



DAILY NEWS PAPER ANALYSIS

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**CIVILS WITH AKASH
SECTOR 25 CHANDIGARH**

Free Indo-Pacific priority for India, Japan: PM

Both countries are 'perfectly aligned', Japanese PM says and stresses on 'strategic cooperation'

Countries seal at least 129 MoUs on technology, investment and AI; Japan may invest \$1 trillion

Modi praises deal over defence tech for maritime security; Takaichi expresses concern over Gulf

Saurabh Trivedi
Kallol Bhattacharjee
NEW DELHI

A "free and rules-based Indo-Pacific" is a common priority for India and Japan, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Thursday while welcoming his Japanese counterpart, Sanae Takaichi. Mr. Modi said India and Japan would jointly develop technologies that would help in maintaining maritime security and "regional peace".

"India and Japan are among the biggest economies of the world. A free, prosperous and rules-based Indo-Pacific is our shared priority. We will jointly pave the way for peace, stability and progress for the entire region," Mr. Modi said.

"In the field of defence, India and Japan have done the first agreement for co-development of projects. This agreement on naval radio antenna will open a new chapter of defence technology partnership. Now, we will jointly develop such technologies that will help in maintaining regional peace, maritime security, and strengthen rules-based order," Mr. Modi added.

Maritime security

Ms. Takaichi, who arrived in New Delhi on July 1 for her first visit to India as Prime Minister, renewed her call for an updated free and open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) and emphasised the need for "strategic cooperation". She said that the two countries were "perfectly aligned".



Boosting ties: Prime Minister Narendra Modi with his Japanese counterpart Sanae Takaichi in New Delhi. SHANKAR PUSHPAKA

Mr. Modi and Ms. Takaichi attended an economic session in which Indian and Japanese companies sealed 129 memoranda of understanding on technology, investment, and artificial intelligence.

According to a document

shared by the External Affairs Ministry, Japan is on track to invest \$1 trillion across States, including Haryana, Odisha, Maharashtra, Gujarat, and those in the northeastern region.

Ms. Takaichi highlighted

Modi, Takaichi unveil Maruti Suzuki plant

NEW DELHI

At the India-Japan Joint Economic Forum on Thursday, Narendra Modi and Sanae Takaichi inaugurated Maruti Suzuki's fourth vehicle manufacturing facility at Kharkhoda in Haryana. This plant will be one of the largest, Suzuki Motors head Toshihiro Suzuki said.

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the importance of maritime security as the key to maintaining regional stability in the Indo-Pacific.

"Expansion of maritime security is especially important for regional peace and stability," Ms. Takaichi said, highlighting the har-

mony between Japan's call for FOIP and the Government of India's emphasis on ocean as a "shared space" that can sustain economic growth and safeguard sovereignty.

"In the midst of international affairs in disarray, the establishment of such an inter-complementary cooperative relationship has become ever more important," she stated.

She expressed concern about the situation in the Gulf region, where at least 31 Japanese vessels remain stranded near the Strait of Hormuz.

Defence cooperation

The two sides also announced deepening of bilateral defence cooperation through joint military exercises, particularly naval exercises in the Indian

Ocean and expanding Maritime Domain Awareness.

Interacting with the media on Thursday evening, Japanese officials said that bilateral cooperation in defence equipment and technology was progressing through industry agreements. They emphasised that the defence technologies being exported were intended for "defence purposes and not for warfare".

The two sides highlighted the need to collaborate in addressing energy security needs against the backdrop of the disruption in the Persian Gulf region and supported the idea of "strategic stockpiling of crude oil" to serve bilateral requirements. Japan is diversifying energy suppliers in the backdrop of the crisis in West Asia, said Japanese officials.

Static Linkages

- SAGAR (2015): India's maritime vision for regional security and inclusive development.
- Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) (2019): Seven pillars:
 - Maritime Security

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context of the News

- India and Japan reaffirmed their commitment to a Free, Open and Rules-Based Indo-Pacific (FOIP) during the bilateral summit.
- The two countries signed their first defence co-development agreement for a Naval Radio Antenna, marking a new phase in defence technology cooperation.
- Both sides agreed to strengthen:
 - Maritime Security
 - Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA)
 - Defence technology collaboration
 - Joint naval exercises
 - Energy security cooperation
- India and Japan also signed 129 MoUs in technology, AI, manufacturing and investment.

Key Points

- Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP): Vision led by Japan for a region based on:
 - Rule of Law
 - Freedom of Navigation
 - Peaceful Settlement of Disputes
 - Respect for Sovereignty and Territorial Integrity
 - Unimpeded Lawful Commerce
- India's Indo-Pacific Vision: Based on SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region).
- Supports a Free, Open, Inclusive and Rules-Based Indo-Pacific with ASEAN Centrality.
- Major Outcomes First India-Japan defence co-development project (Naval Radio Antenna).
- Expansion of Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA).
- Enhanced defence industrial cooperation.
- Joint naval exercises in the Indian Ocean.
- Cooperation on strategic crude oil stockpiling.
- Economic Cooperation 129 MoUs in AI, manufacturing, digital technologies and investment.

- Maritime Ecology
- Maritime Resources
- Capacity Building & Resource Sharing
- Disaster Risk Reduction
- Science, Technology & Academic Cooperation
- Trade Connectivity & Maritime Transport
- UNCLOS (1982) Legal framework governing oceans.
- Provides for:
 - Territorial Sea (12 NM)
 - Contiguous Zone (24 NM)
 - Exclusive Economic Zone (200 NM)
 - Continental Shelf
 - Freedom of Navigation
- Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) Continuous monitoring of maritime activities for security, safety and law enforcement.
- Quad Members:
 - India
 - Japan
 - Australia
 - United States
- Not a military alliance.
- Focuses on maritime security, resilient supply chains, emerging technologies, cyber security, disaster relief and critical infrastructure.
- Malabar Exercise Multilateral naval exercise involving Quad countries.
- Andaman & Nicobar Command India's first and only integrated tri-service command.
- Strategically located near the Strait of Malacca.
- Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR) Maintained to cushion against global oil supply disruptions.

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Strengthens India's Indo-Pacific strategy.
- Boosts defence indigenisation through co-development.
- Enhances maritime deterrence in the Indian Ocean Region.
- Supports resilient supply chains and trusted technology partnerships.
- Diversifies energy security amid geopolitical instability.
- Reinforces adherence to international maritime law.

Challenges

- China's expanding maritime footprint in the Indo-Pacific.
- Dependence on imported energy.
- Technology transfer and export control restrictions.
- Balancing strategic autonomy with deeper security partnerships.
- Rising geopolitical competition in the Indo-Pacific.

Way Forward

- Expand defence co-development under Make in India.
- Strengthen Maritime Domain Awareness through information-sharing.
- Enhance interoperability via regular joint naval exercises.
- Deepen cooperation in semiconductors, AI, cyber security and critical technologies.
- Build resilient supply chains for critical minerals and strategic sectors.
- Promote Blue Economy under the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative.
- Uphold UNCLOS and strengthen ASEAN-led regional architecture.

SC quashes NCLT order for using AI-generated case law

Aaratrika Bhaumik
NEW DELHI

Observing that the use of non-existent or AI-generated hallucinated judicial precedents is "catastrophic" to the judicial process, the Supreme Court on Thursday set aside an order of the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) after finding that it had relied on fictitious AI-generated case laws.

A Bench comprising Justices P.S. Naraimha and Alok Aradhe underscored that courts must adopt a "zero-tolerance" approach towards the reliance on AI-generated precedents without independent verification as it "contaminates" the very "lifeblood of judicial determination".

"Even if an iota of fake or hallucinated material enters the decision-making process, it would violate the sanctity of adjudication. It is absolutely necessary to maintain integrity in decision-making, and we reiterate and declare zero tolerance for the Bar as well as the Bench to cite, refer to, or rely on such material," the Bench said.

Cautioning against AI-generated hallucinations quietly permeating legal practice, it warned that reliance on fictitious precedents "subverts the rule of law".

"Frame norms"
While acknowledging that "increased workloads of modern life" have compelled lawyers and judges to adapt to AI to improve efficiency, it underlined that meaningful human oversight must remain integral to every stage of the adjudicatory process.

"For us, i.e., for those in the province of adjudication and determination of disputes, this by-product of AI, i.e., the production of fake, non-existent, and



hallucinated material and its utilisation as precedents in law, is like the release of methyl isocyanate in the province of law and justice: invisible, insidious, and catastrophic by the time anyone notices," the Bench said.

The top court called for a "deeper collaboration" between the Bar and the Bench on AI and urged the Bar Council of India to frame norms to address the issue of AI-generated precedents.

It noted that the process had already begun with the court publishing the Draft Regulations for Use of Artificial Intelligence in Courts, 2026, for public consultation.

The draft regulations provide that AI systems may function only in an assistive capacity and cannot supplant the role of judges. They also require disclosure of AI-assisted filings and prohibit the use of AI in judicial decision-making.

To address the growing instances of AI-generated hallucinated precedents being cited before courts, the Bench directed the BCI, the apex statutory body regulating the legal profession, to constitute a committee to examine the issue and formulate appropriate norms.

The top court was hearing an appeal filed by Pooja Ramesh Singh, a suspended director of Essel Infra-projects Ltd., challenging

the NCLT decision to admit the company into the corporate insolvency resolution process on an application filed by Jammu and Kashmir Bank under Section 7 of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code. The insolvency proceedings arose out of an alleged default in relation to a ₹200-crore credit facility extended by Jammu and Kashmir Bank to Pan India Utilities Distribution Company Ltd.

The Mumbai Bench of the NCLT admitted the insolvency application in August after recording a claimed default of ₹87.43 crore.

The order was subsequently affirmed by the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT).

Integrity of process

The apex court expressed surprise that the NCLT had failed to notice that the NCLT's order relied on fictitious judicial precedents. It also cautioned that courts and tribunals should not "implicitly trust lawyers" with regard to authorities cited before them without independently verifying them.

The apex court held that the source of the lapse did not diminish its adverse impact on the integrity of the judicial process.

The court set aside the orders of both the NCLT and the NCLAT and remitted the matter to the tribunal for fresh consideration in accordance with law.

- Supreme Court emphasized that fake precedents:
 - Undermine the Rule of Law.
 - Affect judicial credibility.
 - Violate the integrity of adjudication.
- Case involved proceedings under Section 7 of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC), 2016.

Static Linkages

Constitutional Provisions

- Article 14 – Equality before Law.
- Article 21 – Fair procedure (judicial interpretation).
- Article 141 – Law declared by the Supreme Court is binding on all courts.
- Article 144 – All authorities shall act in aid of the Supreme Court.

Legal Institutions

- National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) Established under the Companies Act, 2013.
- Adjudicates corporate insolvency under the IBC, 2016.
- National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) Hears appeals against NCLT orders.
- Bar Council of India (BCI) Statutory body under the Advocates Act, 1961.
- Regulates legal profession and legal education.

Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC), 2016

- Section 7 – Financial creditor may initiate Corporate Insolvency Resolution Process (CIRP).

Governance & AI

- AI is classified as an emerging technology requiring human oversight, transparency and accountability.

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Protects the Rule of Law.
- Reinforces judicial accountability.
- Encourages responsible AI adoption.
- Preserves public confidence in the justice delivery system.

Challenges

- AI hallucinations may go undetected.
- Absence of uniform AI governance standards.
- Limited AI literacy among legal professionals.
- Risk of overdependence on AI-generated research.

Way Forward

- Frame comprehensive AI guidelines for legal practice.
- Make independent verification of AI-generated content mandatory.
- Develop authenticated digital databases of judicial precedents.
- Train judges and lawyers in responsible AI usage.
- Promote explainable and accountable AI systems in governance.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context of the News

- The Supreme Court set aside an order of the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) after finding that it relied on AI-generated fictitious judicial precedents.
- The Court termed such reliance as "catastrophic" to the judicial process and declared zero tolerance towards citing or relying upon AI-generated hallucinated case laws.
- It directed the Bar Council of India (BCI) to constitute a committee for framing norms governing AI use in legal practice.
- The Court also referred to the Draft Regulations for Use of Artificial Intelligence in Courts, 2026, released for public consultation.

Key Points

- AI Hallucination: AI-generated false, fabricated, or non-existent information presented as factual.
- AI can be used only as an assistive tool, not as a substitute for judicial reasoning.
- Mandatory human verification of AI-assisted legal research.
- Draft AI Regulations, 2026 propose:
 - AI only in an assistive role.
 - Mandatory disclosure of AI-assisted filings.
 - AI cannot participate in judicial decision-making.

The right to a fair trial at the crossroads

When, earlier this year, the Supreme Court of India denied bail to Umar Khalid and Sharjeel Imam in the 2020 Delhi Riots cases (while granting bail to five other individuals in the same case), one key question that arose was this: "how long is too long" for people to be kept in jail without being found guilty of an offence? At the time of the Court's judgment, Umar Khalid and Sharjeel Imam had spent more than five years in jail without trial, at the time of writing, that period is approaching six years.



Gautam Bhatia
Delhi-based lawyer

Bail, delay, and rights

In its own prior judgments, the Court had noted that an extended delay in trial would trigger an accused's right to personal liberty under Article 21. Thus, even though the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) has strict requirements for delay, these statutory restrictions could not override the constitutional (and indeed, human) right to personal liberty.

However, in denying bail to Umar Khalid and Sharjeel Imam, another Bench of the Court noted that a delay in the trial could not create an iron-clad right to bail, but would have to be weighed against other factors such as the gravity of the offence and which of the parties was "responsible" for the delay. With respect, these observations appear to miss the point. Issues such as the gravity of an offence are factors used to determine, in the first instance, whether or not a case for bail is made out. To then invoke the gravity of the offence—which, at the stage of bail, is only an allegation made by the state—to override the question of delay essentially creates a sliding scale under which certain individuals can be kept in jail for decades simply because they have been "accused" of grave offences. Indeed, this has happened: people accused under the UAPA have been kept in jail for more than two decades before eventually being acquitted, with the best years of their lives robbed from them. Indeed, the very fact that this has happened on more than one occasion ought to have given the Court pause.

Nor does the argument that the accused themselves might be responsible for delaying the trial hold any water. Whatever applications an accused (or, for that matter, the state) may make,

ultimately it is the judge who controls the courtroom and the pace of the trial, and it is the judge upon whom the ultimate responsibility rests to ensure that trials are completed within a reasonable timeframe.

Indeed, it was clear that the Court itself recognised some of these issues when, in a rare move, another two-judge Bench recently openly criticised the Delhi Riots bail rejection as being contrary to established precedent and reiterated the fundamental principle that, under a Constitution committed to the rule of law, individuals cannot be incarcerated indefinitely without a trial.

In response, and in another case, the Delhi Riots Bench "referred" this question to the Chief Justice to constitute a larger Bench to resolve. With respect, the very fact that the Supreme Court is effectively debating whether people who have spent more than half a decade in jail (the amount of time that another famous political prisoner, Captain Alfred Dreyfus, did) should or should not be released, is a cause for consternation.

Bail and legal inconsistency

In the meantime, at the level of the trial court and the High Courts, conflict and inconsistency in judicial decisions continue to persist. Recently the High Court of Delhi (correctly) granted bail to the Kashmiri human rights activist, Khurram Parvez, who had been incarcerated for more than four years without trial. This length of time in prison without trial weighed heavily with the High Court in deciding to grant bail. What is curious, however, is that the judge who (correctly) granted Khurram Parvez bail had denied bail in the Delhi Riots cases the previous year, when the accused in that case had already spent more than four years in jail. Nor is this the only instance of the same judge speaking with different judicial voices: in the Delhi Riots cases themselves, on the same underlying facts, the same judge delivered opposing bail judgments a year apart.

It is trite to say that no case is identical to the other. On an issue as basic as pre-trial incarceration, repeated inconsistencies across cases and courts undermine the rule of law and, ultimately, damage the cause of fundamental

rights and individual liberty. These questions assume particular significance because laws such as the UAPA, in particular, have an undeniably political character, and it has been demonstrated across the world that states are only too happy to interpret these laws in a way that blurs the line between political dissent and what the law defines as "terrorism". Recent attempts in the United Kingdom and the United States around dissent linked to Israel's genocide in Palestine are examples of this.

What the judiciary must ensure

In such a context, it becomes particularly important for the judiciary to ensure that such laws are not weaponised. While legal interpretation is subjective, one thing is – and should be – crystal clear: that the state cannot keep people behind bars for years without trial. It makes a mockery of having a system based on the rule of law, and one that – to use the old adage – entrenches the process as the punishment.

It is unclear whether – or when – the Court's larger Bench will opt on the issue. In the meantime, however, there remain contentious UAPA cases, where individuals continue to be imprisoned without trial, and their time spent in custody continues to increase with no resolution in sight. Indeed, one such case is that of Umar Khalid and Sharjeel Imam, the last two individuals among the accused student activists who remain in custody in the "Delhi Riots cases". After the denial of bail by the Supreme Court, the case is once again coming up before the trial court this week; in the meantime, five years in prison have turned into six, and the cost – both to the lives of the imprisoned individuals and to the rule of law – has continued to become steeper.

Ultimately, therefore, this issue is both about individual human lives and about our commitment as a society to human and democratic values. As these cases continue to arise, the courts will once again have an opportunity to reaffirm these values, whether in individual bail cases before trial courts or when it comes to laying down the law before the Court. It is to be hoped that this happens, and that the cycle of endless imprisonment without trial is broken.

- Article 22 – Protection against Arbitrary Arrest.
- Article 32 & Article 226 – Constitutional Remedies.
- Rule of Law.
- Presumption of Innocence.
- Due Process through judicial interpretation.
- Special laws vis-à-vis Fundamental Rights.
- Separation of Powers.
- Judicial Review.

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Protects national security through stringent anti-terror provisions.
- Enables investigation of organized terrorist activities.

Concerns

- Prolonged incarceration without trial weakens Article 21.
- Delay may convert process into punishment.
- Low conviction rates raise concerns over misuse of stringent provisions.
- Judicial inconsistency affects certainty in criminal jurisprudence.

Constitutional Issues

- National Security vs Individual Liberty.
- Rule of Law.
- Presumption of Innocence.
- Speedy Justice.
- Proportionality.

Way Forward

- Ensure time-bound disposal of UAPA trials.
- Strengthen special courts dealing with terrorism cases.
- Periodic judicial review of prolonged undertrial detention.
- Improve investigation and prosecution capacity.
- Balance national security with Fundamental Rights through proportionality.
- Reduce pendency using digital case management and judicial reforms.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- The issue of prolonged pre-trial detention has gained attention after the Supreme Court denied bail to Umar Khalid and Sharjeel Imam in the Delhi Riots conspiracy case despite nearly six years of incarceration without conclusion of trial.
- Divergent judicial views on whether prolonged delay alone can justify bail under the UAPA have led to the matter being referred to a larger Bench of the Supreme Court.
- The case raises constitutional questions regarding the balance between national security and Article 21 (Right to Life and Personal Liberty).

Key Points

- Article 21 includes the Right to Speedy Trial.
- Article 22 provides safeguards against arbitrary arrest and detention.
- UAPA, 1967 is India's primary anti-terror law.
- Section 43D(5), UAPA prescribes stringent conditions for grant of bail.
- Constitutional courts can grant bail where prolonged incarceration violates Article 21 (Union of India v. K.A. Najeeb, 2021).
- Hussainara Khatoon v. State of Bihar (1979): Right to Speedy Trial recognized as a Fundamental Right.
- Judicial principle: "Bail is the Rule, Jail is the Exception."
- According to NCRB Prison Statistics, around 75% of prisoners in India are undertrials, indicating systemic delays.

Static Linkages

- Article 14 – Equality before Law.
- Article 21 – Right to Life and Personal Liberty.

A shot at life, Mandsaur's first for HPV vaccination

The birth of Savita (name changed) in Mandsaur district, Madhya Pradesh, 14 years ago was a moment of celebration for her family. The Banchhada community she was born into – a denotified tribe in Madhya Pradesh traditionally associated with sex work – welcomes the birth of girls, who are often viewed as future breadwinners. Yet, when a team of human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccinators recently approached Savita's family, they were apprehensive. "Will she be able to work?" they asked candidly, worried about the vaccine's future impact.

Their hesitation was neither unexpected nor isolated. Although cervical cancer is the second most common cancer among Indian women, preventive health-care initiatives often grapple with low levels of awareness and social stigma. Cervical cancer vaccination faces a distinct set of challenges – low cultural sensitivity around sexual health and gender bias, coupled with vaccine hesitancy – making it a pressing public health concern.

In light of this, the Government of India launched a nationwide cervical cancer campaign on February 28, 2026, providing free HPV vaccinations to 1.15 crore girls aged 14-15 years. India bears a quarter of the global cervical cancer burden, reporting over 1.2 lakh new cases and 80,000 deaths annually. Since nearly 95% of cases are caused by high-risk HPV strains, vaccination offers a significant preventive breakthrough.

From data to coverage

To implement the programme effectively and inclusively, the Mandsaur district administration adopted a data-driven, decentralised and adaptive strategy. For exhaustive coverage, the most vulnerable and often overlooked populations were targeted first. Girls from difficult-to-reach communities – Banchhadas, nomadic tribes, urban slums, and school dropouts – became the starting point. These "missed populations" are at greater risk of falling off the radar of government service delivery.

At the grassroots, the challenge is often not vaccine hesitancy but data invisibility. Leveraging



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Madhya Pradesh

multiple government databases – Rashtriya Bal Swasthya Karyakram (RBSK), SAMAGRA MP (a citizen-centric social security platform by the Government of Madhya Pradesh) and Ladli Laxmi Yojana hyper-localised target lists were created. Fragmented data were transformed into actionable intelligence. Door-to-door surveys and tracking through SAMAGRA IDs ensured that eligible girls did not fall through statistical gaps. School and anganwadi enrolment gaps over the years were meticulously analysed to prepare village-level Master Line Lists. Rapid identification of 'low-coverage/high-resistance' areas enabled coordinated micro-planning. Mapping vulnerable groups geographically also enabled customising communication strategies, tailored to cultural sensitivities.

Reducing barriers through 'nudges'

Behavioural insights played a pivotal role in grassroots 'saturation'. The district relied on the "Nudge Approach" that helped design an environment where vaccination became the default choice. This helped in effectively breaking down grassroots barriers such as reluctance, inertia, social discomfort. Health-care workers informed families that their daughters were 'due for vaccination', rather than asking them to choose to vaccinate. Families who refused vaccinations received repeated counselling visits by health-care teams. Schools and local bodies arranged transportation to eliminate logistical barriers, simplifying access.

Misinformation hoaxes and myths around vaccine-induced infertility resulted in initial resistance. To counter rumours, the administration launched targeted awareness campaigns involving Gen-Z influencers and youth icons. National-level athletes, young doctors, students, religious leaders and media personalities voluntarily joined the effort to promote vaccination and dispel misconceptions.

Social norms and peer networks served as powerful "behavioural nudges". Local events publicly celebrated vaccinated families and recognised vaccinated girls as peer champions. Gram panchayat and ward-level data sharing sparked both collaboration and competition. Recognition was given to both top performers

and the most improved. "Digital nudges" and red-flag reminders for frontline workers enhanced monitoring and accountability.

At the cutting-edge implementation level, resistance often manifests as delay, doubt, and discomfort rather than outright refusal. Vaccinations were conducted exclusively under medical supervision at visible health-care facilities, normalising the practice of adolescent girls' vaccination. Experiences of women affected by cervical cancer were shared to create emotional resonance and encourage informed decision-making. Counselling sessions reduced stigma and replaced distrust with dialogue.

Strategy to impact

The HPV campaign was further integrated with on-going health-care programmes. Routine immunisation days, antenatal care clinics and the Pradhan Mantri Surakshit Matritva Abhiyan sessions were used to promote HPV awareness and conduct vaccination drives. When women accessed one service, they became more receptive to another, creating avenues for 'bundling' of health-care service delivery.

The results were significant. In less than 40 days, Mandsaur achieved 100% of its vaccination target – 493 vaccination sessions were conducted through 12 permanent and 27 temporary vaccination sites across the district. Girls who met the criteria, from 893 villages and 190 urban wards, were mobilised, moving from planning on paper to protecting the population.

The magnitude of India's health-care challenge must be met with the measure of its grassroots' actions. Policy design must bridge the yawning gap between intended outcomes and empirical ground realities. Behavioural and systemic "nudges" in implementation can leverage the human tendency to opt for preset choices. Dovesailing health-care data and grassroots innovations tailored to regional realities can bridge the last mile and deliver the final dose.

By moving from coverage to care, from data to impact, Mandsaur turned a formidable public health challenge into a collective mass movement. The district's inclusive vaccination campaign demonstrated how a simple shot in the arm can truly become a fair shot at life.

- Denotified Tribes
- Nomadic Communities
- School Dropouts
- Urban Slums

Behavioural Interventions

- Application of Nudge Theory.
- Repeated counselling for hesitant families.
- Community mobilization through:
 - Panchayats
 - Schools
 - Religious leaders
 - Youth influencers
- Public recognition of vaccinated girls.
- Digital monitoring and real-time tracking.

Programme Convergence

Integrated with:

- Routine Immunisation Programme
- Pradhan Mantri Surakshit Matritva Abhiyan (PMSMA)
- Antenatal Care Services
- School Health Activities

Static Linkages

- Article 21 – Right to Health (Judicial Interpretation under Right to Life).
- Article 47 – Duty of the State to improve public health.
- Health is primarily a State Subject (State List).
- National Health Policy, 2017 emphasizes preventive and promotive healthcare.
- Universal Immunisation Programme (UIP) is India's flagship immunisation programme.
- Behavioural Economics (Nudge Theory):
 - Proposed by Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein.
 - Encourages desirable behaviour through choice architecture without coercion.

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Reduces cervical cancer incidence and mortality.
- Strengthens preventive healthcare.
- Improves adolescent health outcomes.
- Demonstrates effective use of digital governance.
- Promotes inclusion of vulnerable communities.
- Supports SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being).

Challenges

- Vaccine hesitancy due to misinformation.
- Social stigma around adolescent reproductive health.
- Identification of out-of-school girls.
- Last-mile healthcare delivery in remote areas.
- Cold-chain and logistics management.
- Need for sustained awareness campaigns.

Way Forward

- Include HPV vaccine under the Universal Immunisation Programme (UIP).
- Strengthen IEC campaigns to counter vaccine myths.
- Integrate HPV vaccination with School Health Programme and Ayushman Bharat Health & Wellness Centres.
- Expand digital beneficiary tracking through Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission (ABDM).
- Increase cervical cancer screening among adult women.
- Build capacity of ASHA, ANM and Anganwadi workers.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context of the News

- Government of India launched a nationwide HPV vaccination campaign on 28 February 2026.
- The campaign aims to provide free HPV vaccination to 1.15 crore girls (14–15 years) to reduce the burden of cervical cancer.
- Mandsaur district (Madhya Pradesh) achieved 100% vaccination coverage within 40 days through a data-driven and behavioural approach, making it a model for last-mile healthcare delivery.

Key Points

Cervical Cancer

- Second most common cancer among Indian women.
- India accounts for nearly 25% of the global cervical cancer burden.
- Around 1.2 lakh new cases and 80,000 deaths occur annually (MoHFW/WHO estimates).
- Nearly 95% of cervical cancer cases are caused by persistent infection with high-risk Human Papillomavirus (HPV).

Human Papillomavirus (HPV)

- A sexually transmitted virus.
- High-risk types: HPV-16 and HPV-18 cause the majority of cervical cancer cases.
- Vaccination is most effective before exposure to the virus, hence targeted at adolescent girls.

Mandsaur Model

- Identification of beneficiaries using:
 - Rashtriya Bal Swasthya Karyakram (RBSK)
 - SAMAGRA ID
 - Ladli Laxmi Yojana database
- Preparation of Village-level Master Line Lists.
- Door-to-door verification.
- Special focus on:

Unwelcome surge

The buoyancy in GST collections is spurred by imported inflation

India's June GST collections rose 13.9% year-on-year to ₹1.95 lakh crore, driven largely by import IGST, which surged 34.6% compared with June 2025, up from 17.2% growth in May. Domestic GST collections grew by a more modest 6.5%, suggesting that the sharp increase in overall collections owes less to a broad-based improvement in domestic value addition. Some economists have argued that this reflects stronger imports of capital goods and industrial inputs. However, May petroleum products' trade data and Q1 FY27 data on the performance of the eight core industries, point to a rather different explanation. June GST collections reflect economic activity during May. While crude and petroleum products constituted a 54% rise this May (YoY) in merchandise imports by value, the other chunk was gold, which constituted another 34% rise. The surge in gold price, by nearly 60% between last May and this May, suggests hedging during difficult times, rather than broad-based economic activity. To stem gold imports, the government hiked its import duty from 6% to 15% on May 13, which likely added to the May import GST kitty. This period also coincided with the rupee depreciating by almost 6% against the U.S. dollar since late February. This coupled with a spike in freight charges, and a 14.5% rise on non-oil imports in May at elevated global prices mechanically raised the June tax base. This suggests that much of the import GST rise is driven by imported inflation and currency depreciation rather than domestic production growth, indicating an unwelcome increase due to higher prices.

Read alongside the performance of India's eight core industries, which expanded by only about 2.8% in Q1 FY27 compared with around 6% in the corresponding period last year, the domestic economy appears more subdued. Growth has been expectedly weak in crude oil, natural gas, refinery products, fertilizers and electricity. The latest HSBC Manufacturing PMI reading of 54.2 likewise points to steady but moderating factory activity, marking the second-lowest expansion in 13 months. These figures come as India marks nine years of GST as a unified destination-based indirect tax. The government can point to the expansion of the tax base from about 66 lakh taxpayers in 2017 to over 1.65 crore today, reflecting better compliance, greater formalisation, and faster refunds, though input tax credit, litigation and federal balance in revenue sharing issues remain unresolved. GST has strengthened India's indirect tax architecture. Yet, the June numbers are a reminder that a growing share of the recent buoyancy appears to have been underwritten by imported inflation and a depreciating rupee rather than stronger domestic value addition.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- India's Gross GST collections (June 2026) increased by 13.9% YoY to ₹1.95 lakh crore.
- Growth was driven mainly by Import IGST (34.6%), while domestic GST collections grew only 6.5%.
- Higher collections largely reflected higher import values, rupee depreciation, and imported inflation, rather than robust domestic economic activity.

Key Points

- Gross GST Collection: ₹1.95 lakh crore (June 2026).
- Import IGST growth: 34.6%.
- Domestic GST growth: 6.5%.
- Gold import duty: Increased from 6% to 15% (May 2026).
- Rupee depreciation: Around 6% against the US dollar.
- Eight Core Industries growth (Q1 FY27): 2.8% (vs ~6% in Q1 FY26).
- HSBC Manufacturing PMI: 54.2 (Expansion continues but at a slower pace).
- GST taxpayer base increased from 66 lakh (2017) to over 1.65 crore.

Static Linkages

- 101st Constitutional Amendment Act, 2016 introduced GST.
- Article 246A: Concurrent GST powers to Centre and States.
- Article 269A: Levy and distribution of IGST.
- Article 279A: GST Council.
- GST is a destination-based, value-added indirect tax.
- Imports are treated as inter-State supplies and attract IGST.
 - Eight Core Industries: Coal
 - Crude Oil
 - Natural Gas
 - Refinery Products
 - Fertilisers
 - Steel
 - Cement
 - Electricity
- PMI > 50 indicates expansion.

Critical Analysis

Positives

- Higher GST collections strengthen fiscal position.
- Rising taxpayer base indicates greater formalisation and compliance.
- Improved digital tax administration.

Concerns

- GST growth driven mainly by imported inflation, not domestic value addition.
- Weak domestic GST reflects subdued consumption and manufacturing.
- Slowing core sector growth signals moderation in industrial activity.
- Persistent issues in Input Tax Credit (ITC), litigation and Centre-State fiscal relations.

Way Forward

- Boost domestic manufacturing and value addition.
- Simplify GST structure and ITC mechanism.
- Reduce GST disputes through timely reforms.
- Improve export competitiveness.
- Maintain macroeconomic stability to contain imported inflation.
- Strengthen GST compliance using technology and data analytics.

Air pollution plan needs political will, not an eye on the election cycle

OVER THE past few years, we have witnessed a troubling disconnect between scientific evidence and policy implementation in the country. First, the weak enforcement of the fuel-ban policy for end-of-life vehicles undermined its intended impact. Then, the draft Electric Vehicles (EV) Policy 2.0 raised serious concerns among environmentalists by proposing to extend EV incentives to hybrid vehicles. While hybrids combine petrol engines with electric motors, they remain dependent on fossil fuels and cannot deliver the full environmental and public-health benefits of zero-emission mobility.

Against this backdrop, the Delhi government's latest initiative marks a step in the right direction by targeting emissions at their source rather than targeting the open sky. It offers renewed hope for sustained improvements in air quality. The push for the EV policy 2.0 might shrink the urban carbon footprint, and the purification of local air could help alleviate concerns over respiratory and other non-communicable diseases that affect a substantial section of the city's population. For the metropolis, which juggles a staggering fleet of over 15 million vehicles, transitioning to electric mobility is no longer just an environmental aspiration; it is a public health imperative.



GURRAN BEIG

And cars. Policymakers need to prioritise targets based on the most polluting fleet. Transitioning commercial vehicles to EVs will yield the maximum benefit. However, practical challenges need to be assessed. The public health payoffs of this structural shift are monumental. According to an NIAS policy brief, adoption of EVs would avert 800 premature deaths annually because cleaner air would reduce diseases linked to vehicle emissions, such as heart disease, stroke, lung cancer, and respiratory illnesses. It will save 12,000 years lost to disability every year. In other words, Delhi's population would collectively gain the equivalent of 12,000 additional healthy years of life every year through reduced illness and premature death. Beyond the intrinsic value of human life, this transition makes undeniable economic sense. According to the NIAS study in 2025, transitioning two-wheelers, three-wheelers, and light commercial vehicles fully to electric power could save at least Rs 1,000 crore every year in averted medical expenses, reduced hospital admissions, and recovered economic productivity. When weighed against the Delhi government's pledge to invest Rs 15,000 crore in the EV policy over the next four years, the return on investment becomes clear. The state's entire four-year financial commitment to subsidies and infrastructure is likely to be offset soon. However, this needs to be extended to other vehicle categories firmly to get early returns.

The success of the policy will require sustained investment. Its true environmental and physiological rewards will mature over years rather than months. Policymakers will need to stay the course and demonstrate political will. Air pollution does not recognise election cycles. For Delhi to witness a permanent transformation, these mandates must be agnostic to political shifts, and public health needs to be given top priority. The government also needs to give weightage to phasing out CNG. After all, its use also involves combustion and, therefore, pollution – especially of NOx. Such pollution needs to be curbed. This is the time for deliberate, science-aligned, and phased policy-making (as underlined by the National Air Quality Resource Framework of India) – one that sets clear targets and ensures that interim measures do not undermine long-term goals. If we truly care about clean air, we must get the priorities and the timelines right. We understand that transport bears an enormous responsibility for pollution's stranglehold on our cities, and we have finally made a good start. Now, we must summon the courage and political will to keep to the ultimate solution, attack the source directly, rather than languish in the mediocrity of transitional technologies. In a city gasping for every breath of clean air, our survival may well depend on the choices we make today.

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While the present policy is a good start, to truly clear the air, subsequent policies must tackle the two heaviest polluters: Heavy commercial vehicles and buses, which command around 60 per cent of transport emissions

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- The Delhi Government has approved EV Policy 2.0 to accelerate the transition towards zero-emission mobility and improve urban air quality.
- Key proposals include:
 - From 1 January 2027: Registration of only electric three-wheelers and light goods vehicles.
 - From 1 April 2028: Registration of only electric two-wheelers.
- The policy aims to reduce transport-sector emissions, improve public health, and support India's climate commitments.

Key Points

- Transport sector contributes 41% of Delhi's PM2.5 emissions (NIAS Policy Brief, 2025).
- Complete electrification of:
 - Two-wheelers
 - Three-wheelers
 - Light commercial vehicles
 - can reduce nearly 35% of transport emissions, translating into around 15% reduction in Delhi's PM2.5.
- Heavy commercial vehicles and buses account for nearly 60% of transport emissions; their electrification offers the greatest pollution reduction potential.
- Estimated benefits (NIAS, 2025):
 - Around 800 premature deaths avoided annually.
 - Around 12,000 Disability-Adjusted Life Years (DALYs) saved annually.
 - Annual economic savings of about ₹1,000 crore through reduced healthcare costs and productivity losses.
- Delhi plans to invest ₹15,000 crore over four years for EV subsidies and charging infrastructure.

Static Linkages

- Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981
- Environment (Protection) Act, 1986
- Article 21 – Right to Life includes the Right to a Clean Environment.
- Article 48A – Protection and improvement of the environment (DPSP).
- Article 51A(g) – Fundamental Duty to protect the environment.
- National Clean Air Programme (NCAP) – Target of up to 40% reduction in PM concentrations by 2026 (base year: 2017).
- FAME Scheme and PM E-Drive Scheme promote electric mobility.
- BS-VI emission norms regulate vehicular emissions.

Critical Analysis

Advantages

- Targets pollution at its source through electrification.
- Supports India's Net Zero by 2070 commitment.
- Improves urban air quality and public health.
- Reduces fossil fuel dependence and oil imports.
- Promotes domestic EV manufacturing and green jobs.

Challenges

- Policy does not immediately target the highest polluters (heavy commercial vehicles and buses).
- Inadequate charging infrastructure.
- Battery recycling and disposal challenges.
- High upfront cost of EVs.
- Continued dependence on CNG delays complete decarbonisation.
- Increased electricity demand requires greater renewable energy integration.

Way Forward

- Prioritise electrification of heavy commercial vehicles and public buses.
- Expand fast-charging infrastructure using renewable energy.
- Strengthen battery recycling under Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR).
- Integrate EV policy with NCAP and city-level clean air action plans.
- Promote indigenous battery manufacturing under the PLI Scheme.
- Adopt science-based emission inventories for policy evaluation.
- Ensure long-term policy continuity beyond political cycles.

On winter air, Delhi does the right thing

THE DELHI government has done the right thing in framing a pollution control strategy at least five months before the city's air quality assumes crisis proportions. It comprises most elements of the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) that have so far guided the NCR's approach to containing winter smog. But unlike in the past, when administrators would wait for the Air Quality Index (AQI) red alerts to impose restrictions, curbs on vehicles and construction activities will come into force from November 1 and continue for the next three to four months. Delhi government and private offices will operate with 50 per cent in-person staff attendance. This proactive approach would allow workplaces and business establishments to redesign work-flows, stagger employee attendance, invest in digital infrastructure and make transport arrangements before the pollution season begins. The plan addresses criticism that Delhi's pollution control authorities spring into action only after the foul air precipitates a public health emergency.

That said, bans and restrictions should not be part of a long-term pollution control strategy. Cleaning up Delhi's air will require creating a governance framework that rewards sustained reductions in emissions. Measures to implement the remote working directive, for instance, will need to be framed in a language of people's well-being and public health, not coercion. Policymakers will also be well advised not to treat Work From Home as a substitute for clean commuting. Delhi's recently-framed EV policy is a notable step in this direction. At the same time, reducing congestion on the capital's roads calls for sustained investment in reliable and interconnected public transport. The Delhi government has increased its fleet of electric buses, and the Metro has improved urban mobility to a great extent, but last-mile connectivity remains weak across many neighbourhoods.

The winter plan should, therefore, be part of a multi-pronged pollution control strategy. In recent years, experts have underlined that the national capital is part of a larger airshed with a chronic pollution problem. Delhi's air quality is influenced not just by activities in the city and its neighbourhood, but the toxic smog that engulfs the city in winters is also fed by biomass burning and industrial and transport sector emissions in an area stretching from Punjab in the north to Bengal in the east. In fact, most Indian cities fail to meet the national ambient air quality standards. The capital's decarbonisation plan should, therefore, be part of a larger project to ensure that people across the country breathe clean air. The Delhi government has taken the first step. Other states, too, need to get their act together — the Centre needs to guide and handhold them.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- The Delhi Government has decided to implement winter anti-pollution measures from 1 November, instead of waiting for severe Air Quality Index (AQI) levels.
- Measures include 50% Work From Home (WFH) in government and private offices, restrictions on construction activities, and curbs on polluting vehicles during the winter season.
- The initiative marks a shift from reactive to preventive air pollution management.

Key Points

- Delhi's winter pollution is caused by:
 - Vehicular emissions
 - Road and construction dust
 - Industrial emissions
 - Biomass and crop residue burning
 - Adverse meteorological conditions (temperature inversion, low wind speed)
- Delhi's pollution is an airshed issue, requiring coordinated action across NCR and neighbouring states.
- Long-term mitigation requires:
 - Cleaner transport
 - Public transport expansion
 - Regional emission control
 - Sustainable urban planning

Static Linkages

- Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981

- Environment (Protection) Act, 1986
- Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM), 2021
- Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP)
- National Clean Air Programme (NCAP)
- National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS)
- Article 21 – Right to a clean environment (Judicial interpretation)
- Article 48A – Protection and improvement of environment
- Article 51A(g) – Fundamental duty to protect the environment

Critical Analysis

Positives

- Preventive rather than emergency response.
- Reduces public health risks during peak pollution months.
- Encourages cleaner mobility and digital work culture.
- Improves preparedness of institutions and businesses.

Challenges

- WFH has limited impact on informal sector emissions.
- Weak last-mile public transport connectivity.
- Regional pollution sources remain outside Delhi's control.
- Seasonal restrictions alone cannot ensure sustained air quality improvement.

Way Forward

- Adopt airshed-based pollution management across northern India.
- Strengthen CAQM-led interstate coordination.
- Expand clean public transport and EV infrastructure.
- Reduce biomass and crop residue burning through sustainable alternatives.
- Focus on year-round emission reduction instead of seasonal restrictions.
- Strengthen continuous air quality monitoring and enforcement.

Delhi-Tokyo ties face the future

JAPANESE PRIME Minister Sanae Takaichi's visit to India this week comes in a time of growing uncertainty over the US approach towards China and the Indo-Pacific. While the first Donald Trump administration adopted a confrontational policy towards Beijing and invested in building regional coalitions to contain its rise, Trump 2.0 has favoured transactional one-on-one engagement over coalition-building. The Pentagon's decision to revert the Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM) to its original name, Pacific Command (PACOM), the 2025 National Security Strategy's narrow conception of core US interests in the Indo-Pacific, and the recent Trump-Xi summit have all fuelled concerns about Washington's reliability as a long-term partner for Asian countries wary of China. Against this backdrop, summit-level talks between PM Narendra Modi and PM Takaichi, less than a year after the former's visit to Japan, further boost the deep-rooted Delhi-Tokyo partnership. Japan's advanced technological capabilities, investment capacity, and growing military power make it uniquely placed to complement India's rise.

Both countries share concerns about China's assertiveness. India has an unresolved border, while Japan has maritime and territorial disputes. Technology is another important pillar of bilateral cooperation. Both countries seek to reduce dependence on Chinese technologies and rare earths. Japan brings capital, advanced manufacturing, and semiconductor expertise, while India offers scale, software talent and a vast market. A coordinated India-Japan strategy can help shape the value chains of the future.

The Indo-Pacific continues to be central to India's economic and security strategy. Whether Washington's recalibration turns out to be tactical or strategic, India must do its part by accelerating its military and technological modernisation while deepening strategic partnerships across the region. A closer partnership with Japan advances both objectives. Preserving a stable, rules-based Indo-Pacific and a favourable balance of power requires India and Japan to emerge as stronger strategic actors.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi visited India for bilateral summit talks with Prime Minister Narendra Modi.
- Both leaders reaffirmed commitment to a Free, Open, Inclusive and Rules-Based Indo-Pacific (FOIP).
- The visit assumes significance amid changing geopolitical dynamics and concerns over China's growing regional assertiveness.
- Focus areas include maritime security, defence cooperation, semiconductors, critical minerals, resilient supply chains, and emerging technologies.

Why is it Important ?

- India-Japan Bilateral Relations
- Indo-Pacific Strategy
- Quad & Maritime Security
- Supply Chain Resilience
- Defence Cooperation
- Critical Minerals & Semiconductor Ecosystem

Key Points

Strategic Partnership

- India and Japan elevated ties to Special Strategic and Global Partnership (2014).
- Shared objective of maintaining a rules-based international order.

Indo-Pacific Cooperation

- Support for:
 - Freedom of Navigation.
 - Respect for UNCLOS (1982).

- Peaceful settlement of maritime disputes.
- Cooperation through:
 - Quad
 - Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI)
 - Supply Chain Resilience Initiative (SCRI)

Defence Cooperation

- Bilateral exercises:
 - Dharma Guardian (Army)
 - JIMEX (Navy)
 - Veer Guardian (Air Force)
- Logistics cooperation under Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA), 2020.

Economic & Technology Cooperation

- Collaboration in:
 - Semiconductors
 - Rare earths & critical minerals
 - Green technologies
 - Artificial Intelligence
 - Advanced manufacturing
- Japan remains one of India's largest Official Development Assistance (ODA) partners.

Prelims Enrichment

Important Agreements

- Special Strategic and Global Partnership (2014)
- ACSA (2020)

Important Groupings

- Quad → India, Japan, Australia, USA
- SCRI → India, Japan, Australia

Important Exercises

- Dharma Guardian
- JIMEX
- Veer Guardian
- Malabar (India, Japan, USA, Australia)

Important Concepts

- UNCLOS, 1982
- Freedom of Navigation
- EEZ – 200 Nautical Miles
- Rules-Based International Order
- Indo-Pacific

Static Linkages

- Act East Policy
- SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region)
- Strategic Autonomy
- Maritime Security
- Blue Economy
- Official Development Assistance (ODA)
- Critical Minerals
- Global Value Chains (GVCs)

Mains Value Addition

Significance

- Strengthens India's Indo-Pacific strategy.

- Enhances maritime security in the Indian Ocean.
- Diversifies supply chains away from China.
- Promotes technology transfer and industrial cooperation.
- Supports India's semiconductor mission.
- Improves defence interoperability.

Challenges

- China's expanding regional influence.
- Delays in infrastructure implementation.
- Technology dependence in semiconductor manufacturing.
- Uncertainty in evolving global strategic alignments.
- Limited defence industrial co-production.

Way Forward

- Accelerate defence technology co-development.
- Expand semiconductor and critical mineral partnerships.
- Strengthen maritime domain awareness.
- Deepen cooperation under Quad and SCRI.
- Enhance connectivity and infrastructure projects.
- Promote trusted and resilient supply chains.