-divisional level committee under the same law; and the notifications

reducing the buffer zones for both the Campbell Bay and Galathea Bay National Parks. The petitions also question the validity of a certificate issued by the Andaman and Nicobar Islands administration claiming that all rights under the FRA have been identified and settled.

On Wednesday, Additional Solicitor General of India Ashok Kumar Chakraborty argued that Ms. Gupta did not have authorisation from the tribal population of Great Nicobar Island to file the petition,

adding that the petition was not maintainable because her place of residence was in Hyderabad. The court ruled that in this case, it was "clear that the petitioner has sufficient interest in the matter", and that "she is espousing the cause of the vulnerable tribal community".

The Centre argued that the project was of "great national importance" and that "such project of national importance cannot be called in question in a [public interest litigation] PIL petition".

Tribal Communities

- Shompen Tribe – Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG).
- Nicobarese Tribe – Scheduled Tribe.
- Concerns:
 - Habitat loss
 - Cultural disruption
 - Inadequate consultation

Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006

- Enacted to address historical injustice to forest dwellers.
- Recognises:
 - Individual forest rights
 - Community forest rights
 - Habitat rights of PVTGs
- Gram Sabha is central authority for recognition of rights.
- Forest diversion requires settlement of rights and consent process.

Static Linkages

- Article 21 – Right to life includes clean environment.
- Article 48A – Protection and improvement of environment.
- Article 51A(g) – Fundamental duty to protect environment.
- Sustainable Development Principle.
- Public Trust Doctrine.
- Precautionary Principle.
- Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA).
- FRA, 2006 and tribal autonomy.
- Biodiversity conservation and protected areas.
- Disaster vulnerability of island ecosystems.

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Enhances India's strategic presence in the Indo-Pacific.
- Boosts trade, connectivity, and infrastructure development.
- Reduces dependence on foreign transshipment ports.

Concerns

- Large-scale forest diversion and biodiversity loss.
- Threat to tribal habitat and traditional livelihood.
- Questions over informed consent and FRA compliance.
- Region is vulnerable to earthquakes and tsunamis.

Way Forward

- Ensure strict compliance with FRA provisions.
- Conduct transparent Gram Sabha consultations.
- Strengthen ecological impact assessments.
- Promote sustainable and disaster-resilient infrastructure.
- Protect habitat rights of PVTGs.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context of the News

- The Calcutta High Court rejected the Union government's preliminary objections in petitions challenging the Great Nicobar Island mega infrastructure project.
- The petitions allege violations of the Forest Rights Act, 2006 in obtaining consent for diversion of forest land.
- The project includes:
 - International transshipment terminal
 - Greenfield airport
 - Township development
 - Energy infrastructure
- Concerns relate to:
 - Tribal rights
 - Gram Sabha consent
 - Ecological damage
 - Reduction of buffer zones around protected areas
- The Centre defended the project citing "national importance" and strategic significance.

Key Points

Great Nicobar Island

- Southernmost island of India.
- Part of the Andaman & Nicobar archipelago.
- Located near the Malacca Strait – a critical global maritime trade route.
- Falls in a high seismic and tsunami-prone zone.

Components of the Project

- International Container Transshipment Terminal at Galathea Bay.
- Greenfield International Airport.
- Township and tourism infrastructure.
- Power plants and connectivity infrastructure.

Ecological Importance

- Great Nicobar Biosphere Reserve is UNESCO-recognised.
- Rich biodiversity and endemic species:
 - Leatherback sea turtle
 - Nicobar megapode
 - Giant robber crab
- Tropical evergreen forests and coastal ecosystems.

Bangladesh failed to give 'actionable response': India

In diplomatic note, New Delhi says it sent over 1,000 messages to Dhaka on repatriation of illegal immigrants since 2020, but the neighbouring country has not extended necessary cooperation

Kallol Bhattacharjee
NEW DELHI

India has sent over a 1,000 diplomatic notes (notes verbale) and 456 "consolidated reminders" to Dhaka since September 2020 regarding the repatriation of suspected illegal Bangladeshi immigrants but has not received "an actionable response", a diplomatic document has stated.

The numbers were mentioned in the note verbale that the External Affairs Ministry sent to Dhaka on April 30, hours after the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bangladesh summoned the Indian envoy to protest against remarks made by Assam's then Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma. Mr. Sarma had claimed in a media interview that under his government, Indian border guards were "pushing in" suspected Bangladeshi individuals through unguarded parts of the land border.



BSF personnel patrol along the fence on the India-Bangladesh border in Golakganj in Assam. FILE PHOTO

"It is of note that over 1,137 Notes Verbale seeking nationality verification and 456 consolidated reminders have been sent in this period," the Ministry said in the diplomatic note of April 30, which *The Hindu* has reviewed.

2,862 cases

"A majority of these communications have not received an actionable response," it said, adding that "Since September 2020

Bangladesh has not extended the necessary cooperation to India for nationality verification of over 2,862 cases of illegal Bangladeshis in India..."

It said "all measures undertaken by the Government of India for the repatriation of illegal Bangladeshi nationals are in adherence to Indian laws and procedures, in tandem with established bilateral arrangements". The Indian allegation of

illegal Bangladeshi immigration was spotlighted on Thursday when Randhir Jaiswal, the spokesperson of the External Affairs Ministry, referred to the matter as the "core issue" in bilateral ties.

"These comments must be seen in the context of the core issue of repatriation of illegal Bangladeshis from India. This requires cooperation from Bangladesh. Over 2,862 cases of nationality verification are pending with Bangladesh, some for over five years," Mr. Jaiswal said during a weekly press briefing.

He was responding to remarks by Bangladesh Foreign Minister Khalidur Rahman and Home Minister Salahuddin Ahmed who had said that Dhaka would take "adequate measures" if attempts at "push in" from the Indian side were to take place, especially against the backdrop of the victory of the BJP in the elections in West Bengal and Assam.

- Internal security
- Human trafficking
- Smuggling
- Demographic pressure in border States
- Political tensions.

Static Linkages

- Articles 5–11: Citizenship provisions in Constitution.
- Citizenship Act, 1955
- Foreigners Act, 1946
 - Assam Accord, 1985 Cut-off date for illegal migrants:
 - 24 March 1971
- India is not a signatory to:
 - 1951 Refugee Convention
 - 1967 Protocol.
- Border management agencies:
 - BSF
 - Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB).

Critical Analysis

India's Concerns

- Illegal migration affects:
 - security,
 - welfare delivery,
 - demographic balance.
- Delay in nationality verification hampers deportation process.

Bangladesh's Concerns

- Fear of forced deportation without proper verification.
- Humanitarian and political sensitivities involved.

Challenges

- Porous and riverine borders.
- Lack of proper identity documents.
- Politicisation of migration issue.
- Balancing national security with human rights.

Way Forward

- Strengthen bilateral verification mechanisms.
- Improve coordinated border management.
- Use technology-based surveillance along borders.
- Ensure humane and lawful deportation procedures.
- Avoid politicisation of migration-related issues.
- Enhance India-Bangladesh diplomatic engagement.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context of the News

- India informed Bangladesh through a Note Verbale that since September 2020:
 - more than 1,137 diplomatic notes and
 - 456 consolidated reminders
 - have been sent regarding verification and repatriation of suspected illegal Bangladeshi immigrants.
- India stated that around 2,862 nationality verification cases are still pending with Bangladesh.
- The issue gained attention after remarks by Himanta Biswa Sarma regarding alleged "push-ins" through unguarded border areas.
- Bangladesh protested against these remarks and warned against any unilateral action.

Key Points

- Note Verbale:
 - Formal diplomatic communication between governments.
 - Usually unsigned and written in third person.
- India maintains that:
 - repatriation measures follow Indian laws,
 - bilateral arrangements, and
 - diplomatic procedures.
- India-Bangladesh Border:
 - Length: about 4,096 km
 - India's longest international border.
 - Shared with:
 - West Bengal
 - Assam
 - Meghalaya
 - Tripura
 - Mizoram.
- Major concerns associated with illegal migration:

MGNREGS scale, workdays fell in 2025-26, finds study

Despite rise in registered households, employment generation has dropped, leading to an average income loss of ₹1,221 for each household; 40% fewer households completed 100 days of work

Sobhana K. Nair
NEW DELHI

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) saw a sharp contraction in its scale and reach in 2025-26, according to a report on the final operational year of the scheme introduced by the Congress-led UPA regime.

The report points to a paradoxical trend in which the number of registered households rose marginally, but fewer households and workers found employment, total workdays declined significantly, and fewer families completed the guaranteed 100 days of work.

The report was released by the NREGA Sangharsh Morcha, a coalition of non-profit bodies working with MGNREGS workers, and was prepared by LibTech India, a consortium of academics and activists.

LibTech estimates that the contraction resulted in an average income loss of ₹1,221 for each MGNREGS



The new rural employment scheme, Viksit Bharat - Guarantee for Rozgar and Aajeevika Mission Act, is set to replace MGNREGS. PTI

household during the financial year.

Uncertain transition

The Viksit Bharat - Guarantee for Rozgar and Aajeevika Mission (Gramin) Act, 2025, which was passed in Parliament last December, is expected to come into force soon, replacing MGNREGS. The Union government has allocated only ₹30,000 crore for MGNREGS for the transitional period. This decline is deeply worrying, the NREGA Sangharsh Morcha said, especially since the new employment scheme was brought in with no pu-

blic consultation. "The employment guarantee programmes play a critical role in rural livelihood security and any major restructuring of such programmes must involve meaningful consultation," it said in a statement.

Fewer working days

The number of registered households under the scheme increased by 3.2%, from 14.98 crore in 2024-25 to 15.46 crore in 2025-26. However, this did not translate into greater employment. The report notes that 44 lakh fewer households and 67 lakh

fewer workers were employed compared to the previous year, representing declines of 8.2% and 9.1% respectively.

The number of person-days of work generated under the programme fell sharply by 21.5%, from 268.44 crore in 2024-25 to 210.73 crore in 2025-26. Average person-days per household dropped by 14.5%, from 50.18 to 42.92. The impact of this decline is evident in the sharp fall in the number of households completing the full 100 days of guaranteed employment, which declined by 40.5%, from 0.37 crore to 0.22 crore.

The contraction was geographically widespread. Fifteen out of 20 States recorded a fall in person-days during the year. West Bengal generated no person-days in either 2024-25 or 2025-26 and was excluded from the comparative analysis. Tamil Nadu recorded the steepest decline at 42.8%, followed by Haryana at 41.7%. Only four States registered an increase in person-days.

Important Static Points

- Enacted in 2005.
- Rights-based employment guarantee legislation.
- Provides 100 days of guaranteed wage employment to rural households.
- Ministry:
 - Ministry of Rural Development.
- Legal basis:
 - Article 41 (Right to Work under DPSP).
- Demand-driven scheme.
- Gram Sabha involved in planning and social audit.
- Wages paid through DBT.

Significance of MGNREGS

- Provides rural livelihood security.
- Reduces distress migration.
- Supports rural consumption demand.
- Creates durable rural assets.
- Enhances women participation in workforce.
- Acts as a safety net during economic distress.

Concerns

- Reduced allocation may weaken rural safety net.
- Decline in workdays despite rising registrations indicates unmet demand.
- Delay in wage payments and Aadhaar-linked payment failures.
- Lack of consultation in replacing a major welfare scheme.
- Possible adverse impact on poor and marginal households.

Way Forward

- Ensure adequate and demand-based funding.
- Strengthen social audits and transparency.
- Guarantee timely wage payments.
- Improve Centre-State coordination.
- Link rural employment with climate-resilient assets and skill development.
- Ensure participatory consultation before policy restructuring.]

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- A report by LibTech India and NREGA Sangharsh Morcha highlighted a sharp decline in the implementation of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) during 2025-26.
- The Union government is set to replace MGNREGS with the Viksit Bharat - Guarantee for Rozgar and Aajeevika Mission (Gramin) Act, 2025.
- Concerns have been raised regarding reduced budget allocation and absence of public consultation.

Key Findings

- Registered households increased by 3.2%:
 - 14.98 crore (2024-25) → 15.46 crore (2025-26).
- Employment declined:
 - 44 lakh fewer households got work.
 - 67 lakh fewer workers employed.
- Persondays generated declined by 21.5%:
 - 268.44 crore → 210.73 crore.
- Average employment per household:
 - 50.18 days → 42.92 days.
- Households completing 100 days work:
 - Declined by 40.5%.
- Estimated average income loss:
 - ₹1,221 per MGNREGS household.
- Highest decline in persondays:
 - Tamil Nadu (42.8%)
 - Haryana (41.7%)

A watershed moment in India's defence posture

Operation Sindoor commenced at 1:05 a.m. on May 7, 2025, with a surgical, high-intensity destruction of selected terrorist infrastructure. This strike was a direct and decisive response to the cowardly Pahalgam carnage orchestrated by cross-border terrorists on April 22, 2025. This operation represents a paradigm shift in India's politico-military mindset and doctrine, marking a watershed moment in its approach to national security.



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India's resolve. On May 9 and 10, when the Pakistan Air Force attempted to strike some of India's critical high-value assets, the Indian Air Force countered it in near real time with waves of airstrikes hitting 11 bases across Pakistan, including Nur Khan, Sargodha, Murid and Bholari. The level of precise targeting and extent of damage achieved could not have been imagined by Pakistan. The global defence analytical community acknowledges this as one of the most defining and concise actions against a nuclear-armed nation.

Military audaciousness at its best

This total, integrated and calibrated response, characterised by masterful control of the escalation ladder, reflects the seamless synergy between India's civil and military institutions. In my opinion, India's achievements could not have been better. After 88 hours of Operation Sindoor, by noon on May 10, Pakistan was reeling from massive destruction at 11 bases by the IAF.

Karachi was nervously monitoring Indian naval deployments poised for action, while aggressive Indian Army operations along the Line of Control and the International Border had rendered drone attacks unviable. A robust, networked air-defence system, including the S-400 missile system had completely denied airspace not only over Indian territory but also deep inside Pakistan. Pakistan had no choice but to rush and request a ceasefire.

Given the dynamics and complications of escalation control under a nuclear overhang, India's Chief of Defence Staff and the Service Chiefs deserve high praise for the ferocious targeting on May 10 and the brilliant seizing of the escalation opportunity to coerce a termination. This was military audaciousness at its very best. The Indian armed forces responded in full measure to the political mandate, leaving no doubt regarding the nation's capacity for rapid, high impact operation. The sheer scale and speed of India's action on May 10 was watched with awe across the country.

The announcement of the ceasefire was too sudden for the public at large. You cannot blame the people asking for more. One cannot view these developments with emotion. Having achieved all objectives and the scope of action on May 10, the termination decision was perfectly timed.

Operation Sindoor's ongoing status carries a powerful strategic signal. Undoubtedly, the

primary signal is for terrorists to remain in hiding and for their backers to desist. The message also extends to the Pakistani citizenry – a stark and constant reminder of the reckless involvement of part of their military leadership. In the age of global digital transparency and expert strategic analysis, the truth of these events cannot be shielded from their people for long. They must now confront the realities of a military regime camouflaged by a political facade and "regime" change should be on their minds.

Accelerate indigenous defence growth
Ongoing operations have implications for India as well. The defence forces would need to maintain a high state of readiness to act. After the opening round of Operation Sindoor, the expectations are high. I am sure the services are working proactively to deliver. An equally important implication is for the defence industry to ramp up in real terms to achieve *Atmanirbharta*. The focus must be to "Innovate, Design, and Manufacture" at scale.

The government has focused largely on reforms to energise the public and private industry in defence, aerospace, space, cyber and Artificial Intelligence domains. The stellar performance of indigenous systems during Operation Sindoor has invigorated India's innovation and startup ecosystem. I

have always maintained that the real responsibility for being the "agent of change" rests with the Defence Research and Development Organisation laboratories, Defence Public Sector Undertakings, and, to some extent, even on large industry players already in the system. They no longer have the option to delay and must immediately focus on truly integrating the entire private sector, including micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) and startups, into an indigenous ecosystem through a "whole of nation" approach. There is an urgent need to capitalise on this golden period of governance and reforms, and the unpredictable geopolitical environment only reinforces the need to double down on true *Atmanirbharta*.

Ultimately, the "Modi redlines" regarding cross-border terrorism are permanent. This new normal is irreversible and will define India's strategic mindset for the foreseeable future. The nation demands nothing less, and the populace would stand firmly behind the architects and executors of India's national security. My salute to everyone involved in the success of Operation Sindoor.

New era Indian doctrine
India's historical posture of "reactive restraint" provided a strong rationale for a "dossier approach", in which military inaction was often portrayed as extraordinary restraint and was frequently encouraged and lauded by the West.

"What if" loops about attacking terror targets in a nuclear armed adversary provided the final blow to India's decision-makers. Post-Operation Sindoor, the "zero tolerance" policy declared by Prime Minister Narendra Modi was pivoted further and reinforced to nuclear blackmail and cross-border terrorism would be considered an "act of war".

This reflects a leadership that possesses both the strategic resolve to act and the absolute confidence in the armed forces to deliver retribution. Despite the political risks, this extraordinary resolve to tackle terror head on – and the refusal to succumb to nuclear blackmail and external pressure drew new red lines.

Operation Sindoor defined a new chapter in India's defence evolution too. While on transition to integration and restructuring, this Operation tested the ground realities of the three services – the Indian Air Force (IAF), the Indian Navy and the Indian Army. Post Pahalgam, the forces were tuned to expect a clear-cut political directive for action, which came in an unambiguous form and was perhaps stronger than what the services had anticipated. The services were given a free hand.

The resultant Indian strikes on nine terrorist targets were exceptionally well integrated across the three services, achieving total success despite a fully alert Pakistan. The choice of Bahawalpur, and Muridke in Pakistan as targets was unthinkable. Pakistan and the world woke up to realities of the "new normal". Pictures and videos of the massive destruction at these terror hubs, and the sheer scale and success of the strikes, were stunning.

The highly calibrated and intelligent Indian response over the next two days was executed well, calmly but firmly. Pakistan clearly misread

India's strategic doctrine has evolved sharply after Operation Sindoor



KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- India launched Operation Sindoor on May 7, 2025, in response to the Pahalgam terror attack (April 22, 2025).
- Precision strikes targeted terrorist infrastructure in Pakistan, including Bahawalpur and Muridke.
- The operation reflects India's shift from "strategic restraint" to a "zero tolerance against terrorism" approach.

Key Points

- Cross-border terrorism treated as a major national security threat.
- Demonstrated coordinated operations by:
 - Indian Army
 - Indian Air Force
 - Indian Navy
- Highlighted importance of:
 - Precision strikes
 - Intelligence coordination
 - Air defence systems (S-400)
 - Drone and cyber warfare
- Strengthened India's doctrine of proactive deterrence.
- Emphasised defence indigenisation and *Atmanirbhar Bharat* in defence manufacturing.

Static Linkages

- Article 51 – Promotion of international peace and security.
- Defence is part of the Union List.
- India follows "No First Use" nuclear doctrine.
- Kargil Review Committee recommended defence reforms and intelligence coordination.

- Integrated Theatre Commands for joint military operations.
- Defence modernisation through:
 - DRDO
 - Defence Corridors
 - Defence Acquisition Procedure (DAP)

Critical Analysis

Positives

- Strengthened deterrence against terrorism.
- Improved inter-service coordination.
- Enhanced India's strategic credibility.
- Boost to indigenous defence sector.

Challenges

- Risk of escalation between nuclear-armed neighbours.
- Possibility of proxy and cyber retaliation.
- High defence preparedness costs.
- Diplomatic pressure during crises.

Way Forward

- Accelerate Integrated Theatre Commands.
- Strengthen intelligence and border surveillance.
- Promote indigenous defence manufacturing.
- Expand cyber and drone defence capabilities.
- Enhance diplomatic efforts against state-sponsored terrorism.

As another session of Parliament has ended, a familiar pattern was visible on the floor of the House. Members of Parliament who rose to ask questions, performing one of Parliament's most important accountability functions. Yet, a large share of these questions have followed a predictable format, such as asking how many schools have functional toilets, how many pensions were disbursed in a given year, or how many beneficiaries received a particular scheme.

While these questions address important public concerns, the information they seek should ideally already exist in the public domain in a clear, standardised, and easily accessible format.

An analysis of the parliamentary questions asked during the 17th Lok Sabha (2019-24) on youth employment found that a large share sought such basic facts. This reflects a far deeper reality that India's data system is fragmented and lacks interoperability. The elephant in the room, rarely acknowledged in such debates, is data standardisation, without which even the most ambitious policy visions risk being built on shifting sands.

Anatomy of the problem

In the National Data and Analytics Platform vision document released by NITI Aayog, it was observed that India's data ecosystem remains incoherent, with Ministries and government departments failing to use shared standards for common indicators and even defining basic attributes such as time period and region inconsistently. India today generates more data than ever before, yet abundance does not equate to usability. Data collected by individual Ministries for their own programmes often cannot be integrated seamlessly, making consolidation a laborious and error-prone task. According to a NITI Aayog report released in June 2025, welfare programme databases often list the same beneficiary multiple times, leading



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to fiscal leakages that inflate spending by 4%-7% annually. Recent government data clean-ups highlight the potential savings from addressing such inefficiencies. Notably, deleting 17.1 million ineligible names from the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN) scheme was expected to save ₹90 billion in FY2024, while removing 35 million bogus LPG connections could save ₹210 billion over two years, and eliminating 16 million fake ration cards may save around ₹100 billion annually.

These inefficiencies have significant policy implications. In the health sector, for instance, studies show that childhood tuberculosis cases are recorded separately in the Health Management Information System, the disease surveillance network, and immunisation registries, often resulting in the same patient being counted multiple times. Such duplication creates conflicting estimates, often leaving decision-makers uncertain and leading some to disregard data altogether in favour of anecdote or political expediency.

Beyond policy implications, these weaknesses also carry perception and economic costs. In the Global Innovation Index 2024, India had missing data for two indicators and outdated data for eight, with several relying on figures more than a year old.

Without coordinated methodologies, such indices both mask real performance and expose gaps in inter-agency coordination. In economic terms, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development estimates that improving public-sector data availability and sharing could add up to 1.5% of GDP, rising to 2.5% if private-sector data is included. In other words, the cost of poor data governance lies not only in misinformed decisions but also in squandered economic potential.

Common standard for data
The solution to the inefficiencies can be seen under the National Data Governance Framework

Policy (NDGFP), where the proposed India Data Management Office (IDMO) has the potential to be the keystone of reforms by developing and enforcing common rules, standards, guidelines and protocols for data across all Ministries and States. However, the IDMO needs to be empowered with real authority to set binding standards, audit compliance, and resolve disputes over definitions and methodologies across Ministries. Otherwise, the inefficiencies will persist.

In addition, alignment with global statistical frameworks such as the UN's System of National Accounts for economic indicators, and harmonising them within a National Statistical Standards Manual could unify definitions and practices nationwide.

Most of all, India's open data platform, "data.gov.in", should be scaled up into a centralised, schema-consistent repository that serves both public availability of information and internal needs. Ministries must upload datasets in standardised formats regularly, enabling parliamentarians to access real-time, district-level figures.

As a benchmark
Finally, institutionalising accountability will be key to sustaining progress. NITI Aayog's Data Governance Quality Index should be an annual benchmark, tied to performance reviews and incentives for Ministries and States, as healthy competition on data quality can drive change as powerfully as economic competition.

Data standardisation is often minimised as a technical exercise, but it is in fact the grammar of governance that a nation aspiring to become a \$5 trillion economy needs to get right. Addressing the elephant in the data room means committing to the standards, systems and stewardship that will make India's data fit for purpose, and fit for the future.

The views expressed are personal

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context of the News

- Parliamentary questions during the 17th Lok Sabha revealed that Ministries often lack easily accessible and standardised public data.
- NITI Aayog highlighted fragmentation and lack of interoperability in India's data ecosystem.
- Duplicate and inconsistent databases are causing fiscal leakages in welfare schemes.
- National Data Governance Framework Policy (NDGFP) proposes institutional reforms for common data standards.

Key Points

- Welfare databases show duplication of beneficiaries leading to 4–7% annual fiscal leakages.
- Removal of:
 - 17.1 million fake PM-KISAN beneficiaries may save ₹90 billion.
 - 35 million bogus LPG connections may save ₹210 billion.
 - 16 million fake ration cards may save ₹100 billion annually.
- India had missing/outdated indicators in Global Innovation Index 2024.
- OECD estimates efficient public-sector data sharing can add up to 1.5% of GDP.
- NDGFP proposes India Data Management Office (IDMO) for common standards and protocols.
- Need for strengthening "data.gov.in" as a unified open-data platform.

Static Linkages

- Article 38 – Welfare-oriented governance.
- Article 39(b) – Equitable distribution of resources.
- e-Governance and Digital India initiatives.

- Aadhaar-enabled Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT).
- Open Government Data (OGD) Platform.
- National Statistical Office (NSO).
- Evidence-based policymaking.
- Cooperative federalism in data sharing.

Critical Analysis

Advantages

- Better targeting of welfare schemes.
- Reduction in corruption and leakages.
- Improves policy formulation through reliable data.
- Enhances transparency and accountability.
- Supports real-time governance and monitoring.

Challenges

- Lack of uniform standards across Ministries.
- Poor interoperability of databases.
- Privacy and surveillance concerns.
- Weak institutional coordination.
- Digital divide and low administrative capacity.

Way Forward

- Empower IDMO with statutory authority.
- Develop uniform national data standards.
- Integrate Ministry databases through interoperable architecture.
- Strengthen data privacy safeguards.
- Expand real-time public data access through data.gov.in.
- Conduct periodic data quality audits.
- Promote capacity building in States and Ministries.

Take east

The BJP's priority must be to end the violence in West Bengal

The Bharatiya Janata Party's victory in West Bengal has long been in the making. In power for three consecutive five-year terms, the Trinamool Congress (TMC) had been degenerating by the day while the BJP built itself up, vote by vote, aided by all the levers of power that it could exercise as the ruling party at the Centre. The party won 207 of the 294 Assembly seats; in 2021 it had 77. Suwendu Adhikari, Leader of the Opposition in the outgoing Assembly, will be the new Chief Minister. He defeated Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee in her own constituency, Bhabanipur – marking the second time that he has prevailed over her, after Nandigram in 2021. Popular dissatisfaction over jobs, corruption, governance and law and order undermined the TMC, which increasingly relied on violence and coercion to keep the State under its thumb. The West Bengal teacher recruitment scam eroded public trust in the TMC, and the R.G. Kar rape and murder case was a major inflection point. Ms. Banerjee first lost control of governance – which was never complete even at the beginning – and then lost control of the narrative. In 2021, her claim to be the protector of Bengali identity against a BJP perceived as the promoter of a Hindi heartland project had worked in her favour. That regional identity politics weakened as its principal champion sank into chaos and degeneration.

The BJP's strategy has been evolving over the years under the direct supervision of Union Home Minister Amit Shah, who spent several weeks in the State through the campaign. The party expanded its capacity at the booth level across rural Bengal through a decade of sustained work, building on its strong performance in the 2019 general election and its 2021 Assembly showing. The party had its own identity politics capable of countering the TMC's Bengali identity politics. BJP politics in the State was constructed on intense, contentious debates around citizenship, migration and Hindu consolidation – all tied to controversial administrative measures such as the tailored Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls and changes to the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA). The CAA was deployed as a mobilisation tool, particularly among Matua and other refugee communities. The BJP's gains flowed from a consolidation of Hindu votes alongside a decisive split in the TMC's Muslim support base. Now that the party has created history in West Bengal, the governance challenges before it cannot be overstated. The targeted assassination of a key aide of Mr. Adhikari and violence that has gripped many parts of the State, are instructive. The State needs a new vision for development and progress, but the restoration of law and order is the most urgent priority of all.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context of the News

- The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) won a decisive majority in the West Bengal Assembly elections, securing 207 out of 294 seats.
- The Trinamool Congress (TMC), which had governed the State for three consecutive terms, faced a major electoral defeat.
- BJP leader Suwendu Adhikari defeated Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee in Bhabanipur.
- Issues such as corruption allegations, unemployment, governance concerns, and law-and-order challenges influenced the political discourse.
- The teacher recruitment scam and the R.G. Kar incident became politically significant during the campaign.
- BJP expanded its organisational network through sustained booth-level mobilisation and social outreach.
- Citizenship, migration, refugee issues, and implementation of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) remained important electoral themes.

Key Points

- BJP significantly increased its Assembly strength compared to the 2021 elections.
- Organisational expansion in rural Bengal played an important role in electoral gains.
- Identity politics, welfare measures, and governance issues shaped voter behaviour.
- The CAA was discussed prominently, particularly among refugee communities such as the Matuas.
- Declining public trust due to corruption allegations affected the ruling dispensation.
- Regional identity politics remained an important factor in West Bengal politics.
- Post-election violence and political tensions highlighted continuing law-and-order concerns.

Static Linkages

- Article 324 provides constitutional powers to the Election Commission of India.
- Law and order is a State subject under the Seventh Schedule.
- Citizenship provisions are covered under Articles 5–11 of the Constitution.
- Federalism enables coexistence of regional and national political parties.
- Free and fair elections are part of the basic structure doctrine.
- Political accountability is an essential feature of parliamentary democracy.
- Electoral participation reflects democratic decentralisation and political mobilisation.
- Corruption and governance deficits affect institutional legitimacy.

Critical Analysis

Positive Aspects

- Reflects competitive democratic politics and peaceful transfer of power through elections.
- Demonstrates the importance of organisational strength and voter outreach.
- Highlights growing political participation in rural and semi-urban areas.
- Reinforces democratic accountability of elected governments.

Concerns

- Identity-based mobilisation may increase social polarisation.
- Electoral violence affects democratic credibility and public trust.
- Governance issues such as corruption and unemployment remain major concerns.
- Excessive political confrontation can affect cooperative federalism.

Governance Challenges Ahead

- Restoration of law and order.
- Improving administrative transparency and accountability.
- Addressing unemployment and development disparities.
- Ensuring inclusive governance for all social groups.

Way Forward

- Strengthen institutional mechanisms against corruption.
- Promote issue-based politics focused on development and governance.
- Ensure impartial law enforcement and quick justice delivery.
- Encourage inclusive and participatory governance.
- Enhance electoral reforms to reduce political violence.
- Improve Centre–State coordination for development initiatives.

Judge who quit SIR tribunal cleared more voters than EC added to rolls

Mismatch: Justice Sivagnanam, one of 19 tribunals, cleared 1,717 appeals; EC added only 1,607 names to rolls

Damini Nath
New Delhi, May 8

A DAY before polling ended in West Bengal, data from the office of the Chief Electoral Officer showed that as many as 1,607 appeals by people whose names were deleted from the voter list, as part of the controversial SIR exercise, had been approved by the Appellate Tribunals and added back to the electoral roll. *The Indian Express* has, however, learnt that just one of the 19 tribunals headed by Justice (Retd) T S Sivagnanam had cleared as many as 1,717 appeals between April 5 and April 27. Since there are 18 more tribunals, there are now questions about the number of appeals cleared by them, and how many more persons could have been added to the electoral rolls in time to cast their votes.

The Indian Express reported Friday that Justice Sivagnanam resigned from the tribunal on Thursday. When contacted by *The Indian Express*, he said he had done so due to personal reasons.



Justice T S Sivagnanam quit the tribunal Thursday

The Election Commission did not respond to a request for comment. West Bengal CEO Manoj Agarwal could not be reached for comment.

It is learnt that Justice Sivagnanam, who had originally been assigned some constituencies of North 24 Parganas and Kolkata as per the EC's March 20 notification, disposed of 1,777 appeals in total. Of these, it is learnt he approved all 1,717 appeals filed by citizens against deletion. He rejected 60 appeals filed by the EC against inclusions in Birbhum district, the jurisdiction of which had been given to him when the Supreme Court asked him to give

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

- More than 700 judicial officers participated in adjudication.
- The issue highlighted concerns regarding:
 - Electoral integrity
 - Right to vote
 - Transparency in algorithmic governance
 - Institutional trust deficit
- Congress candidate Motab Shaikh's name was restored after documentary evidence was reconsidered.

Static Linkages

- Article 324 – Powers of Election Commission
- Article 326 – Universal Adult Suffrage
- Article 142 – Complete justice powers of Supreme Court
- Representation of the People Act, 1950
- Free and fair elections as part of Basic Structure doctrine
- Principles of natural justice
- Judicial review and constitutional remedies

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Ensures accuracy of electoral rolls.
- Judicial oversight strengthened credibility of the revision process.
- Reinforces constitutional commitment to free and fair elections.

Concerns

- Risk of disenfranchisement of genuine voters.
- Lack of transparency in algorithm-based verification.
- Electoral roll revision close to polling may affect democratic participation.
- Limited time for appeal disposal.

Way Forward

- Complete electoral roll revision well before elections.
- Ensure transparency in voter verification mechanisms.
- Strengthen grievance redressal systems.
- Increase voter awareness regarding roll verification.
- Conduct independent audits of electoral databases.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context of the News

- During the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in West Bengal, around 27.16 lakh voters were deleted from voter lists after verification.
- The Election Commission (EC) used a centralised algorithm to identify “logical discrepancies”.
- Large-scale deletions triggered concerns regarding wrongful exclusion of genuine voters before Assembly elections.
- The Supreme Court directed the formation of 19 Appellate Tribunals headed by retired High Court judges to hear appeals.
- Justice T.S. Sivagnanam's tribunal reportedly restored more than 1,700 voters to the electoral rolls.
- The Supreme Court invoked Article 142 to allow publication of supplementary voter lists before polling.

Key Points

- Around 60.06 lakh electors were scrutinised during revision.
- Over 34 lakh appeals were reportedly filed against exclusions/inclusions.

In Tamil Nadu, Governor's delay did not do justice to the verdict

It is representative not of a party but representative of the people as a whole of the state. It is in the name of the people that he carries on the administration," said B.R. Ambedkar about the governor's role. The Supreme Court (SC) had quoted this statement in *Nabam Rebia* (2016).

The BJP was formed on April 6, 1980, with a claim that it would be "a party with a difference". But the governors appointed by its government have time and again proved they are the same as the other parts appointed by Congress. Increasingly, they seem not to have much respect for the test of the Constitution, its spirit or even constitutional morality.

Tamil Nadu Governor Rameswar Prasad Vaidyaiah has a long record of such behaviour. He has invited the single largest party to form the new government for days after the results in a general election. In some instances, he has even invited a party to form the government that does not have a majority in the House. There have been a number of instances when the leader of the single largest party was invited to form the government and prove his majority. The BJP formed the NDA government in 1996 was formed because he was the leader of the single largest party in the Lok Sabha with just 161 seats, and the NDA tally was 187 — far short of a majority. He resigned on the 13th day, delivering a powerful speech during the no-confidence motion. In 2018, Karnataka



FAIZAN MUSTAFA

Governor Vajubhai Vala invited the BJP's B.S. Yeddyurappa to form the government despite a post-poll alliance between Congress and the JD(S), and the BJP government eventually failed the subsequent confidence test in the House, which was advanced to 36 hours by the SC.

In the Tamil Nadu assembly, with a strength of 234 seats, the Tamilaga Vettri Kathagam (TVK) led by film star-turned-politician C. Joseph Vijay has 106 seats. With no pre-poll alliance getting a majority, per convention, the governor should have invited Vijay to form the government, as he alone has staked the claim and the DMK and AIADMK have thus far publicly ruled out an alliance between them, rather than delay as much as he did. With Congress first extending the support of its five MLAs and the Left parties and others criticising the governor's actions and following suit, Vijay seems to have the numbers. In *S.R. Bommai* (1994), the apex court did talk of pre-poll alliances, post-poll alliances and the single-largest party hierarchy. In the present case, the TVK has a post-poll alliance with Congress and is the single largest party. Therefore, it has a rightful claim to be invited to form the government.

Due to the governor's unprecedented delay in inviting the TVK, there are reports suggesting that arch-rivals DMK and AIADMK started a conversation about a possible alliance. However, since both have been rejected by the people, such an alliance would be unethical and a negation of constitutional morality and democratic

The writer is the vice-chancellor of Chanakya National Law University, Patna. Views are personal

- Punchhi Commission (2010):
 - Recommended that Governor's discretion should remain limited and politically neutral.

Static Linkages

- Parliamentary form of government.
- Federal structure with unitary bias.
- Constitutional conventions supplement constitutional provisions.
- Principle of collective responsibility.
- Floor test as democratic mechanism to determine majority.
- Constitutional morality.
- Cooperative federalism.
- Discretionary powers of Governor.

Critical Analysis

Positive Role of Governor

- Ensures constitutional continuity during political uncertainty.
- Acts as a constitutional guardian in exceptional situations.
- Facilitates stable government formation.

Major Concerns

- Allegations of partisan behaviour by Governors.
- Lack of clarity in constitutional provisions regarding hung assemblies.
- Delay in inviting majority claimant may encourage political instability.
- Weak adherence to constitutional conventions.

Constitutional Concerns

- Undermines democratic mandate.
- Affects spirit of cooperative federalism.
- Raises concerns regarding misuse of discretionary powers.

Judicial Perspective

- Supreme Court repeatedly emphasised:
 - Floor test as the proper method to determine majority.
 - Neutrality and constitutional morality in gubernatorial conduct.

Way Forward

- Codify clear guidelines for government formation in hung Assemblies.
- Implement recommendations of Sarkaria and Punchhi Commissions.
- Conduct mandatory floor tests within a fixed timeframe.
- Ensure politically neutral functioning of Governors.
- Strengthen constitutional conventions and federal spirit.
- Reduce scope for arbitrary exercise of discretion.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context of the News

- A constitutional debate emerged after the Governor of Tamil Nadu delayed inviting the leader of the single largest party to form the government in a hung Assembly situation.
- The issue highlighted concerns regarding:
 - Discretionary powers of Governors.
 - Constitutional conventions in government formation.
 - Constitutional morality and federalism.
- The controversy revived discussions around Supreme Court judgments and recommendations of commissions on Centre-State relations.

Key Points

- Article 164(1):
 - Governor appoints the Chief Minister.
 - Constitution does not clearly prescribe procedure in case of a hung Assembly.
- Article 164(2):
 - Council of Ministers is collectively responsible to the Legislative Assembly.
- Constitutional Convention:
 - Leader of the single largest party/alliance is generally invited first to form the government and prove majority on the floor of the House.
- Supreme Court's Position:
 - Majority should be tested through a floor test, not through the Governor's subjective assessment.
- Important Judgments:
 - S.R. Bommai Case – Emphasised floor test and federalism.
 - Nabam Rebia Case – Limited arbitrary powers of Governor.
 - Rameswar Prasad Case – Governors should avoid partisan conduct.

India's Perspective

- Supports universal and non-discriminatory nuclear disarmament.
- Opposes unequal nuclear order under NPT.
- Advocates strategic autonomy and peaceful use of nuclear energy.

Way Forward

- Strengthen diplomacy-based non-proliferation efforts.
- Ensure non-discriminatory implementation of nuclear norms.
- Enhance credibility and autonomy of the IAEA.
- Revive multilateral agreements such as JCPOA.
- Promote global nuclear disarmament under Article VI of NPT.
- Increase transparency and confidence-building measures among states.

Lok Bhavan needs to respect lok's mandate

ON MAY 4, in Tamil Nadu, in a dramatic verdict that overturned pre-poll predictions, the incumbent Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) lost, while Vijay's Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK), in its electoral debut, got overwhelming support. It stopped just short of a simple majority, with no rival party or pre-poll coalition coming close. In the aftermath, both democratic convention and judicial precedent dictate that the single-largest party has the strongest claim to form the government. Yet, Governor R V Arlekar's stalling, his insistence on a list with signatures of MLAs, kept the doors open for rumour and speculation, and untenable claims. On Friday, armed with the numbers, Vijay met the governor again, and is likely to form the government. The episode, however, is a reminder of the importance, especially after a verdict in which the numbers are not entirely unambiguous, of the governor abiding by the constitution — not just in letter, but also in spirit.

The Constitution says that the chief minister "shall be appointed by the Governor". But the gubernatorial role in government formation is that of a politically neutral facilitator in the implementation of the mandate. In a hung assembly, the governor exercises discretionary power but that, too, must be circumscribed by the goal of giving effect to the people's verdict. Governors have often cited the requirement of "subjective satisfaction" before extending an invitation to form the government. For Arlekar, however, and every governor who has been in this situation — Goa's Governor Mridula Sinha in 2017 and Karnataka's Governor Vajubhai Vala in 2018 — the irrefutable test is the floor test. For instance, in a midnight hearing in 2018, the Supreme Court heard MLAs of a post-poll coalition led by Congress in Karnataka but refused to stay the swearing-in of a BJP government that was short of the halfway mark by eight MLAs. It is another matter that within 36 hours, the B S Yediyurappa government collapsed after failing to prove its majority. The SC has underlined the primacy of the floor test in several other instances — in Goa in 2017, Uttarakhand in 2016 and Maharashtra in 2019. Even if the government falls, it must do so on the floor of the House. By demanding signatures beforehand, the governor is pre-empting this process, which must unfold in the appropriate forum.

The governor's actions must be impartial, and they must be seen to be so, too. The verdict cannot be re-shaped or manipulated through post-election manoeuvres in Raj Bhavan. In Chennai, the support of the Left parties and VCK — the Congress had pledged its five earlier — helped Vijay cross the line and avoided what could have been an unseemly deadlock. Still, the Lok Bhavan needs a reminder that it must abide by first principles, place the Lok, the people's mandate, above all.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context of the News

- In the Tamil Nadu Assembly election, the newly formed party led by Vijay emerged as the single largest party but fell short of a simple majority.
- The Governor, R. V. Arlekar, delayed inviting the party to form the government and sought signed letters of support from MLAs.
- The episode revived debates regarding:
 - Discretionary powers of Governors,
 - Constitutional conventions in hung assemblies,
 - Primacy of floor tests,
 - Federalism and neutrality of constitutional offices.
- Support from allied parties eventually enabled the formation of the government.

Key Points

- Article 164: Chief Minister is appointed by the Governor.
- In a hung assembly, the Governor exercises discretionary powers.
- Supreme Court judgments have repeatedly upheld the floor test as the ultimate method to determine majority support.
- The Governor's office is expected to function as a politically neutral constitutional authority.
- Delay or selective discretion in inviting parties may raise concerns regarding:
 - Constitutional morality,
 - Democratic legitimacy,
 - Cooperative federalism.

- Similar controversies arose in:
 - Goa (2017),
 - Karnataka (2018),
 - Maharashtra (2019),
 - Uttarakhand (2016).

Static Linkages

- Parliamentary form of government based on collective responsibility.
- Constitutional head vs real executive distinction.
- Article 163: Governor acts on aid and advice except in limited discretionary matters.
- Article 164: Appointment of Chief Minister by Governor.
- Sarkaria Commission recommendations on Governor's role.
- Punchhi Commission on impartiality of Governors.
- S.R. Bommai case and importance of floor test.
- Constitutional morality and federal balance.
- Basic structure doctrine including democracy and federalism.
- Convention of inviting:
 - Pre-poll alliance majority,
 - Single largest party with support,
 - Post-poll coalition.

Critical Analysis

Positives

- Governor seeks proof for stable government formation.
- Prevents political instability and horse-trading.

Concerns

- Delay may undermine democratic mandate.
- Excessive discretion may appear politically biased.
- Demand for signatures before floor test weakens legislative process.
- Repeated controversies reduce trust in constitutional offices.

Constitutional Concerns

- Floor test is the constitutional method to determine majority.
- Governor must act as neutral constitutional authority.
- Constitutional morality requires respect for people's mandate.

Way Forward

- Clear constitutional guidelines for hung assemblies.
- Time-bound mandatory floor test.
- Implement Sarkaria and Punchhi Commission recommendations.
- Ensure political neutrality of Governors.
- Strengthen cooperative federalism.
- Reduce scope of arbitrary discretion.

Four states, one economic challenge

THE CLEAR results of the recent assembly elections – be it the emphatic return of the incumbent in Assam or the ringing out of the old in West Bengal, Tamil Nadu and Kerala — underscore the need for the new governments to urgently address the problems plaguing the economies. The most pressing task is to raise the rate of economic growth. Of the four states, only Assam has done well enough, registering a compound annual growth rate of 11.4 per cent between 2014-15 and 2023-24. Over the same period, Tamil Nadu's economy expanded by 10.3 per cent while the growth rates of Kerala (8.6 per cent) and West Bengal (9.1 per cent) could not even reach double digits. For perspective, between 2004 and 2026, India's overall CAGR has been 12.3 per cent. This shows that even Assam could improve and grow much faster, not to mention West Bengal and Kerala, which are effectively dragging back India's overall growth rate because of their sluggish growth.

Data shows that all the four states are increasingly burdened by debt and rising levels of interest payments. Typically, states are allowed to borrow money but such borrowings are better spent on the creation of productive assets such as roads and ports — the kind of investment that will boost growth and allow the state to pay back the borrowing through higher tax collection in the future. But a look at the revenue deficits shows that be it Kerala, West Bengal or Tamil Nadu, all three states have been borrowing money just to pay for their day-to-day expenses such as salaries and pensions. A more recent challenge has been posed by the increase in unconditional cash transfers by state governments. In Assam, 4.3 per cent of revenue receipts go towards such transfers; West Bengal is worst at 10 per cent.

Debt-ridden government finances and slow economic growth are two sides of the same coin. Governments that borrow recklessly to pay for unproductive schemes actively weaken economic growth. The growth rate in per capita GDP — far slower than the growth rates of overall GDP — as well as uncomfortable levels of unemployment are a reflection of the stresses building up in the system. These mandates should be seen as an opportunity to correct the course.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- Recent Assembly election results in West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Assam have shifted focus toward state-level economic performance and fiscal health.
- Concerns raised regarding:
 - Slow GSDP growth,
 - Rising public debt,
 - Increasing revenue deficits,
 - Expansion of welfare-based cash transfer schemes.
- Debate over balance between welfare expenditure and productive capital expenditure.

Key Points

- CAGR (2014–15 to 2023–24):
 - Assam – 11.4%
 - Tamil Nadu – 10.3%
 - West Bengal – 9.1%
 - Kerala – 8.6%
 - India overall – around 12.3%
- Rising fiscal stress in states due to:
 - High debt-to-GSDP ratio,
 - Rising interest payments,
 - Revenue deficit financing.
- Revenue Deficit:
 - Borrowing for salaries, pensions, subsidies and routine expenses.
 - Indicates weak fiscal sustainability.
- Capital Expenditure:

- Spending on roads, ports, power, irrigation and infrastructure.
- Generates long-term economic growth and tax revenue.
- Welfare Transfers:
 - Increasing unconditional cash transfer schemes by states.
 - Assam: around 4.3% of revenue receipts.
 - West Bengal: around 10%.
- Economic concerns:
 - Low per capita income growth,
 - Rising unemployment,
 - Reduced private investment potential.

Static Linkages

- Article 293 – State borrowing powers.
- FRBM framework – Fiscal discipline and deficit management.
- Revenue Deficit vs Fiscal Deficit distinction.
- Finance Commission recommendations on fiscal consolidation.
- Economic Survey emphasis on quality capital expenditure.
- Cooperative & Competitive Federalism.
- Public debt sustainability principle.
- Multiplier effect of infrastructure investment.

Critical Analysis

Positives

- Welfare schemes support vulnerable sections.
- Cash transfers improve social security and consumption demand.
- Borrowing during slowdown may support economic recovery.

Concerns

- Excessive revenue expenditure reduces fiscal sustainability.
- Interest burden crowds out developmental spending.
- Populist schemes may weaken fiscal discipline.
- Lower capital expenditure affects long-term growth.
- Rising debt can burden future generations.
- Slow growth impacts employment generation.

Way Forward

- Increase productive capital expenditure.
- Rationalize non-merit subsidies.
- Strengthen fiscal discipline under FRBM norms.
- Improve tax collection efficiency.
- Promote manufacturing and MSMEs.
- Focus on employment-oriented growth.
- Shift from populism to outcome-based welfare.
- Enhance infrastructure-led development.