







# Daily CURRENT AFFAIRS

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### Resetting the India-U.S. Partnership in Uncertain Times

#### Why in the News?

India and the United States, once heralded as forging the defining strategic partnership of the 21st century, now find themselves at a crossroads.

- A perceptible drift has emerged in the bilateral relationship, highlighted by tactical irritants, rhetorical missteps, and diverging strategic signals.
- While the structural fundamentals remain intact, shared democratic values, converging geopolitical goals, and mutual economic interests, the tone and trajectory of the engagement require urgent recalibration.
- This call for a "reset" has come into sharper focus following a series of controversial U.S. moves, including overtures toward Pakistan and inwardlooking economic and immigration policies under the Trump administration.
- In this climate of global flux, the India-U.S. partnership, instead of becoming a casualty of uncertainty, must be rejuvenated with clarity, commitment, and candour.

# Background A Historic but Uneven Trajectory

The India-U.S. relationship has evolved through dramatic highs and deep lows—from the mistrust of the Cold War era to the historic 2005 Civil Nuclear Agreement. The post-1998 sanctions period transformed into strategic convergence with increased defence collaboration, counter-terrorism cooperation, and technology partnerships.



- 2005: The Civil Nuclear Agreement demonstrated an audacious strategic trust, positioning India as a de facto nuclear power without being a signatory to the NPT.
- 2016: India was designated a Major Defence Partner by the U.S., institutionalising defence ties.
- 2020: The Quad, Indo-Pacific strategies, and climate cooperation suggested deepening mutual interests.

However, the bilateral arc has never been linear. Past differences on Iran sanctions, Russia defence deals, trade tariffs, and immigration have tested the relationship.

## New Optimism and Strategic Alignment

- Prime Minister Modi's early engagement with U.S. President Donald Trump symbolised renewed energy.
- External Affairs Minister S.
   Jaishankar's presence at Trump's second-term inauguration reflected India's strategic bet on a bipartisan U.S. alignment. India had moved past the outdated hyphenation with Pakistan and positioned itself as a key Indo-Pacific player.
- Yet, recent developments, including Trump's lunch with Pakistan's military chief Asim Munir, lukewarm signals on economic cooperation,



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and an ambiguous H-1B visa stance, have introduced friction.

 These moves, seen as symbolic of a transactional and outdated worldview, risk undermining years of patient diplomacy.

# Features of the Current India-U.S. Relationship India and the U.S. continue to

# align on key strategic issues: Indo-Pacific Strategy: Both countries

- oppose China's assertive behaviour in the South China Sea and support a rules-based order.
- Defence Ties: Foundational agreements (COMCASA, LEMOA, BECA) have created interoperability.
- Counter-terrorism Cooperation: Intelligence sharing and joint exercises are ongoing.

Yet, optics and communication have faltered. U.S. military leaders praising Pakistan as a "phenomenal partner" despite its role in harbouring terrorism sends mixed signals to India.

#### Economic Cooperation with Underlying Frictions

- Trade and Investment: Bilateral trade stands at over \$190 billion (2023). India is part of the U.S.-led Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF).
- Tech Collaboration: Indian-origin CEOs in Silicon Valley symbolise deep innovation linkages.

#### However:

 Trump's comments discouraging Apple from manufacturing in India hurt the "China-plus-one" narrative India champions.  No Free Trade Agreement has materialised; tariff and regulatory barriers persist.

# Immigration and Talent Mobility Concerns

- H-1B Visa Uncertainty: Indian professionals make up 70% of H-1B visa holders, forming a key bridge in India-U.S. tech ecosystems.
- Protectionist Sentiment: Rising antiimmigrant rhetoric undermines mutual innovation potential.

# Policy Misunderstandings and Strategic Asymmetry

- India's Strategic Autonomy: Often misconstrued in Washington as ambivalence or "fence-sitting".
- Washington's Impatience: A transactional mindset clashes with India's long-term strategic lens.

Intellectuals like Ashley Tellis argue that India overestimates its capabilities. However, such views neglect India's sovereign ambition, shaped by its civilisation-state identity and developmental trajectory.

## Challenges in the India-U.S. Relationship

#### Re-emergence of "India-Pakistan Hyphenation"

A defining goal of Indian foreign policy has been to delink its global standing from Pakistan. However, Trump's recent Kashmir remarks and equal reference to both countries post-Operation Sindoor have revived a Cold War-era framework. Transactionalism in U.S. Foreign Policy

# Trump's diplomacy prioritises quick wins, deal-making, and electoral optics:

 His "America First" stance reduces complex partnerships to short-term bargains.









 Strategic decisions like warming up to the Pakistan military reflect old mindsets and tactical utility rather than long-term partnership building.

Erosion of Trust on Trade and Investment

Statements by U.S. leaders casting doubt on investing in India run counter to the joint goals of supply chain resilience. Trade disagreements (e.g., medical device price controls, data localisation, digital taxation) remain unresolved.

# Lack of Institutional Depth and Coordination

India lacks a strong, institutionalised lobbying and policy engagement structure in Washington. Conversely, the U.S. often fails to decode India's calibrated signalling, especially on issues like Russia, Iran, and global governance reforms.

Diverging Priorities in Global Forums

- Climate Policy: Differences in technology access, finance, and carbon equity.
- WTO and Trade Rules: India's developmental stance sometimes clashes with U.S. positions.
- Ukraine War: India's balanced approach differs from the U.S. position.

# Way Forward: Recalibrating the Partnership India's Strategic Path Deepen Quiet Diplomacy

- Avoid public overreaction to U.S. inconsistencies.
- Use backchannel diplomacy to recalibrate trust and signal areas of convergence.

#### Invest in U.S. Ecosystem Engagement

- Build long-term coalitions through Indian-American legislators, think tanks (Brookings, Carnegie), and universities.
- Broaden engagement beyond the White House, Congress, governors, diaspora networks, and Fortune 500 CEOs.

# Reframe Immigration as Innovation Diplomacy

- H-1B, Optional Practical Training (OPT), and STEM visa policies should be projected as shared innovation needs.
- Highlight Indian talent's contribution to the U.S. economy and strategic technology leadership.

#### Make India an Economic Magnet

- Push forward infrastructure, ease of doing business, judicial reforms, and labour reforms.
- Create a predictable regulatory ecosystem to encourage U.S. FDI in electronics, EVs, semiconductors, and defence.

# U.S. Responsibilities in Resetting Tone

#### **Abandon Cold War Mentality**

- Treat India as a unique civilizational power, not as a substitute for Pakistan or an anti-China proxy.
- Understand strategic autonomy as a strength, not a liability.

#### **Support India's Regional Initiatives**

- Back Indian infrastructure and connectivity investments in the Indian Ocean Region and South Asia.
- Coordinate Indo-Pacific capacitybuilding with India's "Neighbourhood First" and SAGAR doctrines.









#### **Show Strategic Patience**

- Accept that convergence with India may not always be linear or transactional.
- Recognise India's democratic and federal structure, where policy movement is evolutionary.

# Rediscovering the Moral Core of the Partnership

- This is not just about China's containment or market access.
- Both nations must rally around shared ideals: democracy, pluralism, sustainable development, and global governance reform.

The 2005 Civil Nuclear Deal is a case study in what bold trust can achieve. A similar moment is neededperhaps on codeveloping green technologies, Al governance, or digital infrastructure standards.

#### Conclusion: A Moment to Renew, Not Retreat

Despite recent turbulence, the India-U.S. relationship remains one of the most promising alignments in the 21st-century geopolitical landscape. The drift observed today is serious but not irreversible. It requires strategic empathy, political will, and a recalibration of tone and tactics.

#### **MAIN QUESTION**

Despite a robust strategic foundation, the India-U.S. partnership is experiencing a perceptible drift in recent times. Critically examine the reasons behind this drift and suggest a roadmap for recalibrating the relationship in an era of global uncertainty.

#### Q. Regarding the recent discourse on the India-U.S. strategic partnership, consider the following statements:

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- 1.The 2005 India-U.S. Civil Nuclear Agreement marked the first time the U.S. made an exception to its domestic nuclear laws for a non-NPT signatory.
- 2.The concept of "hyphenation" in diplomacy refers to grouping India and Pakistan under a common strategic lens.
- 3. The H-1B visa regime is a unilateral concession by the United States to facilitate the employment of Indian IT professionals.
- 4.The Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) is a joint military agreement among the Quad countries to counterbalance China's maritime influence.

## Which of the above statements is/are correct?

A. 1 and 2 only

B. 1, 2 and 3 only

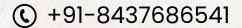
C. 2 only

D. 1 and 4 only

#### Answer: A. 1 and 2 only

#### **Explanation:**

- Statement 1 Correct: The 2005 Civil Nuclear Agreement indeed marked a turning point where the U.S. adjusted its domestic laws and influenced international regimes to accommodate India, a non-NPT state.
- Statement 2 Correct: "Hyphenation" refers to treating India and Pakistan as part of the same diplomatic framework, a policy India has long sought to decouple.
- Statement 3 Incorrect: The H-1B visa is not a unilateral concession to India. It is a merit-based program open to all nations and benefits U.S. tech companies.
- Statement 4 Incorrect: IPEF is an economic framework, not a military agreement, and includes countries beyond the Quad.







# India-Canada Diplomatic Reset: A Step Toward Stability Amid Strained Ties

#### Why in the News?

India and Canada have agreed to restore diplomatic representation by reappointing High Commissioners and restarting stalled dialogue mechanisms after a diplomatic freeze lasting nearly two years.

- This decision was taken after a bilateral meeting between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Canada's new Prime Minister Mark Carney on the sidelines of the G-7 Outreach Summit at Kananaskis, Canada, in June 2025.
- The developments come after months of tension triggered by the killing of Khalistani separatist Hardeep Singh Nijjar in Canada in 2023, which led to mutual diplomatic expulsions, suspension of visa services, and the breakdown of talks on key trade and people-to-people cooperation.
- The recent meeting marks a calibrated diplomatic reset with renewed focus on trade, technology, energy cooperation, education, and mobility.

# Background: From Strategic Partners to Diplomatic Adversaries

India and Canada have historically enjoyed a cordial relationship based on Commonwealth ties, democratic values, multiculturalism, and robust people-to-people connections through a vibrant Indian diaspora of over 1.4 million people in Canada. Bilateral trade, education, and technology were key areas of cooperation.



The Rupture in Ties (2023)
Ties nosedived in 2023 after Canadian
Prime Minister Justin Trudeau accused
Indian agents of involvement in the
assassination of Hardeep Singh Nijjar, a
designated terrorist by India but a
Canadian citizen and vocal Khalistani
supporter. In retaliation, India denied the
allegations, expelled Canadian diplomats,
and suspended visa services for Canadian
nationals.

# Other developments exacerbating the rift included:

- A surge in pro-Khalistani protests targeting Indian missions in Canada.
- Canada's reluctance to act on India's concerns about extremism, security, and national sovereignty.
- Halting of talks on the Early Progress Trade Agreement (EPTA).
- Increasing friction at multilateral forums and cancellation of defence and cultural engagements.

#### **Political Transition in Canada**

The political landscape shifted with the election of Mark Carney as Canada's new Prime Minister in 2025. A seasoned economist and diplomat, Carney brings a more pragmatic and strategic outlook on bilateral and multilateral issues. His decision to meet PM Modi at the G-7 Summit reflects a pivot towards









rebuilding trust and restoring functional diplomacy.

#### Key Features of the Diplomatic Reset

Reappointment of High Commissioners

- Both countries have agreed to restore diplomatic presence in Ottawa and New Delhi.
- India has nominated Dinesh Patnaik, currently serving as Ambassador to Spain, as its next High Commissioner to Canada.
- Canada is expected to reciprocate by July 2025, restarting direct high-level diplomatic engagement.

# Resumption of Visa Services and Dialogue Mechanisms

- India and Canada are moving towards resuming visa services, a major relief for the large Indian student population, business travellers, and families.
- Senior and working-level mechanisms are being restored across areas including trade, education, migration, technology, and cultural exchange.

#### **Trade Talks Back on Track**

- Talks on the Early Progress Trade
   Agreement (EPTA) are set to resume
   to finalise the broader
   Comprehensive Economic
   Partnership Agreement (CEPA).
- Trade in clean energy, LNG, critical minerals, AI, and mobility will form the core of future discussions.

# Technology and Energy Cooperation The leaders discussed building partnerships in:

 Clean energy and LNG supplies to support India's energy security.

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- Digital transformation and artificial intelligence, with Canada being a leader in Al research.
- Critical mineral cooperation, where Canada's vast resources align with India's battery and renewable energy manufacturing needs.

#### **Education and Mobility**

- Indian students form the largest international student group in Canada.
- Talks include enhancing educational cooperation, student mobility, and mutual recognition of academic credentials.
- The emphasis on migration and supply chain resilience highlights interest in structured skilled migration pathways.

#### **Multilateral Engagement**

- The leaders committed to a rules-based international order, aligning on key G-7 priorities.
- Discussions included transnational crime, security, and freedom of expression, subtly referencing the lingering concerns around the Nijjar episode.
- A joint G-7 statement condemned transnational repression, hinting at mutual concerns over the issue of foreign soil for political violence.

# Challenges to Full Normalisation Despite the promising reset, several structural and political challenges remain:

Trust Deficit Over Khalistani Extremism

- India remains concerned about Canada's ambiguous stance on Khalistani groups that openly advocate separatism and violence.
- Public commemorations of separatist figures and targeting of Indian diplomatic missions in Canada are sticking points.





#### Diaspora Politics and Freedom of Speech Debate

- Canada's liberal immigration and free speech protections have often clashed with India's insistence on curbing extremism.
- Balancing freedom of expression with national security will remain a contested issue in future diplomacy.

#### **Slow Progress on Trade Deals**

- EPTA negotiations had already seen multiple delays even before the diplomatic row.
- Sensitive issues such as dairy protectionism in Canada and market access in India may hinder progress.

#### **Geopolitical Divergences**

- India is a strategic partner of the Global South, while Canada's foreign policy is heavily aligned with NATO and the West.
- Divergences over Russia, China, and Iran could impact alignment in multilateral platforms.

#### **Perception Management in Domestic Politics**

- In both countries, domestic political optics play a role in shaping diplomacy.
- In India, any perceived leniency toward Khalistani sympathisers may trigger backlash.
- In Canada, assertive action against pro-Khalistani groups could upset sections of the influential Sikh diaspora.

#### **Way Forward: From Fragile Truce** to Strategic Partnership

To build on the current momentum, both sides must take confidence-building and policy-oriented steps:

#### Institutionalise High-Level Dialogue

 Regular meetings between Foreign Ministers, National Security Advisors, and parliamentary delegations can strengthen mutual understanding and ensure continuity beyond leadership changes.

#### Joint Framework on Extremism

- Establish a bilateral mechanism on countering violent extremism and ensure intelligence-sharing on transnational threats.
- Encourage a code of conduct among diaspora groups and enforce laws against hate crimes and vandalism.

#### **Revive Economic Convergence**

- Expedite EPTA negotiations with timebound milestones.
- Promote joint ventures in critical minerals, green hydrogen, digital public infrastructure, and climate finance.
- Strengthen investment promotion agencies to support MSMEs and startups from both countries.

#### Strengthen Educational and **People-to-People Ties**

- Launch an India-Canada Education and Research Innovation Platform (IC-ERIP) to support research collaboration.
- Expand post-study work permits and structured internship programmes for Indian students.

#### **Create Multilateral Convergence**

 Coordinate closely at G-20, G-7, WTO, UN, and climate forums on issues like sustainable development, tech ethics, and equitable trade.



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 Canada could support India's longstanding demand for UN Security Council reforms and global south representation.

#### **Narrative Recalibration**

- Both sides should encourage public diplomacy campaigns to reset the narrative from mistrust to mutual benefit.
- Address media sensationalism and social media misinformation that often stoke public misunderstanding.

#### Conclusion

The diplomatic thaw between India and Canada, marked by the restoration of High Commissioners and renewed trade talks, signals a positive turn in a once-fractured relationship. However, genuine normalisation requires strategic patience, institutional trustbuilding, and political maturity on both sides. The shared democratic values and vibrant diaspora are assets that can either bridge or break the relationship, depending on how responsibly they are engaged.

#### Main Question:

Critically analyse the recent diplomatic reset between India and Canada in 2025. What were the underlying causes of the rupture, and what steps are necessary to ensure a sustainable and strategic partnership moving forward?

#### Q. Regarding the recent diplomatic developments between India and Canada in 2025, consider the following statements:

1. The Early Progress Trade Agreement (EPTA) aims to replace the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA).

- 2. Dinesh Patnaik has been appointed as India's next High Commissioner to Canada following the 2025 reset.
- 3. The reset was formalised during the official state visit of Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney to India.
- 4. The diplomatic tensions between India and Canada in 2023 were escalated due to India designating Hardeep Singh Nijjar as a terrorist under the UAPA.

#### Which of the above statements is/are correct?

A. 1 and 3 only

B. 2 and 4 only

C. 1, 2 and 4 only

D. 2, 3 and 4 only

Answer: B. 2 and 4 only

#### **Explanation:**

- Statement 1 Incorrect: EPTA does not replace CEPA; it is a precursor or stepping stone to finalising CEPA.
- Statement 2 Correct: Dinesh Patnaik has indeed been nominated as India's High Commissioner to Canada.
- Statement 3 Incorrect: The diplomatic reset occurred on the sidelines of the G-7 Summit, not during an official state visit.
- Statement 4 Correct: Hardeep Singh Nijjar was designated as a terrorist under India's Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA), which was one of the causes of the diplomatic row.

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# India Launches Operation Sindhu to Evacuate Nationals from Iran amid IsraelIran Conflict

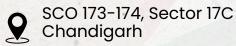
#### Why in the News?

India has launched **Operation Sindhu**, a special evacuation mission to rescue Indian nationals stranded in Iran, amid escalating tensions and open hostilities between Israel and Iran.

- The operation commenced with the successful evacuation of 110 Indian students, primarily from Jammu and Kashmir, followed by others from Uttar Pradesh and Karnataka.
- This development comes after Israeli airstrikes hit parts of Tehran, escalating fears among the Indian diaspora in Iran, particularly students and pilgrims. The evacuees were moved through land routes to Yerevan, Armenia, from where they were flown to New Delhi via Doha.
- However, many Indian pilgrims, especially from Uttar Pradesh, remain stranded with little clarity about subsequent evacuation efforts.
- This marks yet another humanitarian intervention by India under its doctrine of protecting citizens in global conflict zones, following the tradition of operations like Operation Ganga (Ukraine, 2022) and Operation Kaveri (Sudan, 2023).

# Background The Israel-Iran Conflict and the Regional Fallout

 The latest round of violence was triggered by escalating retaliation





- between Israel and Iran, following Israel's airstrikes targeting Iranian positions in Syria and, most recently, inside Iran.
- In retaliation, Iran launched drone and missile attacks on Israeli territory, triggering further aerial bombardments by Israel.
- Tehran, Qom, and other Iranian cities came under threat, impacting both locals and foreign nationals residing there, including Indian students and pilgrims.

#### Indians in Iran

- India maintains strong cultural and religious ties with Iran. Thousands of Indian students-especially from Kashmir, study medicine in Iranian universities due to affordable tuition and religious affinity.
- Additionally, Iran is a key destination for religious pilgrimages (ziyarat) for Shia Muslims from India, especially to cities like Qom, Mashhad, and Tehran.
- The crisis disrupted their safety, mobility, access to healthcare, and communication with Indian authorities.

## Features of Operation Sindhu Humanitarian Evacuation Mission

 110 Indian students were safely evacuated from northern Iran, primarily Qom and Tehran.



- The students were first moved by buses to Yerevan, Armenia, a safer location with functional airports, then flown to New Delhi via Doha.
- The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) coordinated with Iranian and Armenian authorities to ensure logistical safety and cross-border transit.

# High Concentration from Jammu and Kashmir

- Of the 110 students, around 90 were from Jammu and Kashmir, underlining the region's educational mobility toward Iran.
- Most were enrolled in medical degree programs, and some faced injuries or displacement due to the airstrikes.

#### **Diplomatic Coordination**

- Iran's Deputy Ambassador to India, Mohammad Javad Hosseini, affirmed Iran's cooperation and commitment to the protection of foreign nationals.
- This reflects the functional backchannel diplomacy between India and Iran, despite the broader regional instability.

#### **Challenges in Pilgrim Evacuation**

- While students have begun to return, nearly 90 Indian pilgrims from Uttar Pradesh, primarily elderly women and children, remain stranded in Iran.
- Reports from pilgrims suggest a lack of communication with the Indian Embassy and limited access to necessities, such as medicine and childcare essentials.

#### **Multistage Phased Operation**

 Operation Sindhu appears to be multiphased, with an initial focus on students.



 The next stage is likely to include the evacuation of pilgrims and other Indian nationals, depending on the evolving security situation and logistical feasibility.

#### Way Forward Immediate Expansion of Evacuation Efforts

- MEA must urgently map all Indian nationals currently in conflict zones in Iran, especially vulnerable groups like pilgrims, women, children, and the elderly.
- A dedicated helpline and crisis management team should be deployed to handle calls, update families, and coordinate relief.

## Establish Staging Posts in Safe Countries

- Armenia (Yerevan), Azerbaijan (Baku), or the UAE (Dubai/Abu Dhabi) could serve as evacuation staging hubs.
- India can work with these governments for transit corridors, especially via road or chartered aircraft.

#### **Air Force and Navy Preparedness**

 India must be ready to deploy the Indian Air Force (IAF) or naval assets, as in Operation Ganga and Operation Samudra Setu, for bulk evacuation if airspace over Iran becomes unmanageable or civilian aviation halts.

## Better Communication and Embassy Outreach

- The Indian Embassy in Tehran must:
  - Deploy mobile outreach teams to pilgrimage hotspots like Qom and Mashhad.
  - Set up temporary relief camps for stranded citizens with food, water, and medical aid.



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 Use SMS/email alerts, WhatsApp helplines, and local volunteers for communication.

#### Health and Psychological Support

- Students and pilgrims, especially those displaced or injured, must receive medical assistance and trauma counselling on arrival.
- MEA could coordinate with the Ministry of Health and NDRF (National Disaster Response Force) for arrival screening and support services.

#### **Emergency Contingency Planning** for Diaspora Hotspots

- India must build a Diaspora Conflict Early Warning System (DCEWS) under the Ministry of External Affairs.
- Countries with large Indian presence and potential geopolitical risks, like Iran, Israel, Russia, and African conflict zones, should be monitored for evacuation readiness.

#### **Geostrategic Diplomacy**

- India must balance ties with Iran and Israel, ensuring neutrality in rhetoric while prioritising humanitarian diplomacy.
- It should avoid entanglement in the broader Middle East conflict but offer to mediate or promote de-escalation through multilateral platforms like the UN.

#### Conclusion

Operation Sindhu reaffirms India's unwavering commitment to the safety and welfare of its citizens abroad. It is a testament to India's rising diplomatic agility, ability to operate across conflict zones, and its growing global humanitarian profile.

However, as the Middle East becomes increasingly volatile, India must adopt a more proactive and anticipatory strategy, not only to protect its diaspora but also to assert its place as a responsible global actor in crisis diplomacy.

#### **Main Question**

Critically examine India's Operation Sindhu in the context of its evolving doctrine of diaspora protection during international conflicts. What does it reveal about India's diplomatic capacity, regional neutrality, and emergency preparedness?

#### 1. About India's Operation Sindhu (2025), consider the following statements:

- 1. It was launched to evacuate Indian nationals from both Iran and Israel.
- 2. The first batch of evacuees consisted mostly of students from Jammu and Kashmir.
- 3. The operation used Indian Air Force aircraft to airlift citizens directly from Tehran.

#### Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

A. 1 and 2 only

B. 2 only

13

C. 2 and 3 only

D. 1 and 3 only

Answer: B. 2 only

Statement 1 is incorrect; the operation is focused on Iran only.

Statement 3 is incorrect: evacuation occurred via Armenia and commercial routes, not IAF aircraft from Tehran.



## **Chandigarh Tops School Education** Index, While Meghalaya Lags: PGI 2.0 Report

#### Why in the News?

The Performance Grading Index (PGI) 2.0 for 2023-24, released by the Union Ministry of Education, has ranked Chandigarh as the top performer in school education in India, while Meghalaya has emerged as the lowest scorer.

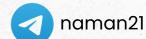
- This annual report evaluates the performance of all Indian States and Union Territories (UTs) on various education-related parameters.
- The PGI 2.0 is a revamped framework introduced to offer a comprehensive assessment of the school education system, incorporating both outcomeoriented and governance indicators.
- The latest results highlight that no state or UT has yet entered the highest performance band, reflecting the pressing need for systemic reforms.

#### Background: Understanding the PGI 2.0 **Framework**

#### What is the Performance Grading Index (PGI)?

Launched in 2017-18, the PGI is an evidence-based assessment framework developed by the Department of School Education and Literacy (DoSEL), Ministry of Education. It measures the performance of States and UTs against a set of clearly defined indicators.

In 2023, the Ministry introduced PGI 2.0, a refined version aimed at strengthening alignment with the National Education





Policy (NEP) 2020, SDG 4 (Quality Education), and outcomes-based governance.

#### What Does PGI 2.0 Measure? The PGI 2.0 evaluates States and UTs across six key domains:

- Learning Outcomes and Quality
- Access (enrolment, transition rates, retention)
- Infrastructure and Facilities
- Equity (gender, socio-economic parity)
- Governance Processes
- Teacher Education and Training

#### Key Features of the 2023 - 24 PGI 2.0 Report

#### **Chandigarh Leads the Nation**

- Chandigarh secured a total of 719 points, making it the only region to fall in the Prachesta-1 category (701–760 points).
- This reflects strong performance across learning outcomes, teacher training, infrastructure, and governance.
- As a Union Territory with a small geographic and administrative size, Chandigarh's focused governance and urban advantage have contributed significantly to its score.

#### No State Crossed the Top Bracket

• The top performance range (761–1,000) remains unachieved.



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- This indicates that even the best performers have yet to meet the optimal benchmarks across all domains.
- Ministry officials highlighted this as a "wake-up call" for all education departments.

#### **Middle and Lower Performers**

- Grade Prachesta-3 (581–640) includes 10 states/UTs: Punjab, Delhi, Gujarat, Odisha, Kerala, Dadra Nagar Haveli & Daman Diu, Haryana, Goa, Maharashtra, and Rajasthan.
- Grade Akanshi-1 (521–580) includes 14 states/UTs such as Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, and Himachal Pradesh.
- Grade Akanshi-2 (461–520) includes underperformers like Telangana, Assam, Jharkhand, Tripura, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Manipur, and Mizoram.
- Grade Akanshi-3 (401–460) has only Meghalaya, the lowest performer, with a score of 417.

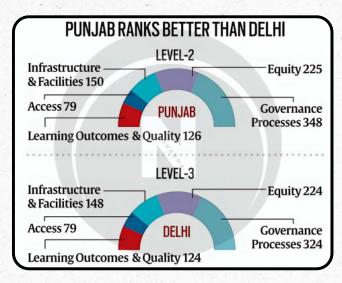
#### **Areas of Improvement**

- 24 States/UTs improved their scores, showcasing progress in governance and access.
- Bihar and Telangana showed maximum improvement in access, highlighting success in enrolment and outreach.
- Delhi, J&K, and Telangana made the most progress in the infrastructure domain.

#### Challenges Revealed by the Report

Despite some signs of progress, the PGI 2.0 report exposes several deep-rooted challenges in India's school education ecosystem.

Structural Inequities



- Northeastern states and tribaldominated regions such as Meghalaya, Manipur, and Mizoram continue to lag.
- · Infrastructure, teacher availability, and access to digital education remain major bottlenecks in these areas.

#### **Learning Outcomes Lag**

- Even top-scoring states fail to meet national averages in foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN).
- The ASER report 2023 echoes this concern: more than 40% of Class 5 students cannot read Class 2-level texts in many states.

#### **Governance Deficit**

- Many states lack real-time data systems, trained personnel, and effective monitoring.
- Weak planning, poor teacher deployment, and unutilised budgetary allocations plague lowranking states.

#### Infrastructure Gaps

- Basic school infrastructure, functional toilets, boundary walls, libraries, and ICT tools remains sub-par in most backwards states.
- Connectivity issues in hilly and remote areas worsen these problems.



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#### **Teacher Shortages and Training** Gaps

- The report underscores the shortage of qualified teachers and inadequate training in pedagogy and assessment.
- States like Bihar, Jharkhand, and Assam have high pupil-teacher ratios and under-resourced teacher training institutes.

#### **Way Forward: Towards Holistic Educational Reform**

To move towards the 761+ score range, India must adopt mission-mode reforms that address systemic gaps while building on strengths identified by the PGI 2.0 report.

#### **Prioritise Foundational Learning**

- Implementation of NIPUN Bharat (National Initiative for Proficiency in Reading with Understanding and Numeracy) must be accelerated.
- Integration of mother tongue instruction, activity-based learning, and digital tools at the primary level is essential.

#### Invest in Data-Driven Governance

- Strengthen UDISE+ and Shagun platforms for real-time school-level monitoring.
- Develop state-specific education dashboards to track performance, funding, and outcomes transparently.

#### **Decentralise and Localise Solutions**

- Empower local governance bodies (Panchayats, School Management Committees) to monitor school performance and suggest solutions.
- Encourage State Innovations like Delhi's Happiness Curriculum, Kerala's ICTenabled classrooms, and Haryana's teacher attendance monitoring apps.

#### **Bridge the Digital Divide**

- Expand internet connectivity in rural and tribal belts.
- Provide low-cost digital infrastructure and e-learning content in regional languages.
- Encourage Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) to fund ICT-based learning platforms.

#### **Revamp Teacher Training and** Deployment

- Restructure B.Ed programs to include blended learning, internship, and pedagogy for inclusive classrooms.
- Use AI and GIS tools to optimise teacher postings and reduce absenteeism in remote areas.

#### Focus on Equity and Inclusion

- Provide targeted incentives and scholarships for SC/ST/OBC girls and children with disabilities.
- Monitor dropout rates among migrant, first-generation, and linguistic minority learners, especially post-COVID.

#### Strengthen Pre-Primary and **Vocational Education**

- Link Anganwadis to primary schools and ensure ECCE (Early Childhood Care and Education) integration under Samagra Shiksha 2.0.
- Promote vocational education from middle school as per NEP 2020, in sectors like agriculture, tourism, Al, and green economy.

#### **Celebrate and Replicate Success** Models

· States like Chandigarh, Delhi, and Kerala should serve as model states for best practices in urban governance, teacher motivation, and digital adoption.



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Statement 2 is incorrect: Chandigarh

760), not Daksh (761-1,000), which no

J&K showed notable improvement in

state achieved.

infrastructure.

data source.

scored 719, so it falls in Prachesta-1 (701-

Statement 3 is correct: Telangana and

Statement 4 is incorrect: PGI 2.0 does

not replace UDISE+; it complements it.

UDISE+ continues to serve as the primary

#### Conclusion

The PGI 2.0 report serves not merely as a grading exercise but as a diagnostic tool for education policy planning in India. While Chandigarh's top score and Telangana/Bihar's improvements offer hope, the absence of any state in the topmost performance band is a stark reminder of the unfinished agenda in Indian school education.

Why has no Indian state achieved the top performance band in PGI 2.0, and what reforms are needed to improve school

Main question

education outcomes?

#### Which of the following statements about the PGI 2.0 (2023-24) and its alignment with national policies is/are correct?

- 1. PGI 2.0 incorporates indicators aligned with both NEP 2020 and Sustainable Development Goal 4.
- 2. The top performance grade, "Daksh," was awarded to Chandigarh for achieving above 760 points.
- 3. States showing the highest improvement in infrastructure include Telangana and Jammu & Kashmir.
- 4. The PGI 2.0 completely replaces the UDISE+ system for education data collection.

#### Select the correct option:

- A) 1 and 3 only
- B) 2 and 4 only
- C) 1, 2, and 3 only
- D) 1, 3, and 4 only

Correct Answer: A) 1 and 3 only

#### **Explanation:**

Statement 1 is correct: PGI 2.0 aligns with NEP 2020 and SDG 4 (Quality Education).



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# Global Liveability Index 2025

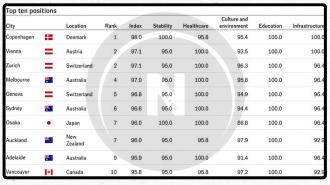
#### Why in the News?

- The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU)
  has released its much-anticipated
  Global Liveability Index 2025, ranking
  173 cities worldwide on the basis of their
  quality of life. The report provides
  insights into global urban trends postpandemic, evaluates socio-economic
  resilience, and spotlights the widening
  disparity in liveability among developed
  and developing nations.
- Significantly, Copenhagen (Denmark)
  has emerged as the most liveable city
  in the world, scoring a near-perfect
  98/100, while Damascus (Syria)
  continues to occupy the bottom spot.
- For India, Delhi and Mumbai are jointly placed at 141st, underlining persistent urban challenges such as inadequate public infrastructure, air pollution, and overburdened healthcare.

#### **Background**

The Global Liveability Index has become an authoritative benchmark for urban quality of life since its inception.

- Published annually by the Economist Intelligence Unit, the index serves a wide array of stakeholders, including corporations, policy planners, relocation agencies, and academics.
- It helps identify not just which cities are attractive to live in, but also highlights areas needing reform for urban administrators.
- In recent years, liveability has become a multidimensional issue, increasingly linked to climate resilience, inclusive infrastructure, mental health, and digital access.



- The COVID-19 pandemic catalysed a fundamental rethink in urban liveability parameters, placing greater emphasis on health systems and resilient governance.
- The 2025 edition of the Index builds on these evolving metrics to offer a comprehensive snapshot of the global urban landscape.

#### Key Features of the Global Liveability Index 2025 Publisher and Purpose

- Publisher: Economist Intelligence
   Unit (EIU), a sister organisation of The
   Economist magazine.
- Objective: To assess how comfortable it is to live in a given city, based on social stability, quality of services, and urban infrastructure.

#### Scope

- Covers 173 cities across continents, making it one of the most expansive global indices on urban quality of life.
- nges faced by residents in their dayto-day life.

#### **Top Performers (2025)**

- Copenhagen (98/100) Scored perfectly in stability, education, and infrastructure.
- Tied 2nd: Vienna and Zurich Maintained high ranks due to efficient public services.
- Others in Top 10: Melbourne, Geneva, Sydney, Osaka, Auckland, and Calgary.

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 Western European and Asia-Pacific cities dominate due to universal healthcare, efficient transport systems, and clean environments.

India's Performance

- Delhi and Mumbai are both placed at 141st out of 173.
- Persisting issues:
  - Overstretched public healthcare
  - Poor air quality and high pollution
  - Traffic congestion
  - Safety and sanitation concerns
- No Indian city figured in the top 100, indicating a need for systemic reforms.

Global

- Damascus (Syria): Conflict-ridden, with broken infrastructure and security threats.
- Tripoli (Libya) and Dhaka (Bangladesh) are plagued by civil unrest, poor healthcare, and environmental degradation.

**Noteworthy Changes** 

- Al Khobar (Saudi Arabia) improved significantlyjumped 13 places due to healthcare and education reforms.
- Several cities in Eastern Europe and Latin America saw improvements due to political stabilisation and post-COVID recovery policies.

# Challenges Highlighted by the 2025 Index Urban-Rural and Global North-South

## Urban-Rural and Global North-South Divide

- The index lays bare the liveability divide between developed and developing countries.
- While cities in Europe and Oceania thrive, South Asian, African, and conflict-ridden cities consistently score low.

 Resource inequality and governance gaps contribute significantly to this divergence.

# Healthcare Crisis in Developing Cities

- Low scores in India, Bangladesh, and African countries reflect the fragile state of public healthcare.
- Overcrowding, low doctor-patient ratios, and limited emergency services remain persistent issues.
- The post-pandemic investment in healthcare is not yet yielding proportionate results in these regions.

#### Climate Change and Environmental Stress

- Many cities lost points under the Culture & Environment category due to:
  - Extreme weather (e.g., heatwaves in Delhi, flooding in Jakarta)
  - High air pollution levels
  - Poor waste management systems

#### **Infrastructural Deficiencies**

- Urban sprawl, inadequate public transport, and poor road quality continue to plague cities like Mumbai and Delhi.
- Even in moderately performing cities, a lack of inclusivity for differentlyabled persons and urban slums presents a grim picture.

#### **Governance and Safety**

- Cities in conflict zones like Damascus and Tripoli continue to suffer from low stability scores due to terrorism, political turmoil, and weak rule of law.
- In South Asia, women's safety and law enforcement gaps drag down the liveability quotient.

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#### Way Forward: Building More **Liveable Indian Cities** Adopt a "Right to the City" Framework

- As proposed by UN-Habitat, India should formalise urban citizenship rights that ensure access to housing, healthcare, sanitation, and mobility for all residents.
- Make cities inclusive, safe, and accessible to marginalised groups, migrants, and the poor.

#### Strengthen Urban Health Missions

- Expand the Ayushman Bharat Urban Health & Wellness Centres (HWCs) to deliver preventive and primary care in slums and peri-urban areas.
- Leverage telemedicine and mobile health vans in overcrowded metros.

#### Massive Investment in Clean Air and Transport

- Adopt successful models like Delhi's Electric Bus Fleet, Mumbai's Coastal Road Project, and Chennai's Stormwater Drainage Network across Tier-1 and Tier-2 cities.
- Incentivise non-motorised transport and climate-resilient city planning.

#### **Smart City 2.0 with a Human Face**

While the Smart Cities Mission, initiated in 2015, was a step in the right direction, the second phase should:

Prioritise citizen-centric planning

- · Use geospatial data for real-time governance
- Ensure infrastructure reaches the underserved neighbourhoods

#### **Local Governance and Urban** Decentralisation

Empower municipal corporations with fiscal autonomy and professional staff (urban planners, sanitation engineers).  Promote public participation through ward committees, digital grievance redressal, and social audits.

#### **Education and Skill** Infrastructure

- Build more public schools and skill centres in urban areas, especially near informal settlements.
- Integrate education with urban planning to make cities hubs of human capital development.

#### **Gender-Responsive Urban Planning**

- Install CCTV surveillance, well-lit streets, women-only transit options, and fast-track courts to address gendered urban insecurity.
- · Launch more schemes like Delhi's Mohalla Clinics and pink toilets for gender inclusivity.

#### Conclusion

The Global Liveability Index 2025 is a wake-up call for developing nations like India. As cities grow demographically and spatially, it is imperative to plan for people, not just populations. Improving urban liveability isn't just about better roads or hospitals; it is about building dignity into daily life for all residents. With strategic investment, political will, and citizen participation, India can transform its megacities into truly liveable urban centres by the end of this decade.

#### **Main Question**

What does the Global Liveability Index 2025 reveal about urban disparities across the world, and how can Indian cities improve their liveability in line with global standards?



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#### About the Global Liveability Index 2025, consider the following statements:

- 1. A city's ranking can decline despite scoring high in education if its healthcare and stability indicators worsen significantly.
- 2. Cities in regions affected by climate change-induced extreme weather events tend to lose points primarily under the "Stability" category.
- 3. Despite geopolitical tensions in Europe, cities like Zurich and Vienna maintained top ranks due to their localised governance and resilience in infrastructure and healthcare.
- 4. The Index explicitly includes metrics on digital access and internet connectivity under its Infrastructure sub-category.

• Statement 4 Correct: While not explicitly named as a standalone metric, digital infrastructure and connectivity are increasingly factored into the Infrastructure and Culture & Environment scores (e.g., public services, innovation, e-governance) in recent EIU methodologies.

#### How many of the above statements are correct?

A. Only one

B. Only two

C. Only three

D. All four

#### Correct Answer: C. Only three

#### **Detailed Explanation:**

- Statement 1 Correct: The Index is weighted, so a drop in Stability or Healthcare, both weighted higher than Education, can disproportionately affect rankings even if education scores are high.
- Statement 2 Incorrect: While climate change impacts cities, weather-related issues like floods or heatwaves are scored under Culture & Environment, not Stability, which focuses on crime, unrest, and terrorism.
- Statement 3 Correct: Cities like Zurich and Vienna have consistently high scores due to strong public systems, decentralised governance, and neutrality from regional conflicts.





## Form 17C and the **Fight for Electoral Accountability in India**

#### Why in the News?

The controversy surrounding the 2024 Maharashtra Vidhan Sabha elections, especially questions over transparency and the appointment process of Election Commissioners, has rekindled a national debate about the independence of the Election Commission of India (ECI). The enactment of the Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Act, 2023, has become a constitutional flashpoint, raising concerns over executive overreach, democratic erosion, and public trust in electoral integrity.

#### **Background**

- Constitutional Mandate: Article 324 of the Indian Constitution entrusts the ECI with the responsibility to conduct free and fair elections.
- Institutional Legacy: The ECI has historically been seen as an impartial constitutional body. Its credibility stems from its autonomous functioning and public trust.
- Judicial Interventions: In Anoop Baranwal v. Union of India (2023), the Supreme Court mandated an interim mechanism involving the CJI, Prime Minister, and Leader of Opposition in appointing Election Commissioners, due to legislative inaction.
- Legislative Override: Parliament responded by passing the ECI Appointment Act, 2023, excluding the judiciary from the selection panel, giving the executive majority control.



#### Features of the 2023 Appointment Law and Electoral Concerns **Executive Majority in Selection** Committee

- Provision: The Act provides a 2:1 executive majority-PM and Home Minister vs. the Leader of the Opposition.
- Implication: Reduces the process to a partisan exercise, where the ruling party can potentially appoint Commissioners favourable to its interests.

#### **Exclusion of the Chief Justice of India**

- Context: SC's 2023 verdict included the CJI to ensure neutrality.
- Issue: Parliament ignored this safeguard. No judicial oversight increases the chances of institutional capture by the ruling party.

#### **Conflict of Interest**

- Conflict: The same executive who contests elections appoints the election watchdog, raising questions of neutrality.
- Public Perception: This diminishes trust in electoral outcomes and institutional credibility.

#### Lack of Consultative Law-Making

 Concern: The law was passed with minimal parliamentary debate, no engagement with stakeholders or bipartisan consensus.



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 Example: Civil society groups and opposition parties expressed deep apprehensions about the rushed passage.

#### **Legal Challenge Pending**

- The Act is being challenged in the Supreme Court for potentially violating:
  - Article 324 Independent functioning of the ECI.
  - Basic Structure Doctrine –
     Undermining free and fair elections.

# Issue of Transparency: Form 17C and Electoral Accountability What is Form 17C?

 It contains polling station-level vote counts and voter turnout data, crucial for verifying election results.

# Challenges Due to Restricted Access:

#### **Limited Verification of Votes**

- Only candidates or their agents receive it.
- Smaller parties or independents lack agents across all booths, restricting access.
- Public and Academic Scrutiny Blocked
- Data unavailability hampers research, journalism, and civic audits.
- No means for citizens or watchdogs to detect anomalies in vote tallies.

#### **Opacity Breeds Suspicion**

- In close or controversial elections, the absence of Form 17C data raises doubts about electoral manipulation.
- Mismatched tallies or untraceable records hurt the ECI's credibility.

## Supreme Court's Role in Defending Democratic Values

 Judicial Safeguard: The Anoop Baranwal judgment was a vital intervention to prevent executive dominance.

- Guardianship of Constitution: SC acted in the absence of a law and emphasized judicial participation to maintain checks and balances.
- Precedent: Parliament had failed to legislate for over 70 years; the SC stepped in to fill this constitutional vacuum.

#### **Key Challenges**

- Institutional Capture of the ECI
- The 2023 Act opens doors for partisan appointments, risking erosion of the ECI's impartiality.

#### **Erosion of Electoral Trust**

 Form 17C opacity and alleged misuse of EVMs contribute to declining public faith in the system.

# Undermining Constitutional Morality

 Despite SC directives, the government bypassed judicial oversight in a key democratic process.

# Legal and Constitutional Uncertainty

The pending SC verdict on the new law's validity adds to institutional instability and political friction.

#### **Inaccessibility of Poll Data**

 Lack of a transparent digital mechanism for sharing booth-level data undermines participatory democracy.

#### Way Forward: Electoral Reforms for Democratic Revival Restore Balance in ECI Appointments

 Reintroduce judicial participation by including the CJI or a retired Supreme Court judge in the selection committee.









 Ensure bipartisan decision-making by requiring consensus or qualified majority votes.

#### • Role of Form 17C

 How to file RTI or complaints on polling irregularities.

#### Make Form 17C Publicly Accessible.

#### Create a central digital repository (managed by ECI) where Form 17C for all polling booths is uploaded within 48 hours of polling.

 Promote data openness to allow public audits, academic research, and media verification.

#### Institutionalise Independent Electoral Audits

- Periodic audits of:
  - EVMs (with VVPAT cross-verification)
  - Voter rolls (to eliminate duplicates or ghost entries)
- Include third-party agencies or retired judicial officers in audit teams.

#### Strengthen Parliamentary Oversight

- All electoral reforms must undergo robust parliamentary debate, public consultation, and be reviewed by a standing committee.
- Encourage cross-party consensus for laws impacting democratic institutions.

# Protect the Autonomy of Constitutional Bodies

Legislate a Constitutional Institutions
Protection Act to define autonomy,
appointment process, tenure, and
funding of bodies like ECI, CAG, CVC,
etc.

#### Civic Engagement and Voter Education

- Launch ECI-led public awareness campaigns on:
  - Voting rights

#### Conclusion

India's electoral process is the foundation of its democracy. At a time when doubts are being cast over the neutrality of the Election Commission, and access to crucial polling data like Form 17C is limited, the entire truth known to the ECI must be disclosed. Transparency, institutional integrity, and public trust are not optional—they are essential. Any deviation from this path weakens the democratic edifice the Constitution has so carefully erected.

#### **Main Question**

How does the 2023 Election Commissioners Appointment Act impact the independence of the Election Commission, and why is full transparency, including public access to Form 17C-crucial for electoral integrity in India?

# Which of the following statements most accurately reflects the constitutional and democratic challenges posed by the Election Commissioners Appointment Act, 2023, and limited access to Form 17C?

A. The Act enhances transparency by formalising appointments through parliamentary law and allows limited data sharing for electoral efficiency.

B. The Act fulfils Article 324's mandate by giving the executive full control, while Form 17C access is rightly restricted to protect voter secrecy.

C. The Act violates the spirit of the Supreme Court's directive by excluding judicial oversight, and restricted access to Form 17C undermines electoral transparency and public trust.









D. The Act is aligned with the Basic Structure Doctrine, and Form 17C secrecy ensures impartial vote counting.

Answer: C. The Act violates the spirit of the Supreme Court's directive by excluding judicial oversight, and restricting access to Form 17C undermines electoral transparency and public trust.





## **SMILE in Reasi: A Step Towards Inclusive** Welfare and Livelihood

#### Why in the News?

Reasi district in Jammu and Kashmir is set to become the second district after Srinagar to implement the Support for Marginalised Individuals for Livelihood and Enterprise (SMILE) scheme. This initiative is a significant step toward the rehabilitation of beggars and the empowerment of transgender persons, offering them dignity, livelihood, and social reintegration.

#### **Background**

- Launch: The SMILE scheme was introduced in 2022 by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.
- Policy Context: It merged and replaced older, fragmented welfare schemes targeting transgender persons and individuals engaged in begging.
- Legal and Social Push: The scheme came after the 2014 NALSA v. Union of India judgment, which recognised the rights of transgender persons and mandated state support for their inclusion.

#### Feature of the SMILE Scheme **Comprehensive Coverage**

- Targets two of the most vulnerable groups:
  - Transgender individuals
  - Urban homeless beggars

#### **Shelter & Rehabilitation**

- Utilises existing shelter homes and establishes new ones where necessary.
- Includes health care, counselling, and safe spaces.

#### **Livelihood Development**

- Focuses on vocational training, education, and skill development.
- Helps beneficiaries obtain ID documents, bank accounts, and connect to economic opportunities.

#### **Survey-Based Identification**

- Each participating city/district conducts a field survey to identify and track beneficiaries.
- Rehabilitation targets: At least 25 individuals per unit.

#### **Funding & Expansion**

- Total Outlay (2023–26): ₹100 crore
- Utilised (by Dec 2024): ₹14.71 crore
- Implemented in 30 cities (Phase 1) and 50 more (Phase 2)
- Reasi and Srinagar are the key districts in J&K

#### Challenges in Implementation Social Stigma and Exclusion

- Deep-rooted bias against transgender persons and beggars limits their reintegration into society and the workforce.
- Example: Beneficiaries may be denied jobs despite skilling.

#### Low Awareness and Outreach

 Many eligible individuals remain. unaware of the scheme due to a lack of grassroots awareness campaigns.







#### Inadequate Infrastructure

 Several districts lack sufficient shelter homes, mental health services, or trained social workers.

#### **Underutilisation of Funds**

 Less than 15% of the ₹100 crore allocation was utilised by December 2024, indicating poor absorption and execution capacity.

#### **Lack of Convergence**

 Weak coordination with other central/state schemes like PM SVANidhi, PMKVY, and housing schemes reduces the long-term impact.

# Way Forward Strengthen Local Implementation

 Districts like Reasi must create dedicated task forces with NGOs, civil society, and government officials to track and support beneficiaries.

# Enhance Awareness and Counselling

 Launch awareness drives in local languages to educate people about the scheme's benefits and reduce social stigma.

#### **Improve Fund Utilisation**

 Streamline fund release mechanisms and capacity-building for implementing agencies to ensure optimal use of resources.

#### **Integrate with Other Schemes**

- Link SMILE beneficiaries with:
  - PMAY (Urban/Rural) for housing
  - Jan Dhan Yojana for financial inclusion
  - Skill India Mission for certification and job placement

#### Monitor Outcomes, Not Just Numbers

 Shift focus from input metrics (shelters built, trainings conducted) to real outcomes like job placements, reintegration success, and reduction in street begging.

#### Conclusion

The implementation of the SMILE scheme in the Reasi district marks a progressive shift in social welfare delivery in Jammu and Kashmir. However, for it to truly transform the lives of the most marginalised, it needs sustained funding, institutional coordination, and a societal shift in attitude. Making inclusion measurable and dignified must be at the heart of India's welfare architecture.

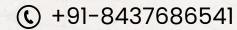
# Which of the following best reflects the core constitutional and policy significance of the SMILE Scheme as implemented in districts like Reasi?

A. It is primarily a welfare program aimed at improving urban sanitation by removing beggars from public spaces.
B. It operationalises Article 21 by enabling the right to livelihood, dignity, and inclusion for transgender persons and persons engaged in begging.
C. It fulfils India's obligations under the SDG-7 (Affordable and Clean Energy) by providing housing and identity to the urban poor.

D. It ensures electoral rights for marginalised communities under Article 326 through voter enrolment drives in shelters.

**Answer: B.** It operationalises Article 21 by enabling the right to livelihood, dignity, and inclusion for transgender persons and persons engaged in begging.





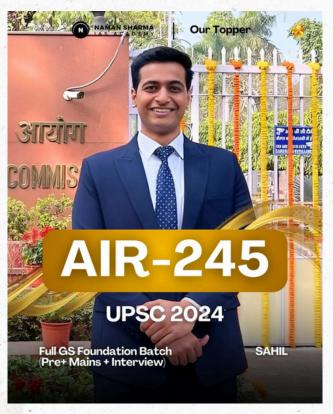
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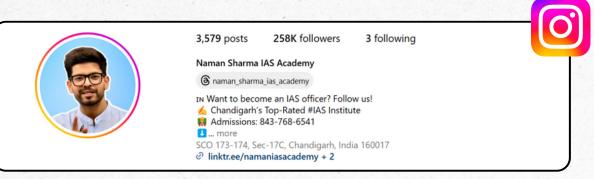


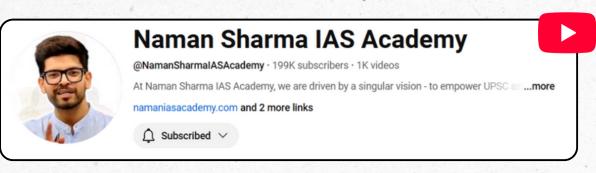
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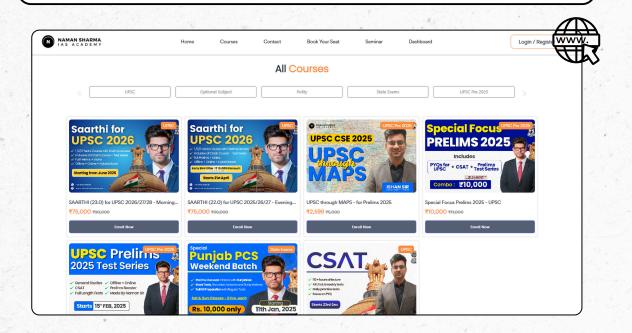






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