

**The Hindu Important News Articles & Editorial For UPSC
CSE**

Friday, 07 Nov , 2025

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In a major milestone for India's space sector, ISRO Chairman V. Narayanan announced that the first Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV) built entirely by a private consortium led by HAL and L&T will be launched in February 2026. This marks a significant leap towards commercialisation and privatisation in India's space industry — aligning with the vision of "Aatmanirbhar Bharat" and the Space Policy 2023, which emphasises greater private sector participation.

First PSLV made by private firms to be unveiled in 2026, says ISRO Chairman

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) Chairman V. Narayanan said on Thursday that the first Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV) rocket developed by a private consortium, led by Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) and L&T, would be launched in February 2026.

Speaking during the inauguration of the India Manufacturing Show 2025 in Bengaluru, he said, "The consortiums led by HAL and L&T have produced the first rocket and we are going to have the launch by February 2026. Once we succeed with two launch-



V. Narayanan

es, our plan is to give at least 50% of the PSLV directly to the Indian industry consortium."

He added that about 80% to 85% of the systems are developed by private industries.

"On November 2, the ISRO's heaviest communication satellite CMS-03 was placed successfully in the

orbit for enhancing the communication capability of India using our own Bahubali rocket LVM-3 M5. This mission is launched by the ISRO, no doubt but if you look at the contribution almost 80% to 85% systems are delivered by Indian industry that speaks volume of the contribution by the Indian industries," he added.

450 Indian industries

He said that about 450 Indian industries are contributing towards the Indian space programme and today, 330 plus start-up ecosystems are working in the country.

"The Indian space programme, when it was start-

ed, was 70 years behind the developed nations. By 2040... the programme will be on par with any other space-faring nations in terms of launchers, satellites, human space flight programme and applications," he said.

Speaking on the occasion, Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) Chairman Samir V. Kamat said that the contribution of the Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises (MSME) sector was very significant during Operation Sindoor.

He further said that for a country to retain its sovereignty, it is very important to indigenously develop critical technologies.

Key Analysis

- **Private Sector Integration and Indigenous Capability** : The upcoming PSLV marks the first time that the complete production of a launch vehicle is being handled by a non-government consortium. With 80–85% of systems already being developed by private industries, this transition showcases India's growing industrial ecosystem and technical

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maturity. Over 450 Indian industries currently contribute to ISRO's missions, and more than 330 space start-ups have emerged — a testimony to the growing innovation in the space ecosystem.

- **Strategic and Economic Significance :** The move reduces ISRO's operational load, allowing it to focus on R&D and advanced missions such as human spaceflight (Gaganyaan), planetary exploration, and deep space projects. Simultaneously, private sector involvement will enhance efficiency, cost-effectiveness, and export potential of Indian launch services in the global market.
- **Technological Sovereignty and National Security:** As highlighted by DRDO Chairman Samir V. Kamat, indigenously developing critical technologies is essential for maintaining sovereignty. The synergy between ISRO, DRDO, and Indian industry will strengthen India's strategic autonomy, reduce import dependence, and contribute to defence and dual-use technology sectors.
- **Long-term Vision:** ISRO aims for India to be on par with leading space-faring nations by 2040, with advancements in launchers, satellites, and human spaceflight. The HAL-L&T consortium's PSLV project represents a crucial step toward this goal, potentially leading to 50% of PSLV launches being handled by the private sector in the future.

What is commercialization of space sector in India?

- Commercialization in India's space sector refers to the increasing involvement of private companies in space activities.
- It is enabled by policy changes that allow them to develop and launch satellites, provide space-based services, and compete in the global market.
- Antrix Corporation Limited (ACL) – It was established in 1992 is a wholly owned Government of India Company under the administrative control of the Department of Space.
- It is the Marketing arm of ISRO for promotion and commercial exploitation of space products, technical consultancy services and transfer of technologies developed by ISRO.
- NewSpace India Limited (NSIL) – It is established in 2019 as a public sector undertaking of the Government of India.
- To spearhead commercialization of space products including production of launch vehicles, transfer to technologies and marketing of space products.
- In-space – It was established in 2020 and functions as an autonomous agency in Department of Space (DOS).
- It acts as a single window agency for all space sector activities of private entities.
- Emerging space startups – Several private space companies have emerged in India, including Skyroot Aerospace, Agnikul Cosmos, Pixxel and Bellatrix Aerospace.

Importance of Commercialization of the Space Sector (in short)

- **Indigenous Capability:** Helps India develop reusable and heavy-lift rockets, reducing dependence on foreign launchers (e.g., GSAT-N2 launched by SpaceX).
- **Economic Growth:** Expands India's \$7 billion space industry, creating new revenue streams through private participation.
- **Global Competitiveness:** Enhances India's share in the \$440 billion global space economy via cost-effective launches.
- **Job Creation & Skill Development:** Generates employment in aerospace engineering, satellite design, and data analytics.
- **Strategic Independence:** Reduces reliance on foreign technology and boosts national security and autonomy.
- **Innovation Boost:** Public-private collaboration accelerates development of reusable rockets and small launchers.
- **Infrastructure Growth:** Encourages PPP-based facilities like assembly units and launch pads.
- **FDI Attraction:** 100% FDI allowed in key space segments, boosting investment inflows.

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Measures Needed

- **Strengthen Policy Framework:** Formulate supportive and transparent policies for private players.
- **Milestone-Based Funding:** Link funding to performance stages to ensure accountability and cost control.
- **Leverage Private Industry:** Award contracts for reusable and heavy-lift vehicles to build competition.
- **Promote Global Collaboration:** Encourage **technology transfer and joint R&D** with foreign firms.
- **Develop Infrastructure:** Create **shared testing and launch facilities** for startups.
- **Focus on Education & Training:** Align university programs with industry needs for skilled manpower.
- **Public-Private Partnerships:** Combine ISRO's expertise with private sector agility for faster innovation.

Conclusion

The development of the first privately manufactured PSLV marks a transformational shift in India's space journey — from a government-driven model to a public-private collaborative ecosystem. It not only strengthens India's industrial and technological base but also propels the country toward becoming a global space hub. The coming years will test how effectively India can balance innovation, regulation, and competitiveness to realise its ambition of becoming a leading player in the global space economy by 2040.

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Ques: With reference to the commercialization of the Indian space sector, consider the following statements:

1. India now allows 100% Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in satellite manufacturing and operations.
2. The first Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV) to be fully built by a private consortium will be launched by 2026.
3. ISRO currently manufactures all rockets and satellites in-house without private industry support.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
(b) 2 and 3 only
(c) 1 and 3 only
(d) 1, 2, and 3

Ans: a)

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Ques: What is the importance of commercialization of the space sector? Discuss the measures needed to promote it in India. (250 Words)

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Karnataka has become the first Indian State to extend one day of paid menstrual leave per month to all women employees, including those in the private sector, marking a significant milestone in workplace gender sensitivity. While hailed as a progressive step toward recognising menstrual health as a legitimate workplace concern, the policy has also triggered debate over its scope, sufficiency, and potential implications for gender equity and workplace dynamics.

Karnataka's menstrual leave policy: progressive step or symbolic gesture?

While the move has received appreciation, it has also sparked a debate on whether a single day is sufficient and if it will achieve its intended purpose; doctors say that it could make a big difference for women living with painful periods or other conditions, but add that focus should be on helping women manage menstrual discomfort effectively

Afshan Vasmeen

Karnataka has become the first State in the country to approve one day of paid menstrual leave per month for all women employees, covering both government and private sectors. Odisha and Bihar have similar policies for government employees, while Kerala has implemented this in universities. Cleared recently by the Karnataka Cabinet, the policy is being hailed as a progressive measure recognising menstrual health as a legitimate workplace concern. The leave, amounting to 12 days a year, applies to women in government offices, educational institutions, factories, and private organisations. While the move has received widespread appreciation, it has sparked debate on whether a single day of leave is sufficient and whether it will achieve its intended purpose.

How it came about
Describing the decision as a "momentous occasion," Sapna S, associate dean and head, school of law, Christ (Deemed-to-be) University, said it marks a progressive step towards gender equity and aligns with the principles of affirmative action enshrined in the Constitution.

Dr. Sapna, who chaired the 18-member committee that drafted the policy, said it resulted from extensive consultations and comparative studies. "We reviewed global practices from countries such as Finland and Japan. The committee included gynaecologists, psychiatrists, professors, employers, employees, NGOs, and trade unions. Though there were suggestions to reduce the leave to half a day or change the name, our persistence paid off, and the government approved 12 days, aligning with our original proposal," she said.

On concerns of misuse, she said that a sub-committee will frame implementation guidelines for the policy. "Misuse can occur with any law. But accommodating menstrual leave can boost productivity and employee well-being in the long run." She also emphasised the need for sensitisation programmes to prevent stigma or discrimination, adding, "Female-intensive workplaces should have these provisions intact, as they reflect the true spirit of gender equity."

Citing global research, Dr. Sapna said menstrual pain was a serious health concern. "A 2018 Quartz article quoted John Guillebaud, a reproductive health professor at University College London, as saying patients described menstrual cramps as 'almost as bad as having a heart attack.' That itself underscores the need for understanding and supportive policies," she noted.

Gynaecologists note that menstrual experiences vary widely, from mild discomfort to debilitating pain. Some women may experience fatigue, mood



Seeking change: Students staging a protest demanding 12 menstrual leaves per semester for female students in Delhi University, etc.

swings, migraines, or heavy bleeding, while others may have minimal symptoms.

Hema Divakar, division director at Well Women Healthcare, International Federation of Gynaecology and Obstetrics (FIGO), said conditions such as adenomyosis, endometriosis, fibroids, or hormonal imbalances can cause severe pain or heavy bleeding and require medical treatment. "Instead of blindly asking for a day's leave, girls and women should undergo a wellness check to identify and address root causes. Many of these issues can be fixed," she said.

While welcoming the policy, she cautioned that menstrual leave may be more symbolic than practical.

"Menstruation is a recurring physiological process affecting each woman differently. Pregnancy leave allows the mother's body to recover and facilitates bonding with the newborn. Granting a one-day leave for menstruation may not make much sense," she said. She also warned that mandatory menstrual leave could inadvertently reinforce workplace bias. "From an employer's perspective, there may be hesitation in assigning women critical roles or leadership responsibilities if they



A 2018 Quartz article quoted John Guillebaud, a reproductive health professor at University College London, as saying patients described menstrual cramps as 'almost as bad as having a heart attack.' That itself underscores the need for understanding and supportive policies.

DR. SAPNA
Head of committee that drafted the policy

are perceived as taking frequent leave. This could deepen gender inequality," she noted.

Stating that menstruation was no longer a "hush hush" subject thanks to greater awareness through education and social media, Dr. Divakar said: "Prevent illness, promote wellness should be the mantra. The focus should be on helping women manage menstrual discomfort effectively rather than offering a symbolic one-day off."

Subasini Inamdar, senior consultant obstetrician and gynaecologist at

Motherhood Hospitals, Bengaluru, said menstrual leave was a woman's right. "In ancient times, women took four days off from household work purely for rest, to preserve physical and emotional well-being, not as a sign of impurity. The original intent has been lost over time," she said.

Calling the policy a "welcome and much needed step," Dr. Inamdar said it recognises menstrual health as integral to overall well-being. Severe menstrual pain, or dysmenorrhea, affects women of all ages, particularly younger women or those with gynaecological conditions. Stress, lack of exercise, and poor sleep can further aggravate symptoms. Persistent pain should be medically evaluated rather than dismissed as normal, Dr. Inamdar said.

For mild to moderate discomfort, simple measures such as hot compresses, hydration, light exercise, and rest can help. Over-the-counter pain relief may also be used. For severe or recurrent pain, consultation with a gynaecologist is essential. "Conditions such as endometriosis or fibroids require targeted treatment, which could include hormonal therapy or lifestyle adjustments," Dr. Inamdar noted.

Need for awareness
For women living with painful periods or conditions such as endometriosis, adenomyosis, fibroids, or PCOS, menstrual leave can make a significant difference, said Sumitha Mahesh, medical director and senior consultant gynaecologist at Miam Birthing Hospital, Bengaluru.

"These conditions can cause severe cramps, heavy bleeding, and exhaustion, making it difficult to get through daily life. Having the option to take a day off allows women to rest without using their regular sick leave," Dr. Mahesh said. However, she emphasised that severe or unusually heavy periods should not be dismissed as normal.

"It's important to consult a gynaecologist to identify the underlying cause and receive appropriate treatment – whether through medication, a procedure, or lifestyle changes – to make future cycles easier to manage," she said. Dr. Mahesh highlighted the need for greater awareness among women, noting that many assume intense pain or heavy bleeding is normal and therefore delay seeking medical help.

While menstrual leave can offer temporary relief, Dr. Mahesh underlined that addressing the root cause is key for long-term well-being. She also called for workplace policies that are flexible, optional, and free from stigma. "Every woman's cycle is different, and symptoms can vary widely. Policies should be sensitive, and no one should feel pressured to disclose personal details or fear that taking leave will affect their performance," she said.

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Karnataka has become the first State in the country to approve one day of paid menstrual leave per month for all women employees. The leave applies to women in government offices, educational institutions, factories, and private organisations.

Citing global research, doctors say that menstrual pain was a serious health concern and that the policy recognises menstrual health as integral to overall well-being. Some experts warn that the leave could inadvertently reinforce workplace bias.

Doctors call for workplace policies that are flexible, optional, and free from stigma. Policies should be sensitive, and no one should feel pressured to disclose personal details or fear that taking leave will affect their performance, they say.

Progressive Aspects of the Policy

1. Recognition of Menstrual Health: The move formally acknowledges menstruation as a genuine health issue that can affect productivity and well-being — an important step toward normalising menstrual discussions in workplaces.

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2. Inclusion Across Sectors: Unlike Bihar and Odisha, where menstrual leave applies only to government employees, Karnataka's policy covers both public and private sector workers, making it more comprehensive.
3. Gender Equity and Affirmative Action: The policy aligns with the constitutional principles of equality and affirmative action, recognising physiological differences while striving for equitable working conditions.
4. Health and Productivity Benefits: As highlighted by experts like Dr. Sapna S., providing rest during painful menstrual days could enhance long-term productivity, morale, and job satisfaction.

Concerns and Limitations

1. Sufficiency of One-Day Leave: Many argue that a single day per month may be inadequate given that menstrual pain and symptoms often last two to three days for some women.
2. Risk of Symbolism Without Structural Support: As Dr. Hema Divakar notes, the policy may turn symbolic if not accompanied by broader efforts such as wellness checks, awareness programs, and medical support to manage menstrual discomfort.
3. Possibility of Gender Bias: Mandatory menstrual leave may inadvertently reinforce workplace stereotypes, leading employers to hesitate in offering leadership roles or critical assignments to women, deepening gender inequity.
4. Lack of Awareness and Medical Follow-up: Many women continue to dismiss severe menstrual pain as "normal." Without awareness campaigns and healthcare support, the policy alone may not improve long-term menstrual health outcomes.

Expert Perspectives

- Medical Viewpoint: Gynaecologists stress that conditions like endometriosis, adenomyosis, fibroids, or hormonal imbalances can make menstruation severely painful, and such women would benefit significantly from this leave policy.
- Preventive and Holistic Approach: Experts advocate for a wellness-oriented model—promoting exercise, hydration, rest, and medical consultation—rather than solely relying on leave entitlements.
- Need for Sensitisation: To prevent misuse and stigma, workplace sensitisation and clear implementation guidelines are essential so that women can use the leave without fear of judgment or career impact.

Way Forward

- Integrate Health and Policy: Combine menstrual leave with period-friendly infrastructure, such as restrooms, sanitary facilities, and healthcare access.
- Awareness and Education: Conduct campaigns to help women identify abnormal menstrual symptoms and seek timely medical advice.
- Optional and Flexible Policy: Ensure that menstrual leave remains voluntary, not mandatory, so women can decide based on their individual needs.
- Regular Evaluation: Periodically review the policy's effectiveness and inclusivity, ensuring it serves its intended purpose without reinforcing stereotypes.

Conclusion

Karnataka's menstrual leave policy represents a progressive acknowledgment of women's health needs in the workplace — a long-overdue recognition in India's gender equity journey. However, to transform this move from a symbolic gesture to

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substantive reform, the focus must extend beyond leave to creating supportive, stigma-free workplaces and promoting menstrual wellness through education and healthcare. True empowerment lies not just in offering a day off but in ensuring that menstrual health becomes a normal, accepted, and well-supported aspect of women's working lives.

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques: Recognising menstrual health as a workplace concern is an important step toward gender equity. Discuss the significance of Karnataka's menstrual leave policy in promoting inclusive and equitable work environments in India. **(150 Words)**

Page 08 : GS 2 : Social Justice / Prelims

The recently released EAT-Lancet Commission Report on Healthy, Sustainable, and Just Food Systems highlights that food systems lie at the heart of the global environmental crisis. It shows that food production alone drives five of the six breached planetary boundaries, contributing to nearly 30% of global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. The report calls for a transition toward food systems that are sustainable, equitable, and health-oriented, ensuring justice not just for consumers but also for producers and the planet.

Key Findings of the Report

1. Food as a Major Ecological Driver:

- Agriculture is responsible for crossing planetary boundaries related to climate change, biodiversity loss, nitrogen and phosphorus flows, freshwater use, and pollution.
- Animal-based foods account for the largest share of agricultural emissions, while grains dominate nitrogen, phosphorus, and water use.

2. Global Nitrogen Surplus:

- The report warns that current agricultural practices create a nitrogen surplus more than double the safe limit, threatening ecosystems and water quality.

3. Limited Impact of Efficiency Gains:

- Technological or yield efficiency alone cannot ensure sustainability, as increased productivity often leads to higher total output, negating environmental savings unless backed by sound policy frameworks.

4. Realistic but Cautious Outlook:

- Even with combined actions — from dietary shifts to emission mitigation — the world may only just return to safety on climate and freshwater boundaries by 2050, with nutrient security still under strain.

The Indian Context

1. Cereal-Heavy Diets and the Need for Diversification:

- India's food pattern is dominated by cereals, especially rice and wheat.
- Meeting the 2050 benchmarks requires increased intake of vegetables, fruits, legumes, and nuts, but this transition could raise food prices, making affordability a major concern.

2. Affordability and Justice:

- Justice in food systems means ensuring nutritious and diverse diets that remain affordable, especially for vulnerable groups.
- Many regions dependent on imports for nutritious foods are exposed to price shocks, making the shift toward healthier diets a challenge.

3. Cultural and Policy Constraints:

- Dietary choices are deeply linked with religion, caste, and cultural preferences,

Justice in food

Justice in food systems implies transition to healthy, affordable diets

By showing that food alone drives five of the six breached planetary boundaries and about 30% of greenhouse-gas emissions worldwide, the new 'EAT-Lancet Commission on healthy, sustainable, and just food systems' report shows how food systems are at the centre of the overlapping climate, biodiversity, water, and pollution crises. Foods from animals account for most agricultural emissions whereas the grains dominate nitrogen, phosphorus, and water use. Only combined action, including cuts to food loss, enhanced and durable productivity gains, and dietary changes, can reverse these trends. The prediction on biogeochemical flows is stark: current agriculture leaves a global nitrogen surplus more than twice in excess of the safe limit. Efficiency gains left uncorrected by good policy can also spur more output that then erases environmental savings. The Commission is pragmatic, too, acknowledging that a response combining everything from dietary changes to emissions mitigation would still only barely return the world's food systems to safety vis-à-vis the climate and freshwater crises by mid-century; the pressure on nutrient security will remain. It does make one questionable assumption, that GDP will grow 127% in 30 years, whereas policy should focus on lower growth and worse climate shocks.

According to the report, India maintains a cereal-heavy diet while meeting benchmarks by 2050 entails more vegetables, fruits, nuts and legumes, which could raise average consumer prices. Affordability is already fragile in areas that import many of these foods, leaving consumers exposed to price shocks. Justice thus implies a transition towards healthier, more diverse diets while keeping prices in check. But changing diets may not always be desirable: preferences are anchored in religion, caste, and convenience, and on necessity vis-à-vis midday meals and procurement commitments. Rather than a diet-first strategy, then, new standards can cut harmful inputs, fiscal measures can make minimally processed foods cheaper, and procurement can normalise regionally familiar, more affordable dishes. Even then, supply-side reform is essential to overcome water stress, degraded soils, and fossil fuel dependence in cold chains and processing. India also needs to move away from implicit, open-ended incentives to extract groundwater. Finally, the Commission identifies market concentration, weak incentives for preventing labour and ecological harm, and undue corporate influence as factors that could stall change. Justice on the other hand demands stronger collective bargaining by workers and small producers and consumer representation in regulatory processes. These safeguards are partial at best today and need to become guaranteed in practice.

as well as state welfare programs like midday meals and procurement

policies.

- Therefore, a "diet-first" approach may not be feasible without addressing these underlying social and economic factors.

Policy Measures for a Just Transition

1. Input and Fiscal Reforms:

- Introduce new standards to curb harmful fertilizers and chemicals.
- Use fiscal incentives to make minimally processed, healthy foods cheaper.

2. Procurement and Food Diversity:

- Public procurement systems can be leveraged to promote regionally diverse, nutritious, and affordable dishes, normalising dietary diversity.

3. Supply-Side Sustainability:

- Reform agricultural practices to tackle water stress, soil degradation, and fossil-fuel dependence in cold chains and processing.
- End open-ended groundwater extraction incentives that worsen ecological stress.

4. Structural Reforms for Justice:

- Strengthen collective bargaining rights for farmers, workers, and small producers.
- Ensure consumer representation in food regulatory processes.
- Reduce corporate concentration and influence that hinder sustainable reforms.

Justice Dimension in Food Systems

Justice in food systems goes beyond nutrition — it involves fair access, equitable participation, and environmental sustainability. It includes:

- Social Justice: Empowering small producers, women, and workers in agri-value chains.
- Economic Justice: Making healthy food affordable without harming farmers' incomes.
- Environmental Justice: Restoring ecological balance while ensuring food security for all.

Conclusion

The EAT-Lancet report rightly positions food systems at the core of global sustainability and justice debates. For India, the challenge lies in balancing affordability, cultural diversity, and ecological sustainability. True justice in food requires rethinking production and consumption together — ensuring that both farmers and consumers benefit from a system that is healthy for people, fair in access, and safe for the planet. Only such an integrated approach can make the vision of "healthy diets for all, within planetary limits" a practical reality.

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques : Discuss how India's cereal-heavy food production and consumption pattern poses challenges to achieving sustainable and equitable food systems. (150 Words)

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Page : 10 : GS 2 : Indian Polity / Prelims

The foundation of any democracy lies not only in free and fair elections but also in the freedom to contest them. The Representation of the People Act (RPA), 1951 ensures that only qualified citizens can stand for election. However, over the years, the nomination process — governed by Sections 33 to 36 of the Act — has become overly procedural and exclusionary, allowing technicalities to override democratic intent. The article by Kannan Gopinathan, a former IAS officer, argues that India's nomination system today often prioritises bureaucratic compliance over democratic legitimacy.

Core Issue — Discretion and Procedural Traps

1. Excessive Discretion of Returning Officers (ROs):

- The RPA vests extraordinary powers in the Returning Officer to scrutinise and reject nomination papers.
- Under Section 36(2), an RO may reject nominations for “defects of a substantial character” — yet there are no clear guidelines defining what is “substantial”.
- Article 329(b) of the Constitution bars courts from intervening in election matters until polling is over, making arbitrary rejection virtually unchallengeable in real time.

2. Procedural Technicalities as Grounds for Rejection: Candidates are often disqualified for minor clerical or procedural lapses such as:

- Taking the oath too early or too late;
- Notarisation errors in affidavits (Form 26);
- Missing or delayed no-dues certificates;
- Incomplete disclosure of assets or liabilities;
- Filing after the stipulated time, even by a few minutes.

These technical defects, though non-substantive, have resulted in valid nominations being cancelled, undermining voters' choice before the election even begins.

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Why the nomination process needs reform

The Representation of the People Act (RPA), 1951 mandates that only qualified candidates can contest an election. However, the process of verifying said qualifications has accumulated complexity over the years, with too much importance being laid on procedural technicalities than actual defects of a substantial character*

LETTER & SPIRIT

Kannan Gopinathan

A young woman from Dadra and Nagar Haveli called last week about the recent municipal council elections. This is a district in which I once served as Collector and Returning Officer. Her father's nomination for municipal councillor had been rejected without any chance for clarification. She asked, “Sir, is this how elections work?” The honest answer is yes. And that is the problem.

One often hears about how nominations of candidates contesting elections are rejected over technicalities without any chance for clarification. However, the fact of the matter is that such rejections are lawful. The most undemocratic part of India's electoral process occurs before a single vote is cast at the stage of nomination scrutiny.

The politics of procedure

India's electoral nomination process vests extraordinary discretion in a single official: the Returning Officer (RO). The Representation of the People Act (RPA), 1951, particularly Sections 33 to 36, and the Conduct of Elections Rules, 1961, govern the nomination process. Section 36 authorises the RO to scrutinise nominations and reject those deemed invalid. The RO's power under Section 36(2) to conduct a “summary inquiry” and to reject nominations for “defects of a substantial character” is extraordinarily wide, and largely unreviewable before polling, since Article 329(b) bars courts from interfering until election day. The law says no nomination should be rejected for defects not of a substantial character. But there are no written guidelines on what is substantial. And the only remedy to protest it is an election petition after the polls, when the damage is irreversible. In a democracy, this absolutism dressed in legal language has the potential to become a tool of political exclusion.

In Bihar this year, a Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) candidate's nomination was rejected for leaving some fields blank. Last year in Saurashtra, opposition candidates were eliminated after proposers denied signatures, delivering a Lok Sabha seat unopposed. In the 2019 elections in Varanasi, decorated BJP jagan trij Bahadur Yadav was rejected because he could not obtain an Election Commission certificate overnight. In Bhubaneswar, former UP officer Debashis Bhui was kept off the ballot when his no-dues certificate from the government was delayed. Yes, there is no publicly available consolidated dataset on rejection grounds, patterns, or party-wise breakdowns. This opacity shields the weaponisation of procedure.

Procedural traps

Section 36 of the RPA mandates that only qualified candidates can contest. However, the process of verifying qualifications has accumulated complexity over the years. Well-intended judicial interventions have paradoxically worsened the problem. Supreme Court directions mandating detailed affidavits on assets, liabilities, and criminal cases were meant to ensure transparency, yet each new disclosure requirement added another opportunity for technical rejection. For example, in *Resurgence India* versus Election Commission (2023), the Supreme Court held that false declarations lead to prosecution but don't invalidate nominations; only incomplete ones do. This means that a candidate who



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India's electoral nomination process vests extraordinary discretion in a single official: the Returning Officer (RO).

In *Resurgence India* versus Election Commission, the Supreme Court held that false declarations lead to prosecution but don't invalidate nominations; only incomplete ones do. This means that a candidate who lies but fills all columns stays on the ballot, and one who makes a good-faith error can be rejected.

When a nomination is rejected arbitrarily, two rights are violated: the candidate's right to contest and the voters' right to choose.

Grievolving rules: RJD candidate from the Saran constituency, Ashwini Acharya, files her nomination papers for the Lok Sabha elections, in April 2024.

lies but fill all columns stays on the ballot, and one who makes a good-faith error can be rejected. The system now punishes incomplete declarations more harshly than dishonest ones.

A missing signature, a mismatched electoral number, a form filed at 3:05 PM instead of 3:00 PM, a blank column in an affidavit, a delayed oath, a missing no-dues certificate — any of these can end a candidacy. The burden of proof thus lies entirely on the citizen seeking to exercise a legal right, and not on the official denying it. This is constitutionally backwards. The right to be voted for is the necessary twin of the right to vote.

Without candidates to choose from, the ballot is ritual without substance. The first principle must be that every qualified citizen has a presumptive right to contest. That right can be denied only when the RO establishes, with clear evidence, a substantive constitutional or statutory disqualification. Technical paperwork errors cannot be a reason for disqualification.

A sense of the common procedural technicalities on which nominations are rejected include:

- The oath trap:** Every candidate must take an oath before a specified authority after filing nomination but before scrutiny. If too early, it's invalid, and if too late, the nomination is rejected. Moreover, if it is not before the specified authority, your form is again bound to be rejected.
- The notarisation trap:** Every Form 26 affidavit can affidavit which needs to be filed by the candidate along with nomination papers must be notarised by a specified authority. Not having done so can result in rejection of the nomination.
- The certificate trap:** Along with nomination papers, the candidate is liable to submit no-dues certificates from municipal bodies, electricity boards, or other government departments. Clearance certificates from the Election Commission for government servants, and various other bureaucratic attestations, each of them a veto point when it comes to the time of scrutiny. Thus, each issuing office becomes a

potential chokepoint where deliberate delay can eliminate a candidacy. These procedures, once designed as safeguards, have turned into potential opportunities for delay and manipulation. Here, bureaucratic compliance is being rewarded over democratic legitimacy.

Facilitation, not filtration

Other democracies show a different approach. In the UK, ROs help candidates fix errors before deadlines. Canada mandates a 48-hour correction period. Germany requires written notice of problems, time to remedy them, and multiple appeal layers. Australia encourages early submission to allow corrections. The common idea being that officials are facilitators, not sentinels.

India also has a checklist system. The RO Handbook instructs ROs to point out defects at the time of filing and record them in a checklist. But this checklist has no legal standing. The Handbook itself clarifies that the checklist “will not prevent the Returning Officer from discovering later during scrutiny”. A nomination can be marked defect-free at filing, yet rejected at scrutiny for defects the RO discovers later. The candidate has no right to rely on the checklist, and the RO faces no legal obligation to honour it. The checklist thus remains as an illusion of transparency without offering any real protection to the candidate.

The RO's role must shift from discretion to duty. When a deficiency exists, the RO must issue a detailed written notice specifying the exact error, the legal provision violated, and the correction needed. Candidates must get a guaranteed 48-hour window to fix it after receiving this notice.

The law must that classify deficiencies into three categories: (1) technical or paperwork defects such as missing signatures, blank affidavit columns, clerical errors, no-dues certificates etc. These cannot justify rejection; (2) matters requiring verification of authenticity such as disputed signatures, challenged documents etc. These require investigations before rejection; and (3)

constitutional and statutory bars. These should lead to immediate and absolute disqualification. Moreover, every rejection order must be reasoned. The RO must specify which exact requirement was not met, which provision of law was violated, what evidence supports the finding, and why the defect is substantial enough to justify rejection.

A digital solution

The Election Commission of India (EC) can build a nomination system that is digital by default; one that doesn't depend on excessive paperwork. This is not to argue for a digital-only framework, but a digital-by-default framework that can eliminate disqualifications based on blank columns and misspelt names or typos. The entire nomination process could move to an integrated online portal linked with the electoral roll. The system could automatically validate voter ID, age, and constituency details. Oath, affidavit submission, proposer verification, and deposit payment could all be digital. Moreover, every nominator's progress such as when it was filed, verified, deficiency notified, corrected, accepted or rejected, should be visible on a public dashboard with timestamps and reasons.

Upholding democracy

When a nomination is rejected arbitrarily, two rights are violated: the candidate's right to contest and the voters' right to choose. The world's largest democracy deserves a nomination process that is modern, fair, and inclusive, where the burden of proof is on the state to justify exclusion, not on citizens to prove their right to participate.

The EC should work towards a citizen-friendly nomination process that would end the bureaucratic net and open around disqualifications for blank columns, wrong payment modes, misspelt signatures, misspelt names and typos, no-dues certificates or a delayed oath. It should work towards a simplified process that removes the possibility of using procedure as politics.

Kannan Gopinathan is a former IAS officer who is now part of the Compass.

Daily News Analysis

Judicial and Systemic Complications

- **Judicial Overreach with Unintended Effects:** Supreme Court rulings aimed at transparency — mandating detailed affidavits on criminal and financial background — have made nominations more complex. For instance, in *Resurgence India vs. Election Commission (2013)*, false declarations led to prosecution but not disqualification, whereas incomplete declarations could cause rejection, paradoxically punishing honesty over deceit.
- **Lack of Transparency and Data:** There is no public database on nomination rejections, patterns, or political affiliations of rejected candidates — leaving the process opaque and susceptible to misuse.
- **Weaponisation of Procedure:** Instances such as the rejection of Opposition candidates in Surat (2023) or Tej Bahadur Yadav's nomination in Varanasi (2019) show how procedural discretion can become a political tool to eliminate competition.

Comparative Global Perspective

Other democracies treat election officials as facilitators, not gatekeepers:

- U.K. — Returning Officers assist candidates in correcting mistakes before deadlines.
- Canada — Mandates a 48-hour correction window.
- Germany — Provides written notice and appeal options.
- Australia — Encourages early submission to allow corrections.

India's system, in contrast, still allows post-submission rejections without prior notice or remedy, reflecting an administrative rather than participatory ethos.

Reforms Suggested

- Shift from Discretion to Duty:**
 - The RO's role should be facilitative, not punitive.
 - Every deficiency should trigger a written notice specifying the exact error and a 48-hour correction window.
- Categorisation of Defects:**
 - Category 1: Technical defects (missing signatures, typos, blank columns) — *cannot justify rejection*.
 - Category 2: Authenticity issues (disputed signatures, forged documents) — *require verification before rejection*.
 - Category 3: Constitutional or statutory bars (age, citizenship, criminal disqualification) — *lead to immediate rejection*.
- Digital-by-Default Nomination System:**
 - Develop a single online portal integrated with voter databases.
 - Enable digital verification of voter ID, constituency, and proposer details.
 - Display real-time status updates, deficiency notices, and reasons for rejection on a public dashboard for transparency.
- Mandatory Reasoned Orders:**
 - Every rejection should include clear justification citing the violated provision and evidence, ensuring accountability of officials.

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Democratic Implications

- Arbitrary rejection of nominations undermines two fundamental democratic rights:
 1. The candidate's right to contest, and
 2. The voter's right to choose among candidates.
- If the electoral gatekeeping process is flawed, the entire democratic exercise becomes hollow, reducing elections to mere procedural rituals.

Conclusion

India's nomination process, intended as a safeguard, has evolved into a bureaucratic filter that can stifle democracy even before voting begins. The need of the hour is a citizen-friendly, transparent, and technologically modern system where errors are corrected, not penalised. Democracy must rest on the presumption that every qualified citizen has the right to contest, and it is the state's duty to facilitate, not frustrate, that right. Reforming the nomination process is thus essential to uphold the spirit of free choice and political inclusion — the very essence of India's democratic promise.

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Ques : Consider the following statements about the nomination process for elections in India:

1. The nomination process is meant to act as a safeguard ensuring only eligible candidates contest elections.
2. Currently, it has evolved into a bureaucratic process that may sometimes restrict democratic participation.
3. Reforms in the process aim to make it more transparent and citizen-friendly.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1, 2 and 3
- (d) 1 and 3 only

Ans: c)

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques: India's nomination process, designed as a safeguard, has become a bureaucratic barrier that often curtails democratic participation. Discuss the need for reforms in the nomination process to ensure free, fair, and inclusive democracy in India. **(250 Words)**

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Page : 15 : GS 3 : Environment

The World Meteorological Organization (WMO) has warned that 2025 will likely rank among the top three warmest years on record, continuing a decade-long streak of rising global temperatures. Concentrations of greenhouse gases have reached record highs, intensifying the climate crisis.

Key Findings

1. **Record-Breaking Heat:**
 - Between 2015–2025, every single year ranks among the warmest years since records began (176 years ago).
 - 2024 remains the hottest year on record, while 2025 is expected to rank second or third.
2. **Greenhouse Gas Concentrations:**
 - Levels of CO₂, CH₄ (methane), and N₂O (nitrous oxide) continue to rise, trapping more heat.
 - These gases have “locked in” additional warming for future decades.
3. **Global Target Under Threat:**
 - The WMO warns that it will be virtually impossible to limit warming to 1.5°C in the short term without overshooting this target.
 - However, scientific models show that temperature stabilization by the end of the century is still achievable if emissions decline rapidly.
4. **COP30 Context:**
 - The report comes just before COP30 (Brazil, 2025), where countries are expected to revise and enhance their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs).

Reasons for Rising Temperatures

- Continuous burning of fossil fuels and industrial emissions.
- Deforestation and decline in carbon sinks.
- Weak global climate governance and insufficient climate finance.
- Recurring El Niño events, intensifying short-term temperature spikes.

Implications

- Human Health: More heatwaves, water stress, and vector-borne diseases.
- Agriculture: Crop yield reductions, soil degradation, and food insecurity.
- Ecosystems: Coral bleaching, biodiversity loss, and increased forest fires.
- Economy: Damage to infrastructure, higher energy demand, and migration pressures.



Concentrations of greenhouse gases grew to new record highs in the past year, the UN said. AP

2025 to be among top three warmest years on record: UN

Agence France-Presse
GENEVA

An alarming streak of exceptional temperatures is continuing, with 2025 set to be among the hottest years ever recorded, the United Nations said Thursday, insisting though that the trend could still be reversed.

While this year will not surpass 2024 as the hottest ever recorded, it will rank second or third, the UN's weather and climate agency said, capping more than a decade of unprecedented heat.

Meanwhile, concentrations of greenhouse gases grew to new record highs, locking in more heat for the future, the World Meteorological Organization warned in a report released ahead of next week's COP30 UN climate summit in Brazil.

Together, the developments make “it clear that it will be virtually impossible to limit global warming to 1.5°C in the next few years without temporarily overshooting this target,” WMO chief Celeste Saulo said in a statement.

Ms. Saulo insisted that while the situation was dire, “the science is equally clear that it's still entirely possible and essential to bring temperatures back down to 1.5°C by the end of the century”.

But the world remains far off track.

Already, the years between 2015 and 2025 will individually have been the warmest since observations began 176 years ago, WMO said.

And 2023, 2024 and 2025 figure at the very top of that ranking.

Daily News Analysis

Way Forward

1. Deep Emission Cuts: Immediate transition to renewable energy, phasing out coal, and stricter carbon pricing.
2. Climate Finance and Technology Transfer: Developed nations must fulfil their \$100 billion per year commitment to support developing countries.
3. Adaptation and Resilience Building: Early warning systems, heat action plans, and climate-resilient agriculture.
4. Global Cooperation at COP30: Stronger, legally binding emission targets and equitable transition mechanisms.

Conclusion

The WMO's warning highlights that the world is at a tipping point. Without urgent, collective action, the Paris Agreement's 1.5°C goal may slip beyond reach. However, science still offers hope — decisive mitigation and adaptation strategies can still secure a sustainable future.

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Ques: The term "Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs)" seen in news is related to:

- (a) Biodiversity Conservation Targets under the CBD
- (b) Country-wise emission reduction commitments under the Paris Agreement
- (c) Global health initiatives under WHO
- (d) Forest restoration programmes under UNEP

Ans : b)

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques: The World Meteorological Organization has warned of record-high greenhouse gas concentrations. Analyse the role of greenhouse gases in the climate system and evaluate India's policy response to mitigate their impact **(250 Words)**

Page : 08 Editorial Analysis

Redraw welfare architecture, place a UBI in the centre

As India's wealth gap stretches to levels unseen since Independence and technology races ahead of policy, we find ourselves hurtling toward a collision of crises, job-shedding automation, gig economy precarity, climate-driven displacement and a mental health time bomb fed by chronic insecurity. At this moment, ideas such as universal basic income (UBI), once dismissed as utopian, deserve a fresh, pragmatic look. A UBI can cushion mass unemployment, restoring consumer demand when machines outnumber workers, rewarding unpaid care that props up the formal economy, and rebuilding a social contract frayed by pandemics and capitalism alike. In India, where welfare systems are often plagued by inefficiencies, exclusions and complex eligibility filters, a UBI offers a radical yet simple proposition: a periodic, unconditional cash transfer to every citizen, irrespective of income or employment status. Re-examining it is no longer an academic indulgence. It is an urgent policy imperative. By embedding dignity, autonomy and simplicity into its design, a UBI challenges us to rethink what a welfare state ought to provide in the 21st century.

Universality is the primary strength of a UBI. Where Bismarckian and Beveridgean models peg security to past employment or bureaucratic proof of hardship, a UBI anchors it in citizenship alone, transforming social protection into a streamlined, rights-based pipeline that is resilient to automation shocks, climate emergencies and the invisible labour of care. It bypasses the administrative complexities of targeted welfare and removes the stigma associated with poverty-based entitlements. It aims to create a basic floor of income security for all, ensuring that no one is left behind due to bureaucratic lapses or conditional access.

The argument for a UBI in India

India's current welfare landscape, though expansive, remains fragmented and uneven. Schemes suffer from leakage, duplication, and exclusion. A UBI offers a way to streamline welfare delivery, particularly as digital infrastructure, such as Aadhaar and Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) platforms, matures. But the argument for a UBI is not just administrative; it is fundamentally moral and economic.

The macro numbers flatter us. Earlier this year, the Press Information Bureau (PIB) claimed that India ranks fourth globally in income equality, citing the consumption-based Gini index. However, this measure focuses on household expenditure, not income or wealth, and thus masks the true extent of economic inequality. According to the World Inequality Database, India's wealth inequality Gini stood at 75 in 2023. The top 1% of the population owns 40% of the national wealth, while the top 10% controls nearly 77%. These figures suggest a level of concentration unseen since colonial times.

At the same time, India's GDP growth – 8.4% in



Saptagiri Sankar Ulaka

is Member of Parliament (Lok Sabha), Indian National Congress, and Chairperson, Standing Committee on Rural Development and Panchayati Raj

In today's crisis-ridden world, ideas such as a universal basic income (UBI) are an urgent policy need

2023-24 – has failed to translate into broad-based prosperity. Nobel laureate Joseph Stiglitz has long argued that GDP, while measuring economic output, does not account for the quality of life, environmental sustainability or equity. This disconnect is underscored by India's ranking of 126 out of 137 countries in the 2023 World Happiness Report – behind Nepal, Bangladesh, and Pakistan. GDP-centric narratives obscure rising precarity, job insecurity and social stress.

A modest, unconditional deposit, landing in every Jan Dhan account without forms or favours, means that a gig-worker can buy vegetables even when the app is quiet and a rickshaw driver's child can start the school term with new shoes. So, a UBI chips away at extreme concentration, reduces the lure of one-off freebies, and anchors growth in every kitchen rather than just in quarterly spreadsheets.

Pilot studies within India, including the Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA)-led initiative in Madhya Pradesh (2011-13), found that UBI recipients experienced better nutrition, increased school attendance, and higher earnings. International trials in Finland, Kenya and Iran showed similar results, with improved mental health and food security, without reducing willingness to work.

Automation and artificial intelligence add urgency to the case for a UBI. According to a McKinsey Global Institute report, up to 800 million jobs worldwide could be displaced by 2030 due to automation. India's semi-skilled and informal workforce is especially vulnerable. A UBI can provide a buffer during this transition, allowing time for upskilling and repositioning in the labour market.

It will rework the citizen-state relationship

The philosophical case for a UBI is equally compelling. For decades, the relationship between the citizen and the state has been largely transactional, defined by market participation and economic contribution. A UBI offers a structural antidote to the very populist, consumer-as-voter politics Shruti Kapila critiques. It removes the political incentive to dangle ad hoc freebies, free power here, a loan-waiver there, that parties deploy to manufacture short-term allegiance. When income security is decoupled from partisan largesse, voters are less hostage to transactional giveaways and more empowered to judge governments on systemic outcomes: quality of schools, rule of law, and ecological stewardship. In this sense, a UBI shifts the relationship from consumerism ("Vote me in, get subsidised units of electricity") back to citizenship ("You already possess a basic economic right; now demand good governance"). It replaces the politics of paternal patronage with a rights-based social contract, undercutting populist schemes that thrive on scarcity, targeted subsidies and moral grandstanding.

Worries that a basic income cheque would make everyday prices explode do not match how

people live where such cheques already exist. Big inflations, Weimar and Zimbabwe happened when factories shut and debts were owed in foreign money, not because ordinary people got a little extra spending money. Fund a UBI responsibly, keep the shelves stocked, and it becomes a cushion against hardship, not a spark for price hikes. Rather than dismiss a UBI as fiscally unviable or politically risky, we must engage with it seriously, as a tool to reduce poverty, mitigate inequality, and strengthen democratic citizenship.

It is important to recognise that a UBI is not a panacea. It will not by itself create jobs, fix public health systems or transform education outcomes. But it can serve as a base – providing a minimum level of economic security upon which individuals can build lives of agency and aspiration. It also recognises and supports unpaid labour, especially the care work undertaken predominantly by women, which remains invisible in traditional economic metrics. A UBI is not about promoting dependency; it is about expanding opportunity.

Some issues such as funding

Despite its promise, a UBI raises legitimate concerns. A minimal UBI of ₹7,620 a person a year – equivalent to the poverty line – would cost around 5% of India's GDP. Funding such an initiative would require either raising taxes, rationalising subsidies, or increasing borrowing, each of which has its economic implications. Moreover, a UBI's universality could dilute its redistributive intent by allocating resources to affluent sections alongside the poor.

A practical way forward would be to introduce a UBI in phases. Vulnerable groups – women, the elderly, persons with disabilities and low-income workers – could be prioritised. This targeted rollout would allow for evaluation and infrastructure building before full-scale implementation. A UBI could also complement, rather than replace, essential schemes such as the Public Distribution System and the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, particularly in the early stages.

Another key challenge is technological access. While Aadhaar and Jan Dhan have expanded financial inclusion, gaps remain in digital literacy, mobile access and bank connectivity particularly in tribal, remote, and underserved areas. These gaps must be closed to prevent exclusion from a scheme intended to be universal.

As the Indian state seeks to modernise its welfare architecture, a UBI deserves a central place in the conversation. History suggests that India will revisit the question sooner than we think. The calculus is no longer 'Can we afford UBI?' but 'Can we afford the democratic cost of mass insecurity?' Universality, not means-testing, is the architecture fit for a 21st-century welfare state.

The views expressed are personal

GS. Paper 2 Governance

UPSC Mains Practice Question: In the context of widening inequality and automation-induced job losses, discuss how Universal Basic Income (UBI) can redefine India's welfare architecture. Also highlight the challenges in its implementation. **(150 Words)**

Context :

As India faces widening income inequality, job-displacing automation, and rising social insecurity, the idea of Universal Basic Income (UBI) — once seen as utopian — has re-emerged as a serious policy option. In his article *"Redraw welfare architecture, place a UBI in the centre"*, Member of Parliament Saptagiri Sankar Ulaka argues that a UBI can serve as a moral, economic, and structural reform to modernise India's welfare system. UBI offers a simple, unconditional, and universal transfer of income to all citizens, aiming to replace fragmented welfare schemes with a dignified, rights-based safety net.

Context: Inequality and the Crisis of Welfare

India's economic growth story conceals deep inequality.

- **Wealth concentration:** According to the World Inequality Database (2023), the top 1% own 40% of national wealth, and the top 10% control nearly 77% — levels unseen since colonial times.
- **GDP vs well-being disconnect:** Despite 8.4% GDP growth (2023-24), India ranks 126/137 in the World Happiness Report (2023), reflecting poor quality of life and growing insecurity.
- **Labour challenges:** Automation and AI threaten millions of semi-skilled and informal jobs, while the gig economy expands precarious employment without social security.

Amid these challenges, India's welfare architecture remains fragmented, marred by leakages, duplication, and exclusion. Existing schemes often fail to reach those most in need — making a UBI an attractive alternative.

What is Universal Basic Income (UBI)?

UBI is a periodic, unconditional cash payment made to all citizens, regardless of income, employment, or social status. Its three key principles are:

1. **Universality:** Everyone receives it — avoiding exclusion errors.
2. **Unconditionality:** No conditions such as work, gender, or caste.
3. **Periodicity:** Regular and predictable transfers ensuring income security.

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Daily News Analysis

Arguments in Favour of UBI

1. Administrative Efficiency and Simplicity

UBI eliminates bureaucratic complexity and corruption associated with targeted welfare schemes. With Aadhaar and DBT (Direct Benefit Transfer) platforms, India already has the digital infrastructure for implementation.

2. Moral and Economic Rationale

- Moral: Ensures dignity and autonomy as a right of citizenship, not charity.
- Economic: Restores consumer demand, stabilises local economies, and supports unpaid care work (mostly done by women).

3. Evidence from Pilot Studies

- SEWA's pilot in Madhya Pradesh (2011–13): Improved nutrition, school attendance, and small business investment.
- International examples: Finland, Kenya, and Iran observed better mental health, reduced poverty, and no decline in work participation.

4. Response to Technological Unemployment

With automation projected to displace up to 800 million jobs globally by 2030 (McKinsey Global Institute), UBI can act as a transition buffer, giving people time to retrain and adapt.

5. Strengthening Democracy and Citizenship

UBI redefines the citizen–state relationship:

- Moves welfare from paternalistic freebies to a rights-based framework.
- Reduces populist dependence on conditional subsidies.
- Encourages citizens to demand better governance, education, and health services.

6. Macroeconomic Stability

Fears of inflation are often overstated. As the author notes, responsible funding and productive supply can prevent price rises. Instead, a UBI can stimulate aggregate demand, especially in rural areas.

Concerns and Challenges

1. Fiscal Burden

A basic UBI equivalent to India's poverty line (₹7,620 per person annually) would cost nearly 5% of GDP — posing serious budgetary constraints.

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2. Risk of Diluting Redistribution

If everyone receives income — including the rich — the redistributive effect could weaken unless combined with progressive taxation.

3. Implementation and Digital Divide

Despite progress in financial inclusion, tribal and remote regions still face barriers in banking access and digital literacy. These must be addressed to ensure true universality.

4. Complementarity vs Replacement

UBI should complement — not replace — essential welfare programmes like PDS, MGNREGA, and public health services until systems mature.

Possible Way Forward

1. Phased Implementation: Begin with vulnerable groups — women, elderly, disabled, and informal workers — before scaling up.
2. Rationalise Subsidies: Consolidate overlapping schemes to fund UBI without fiscal excess.
3. Progressive Taxation: Higher taxes on wealth, inheritance, and luxury goods to finance redistribution.
4. Digital Strengthening: Ensure universal financial access and grievance redressal mechanisms through DBT and Jan Dhan accounts.
5. Evidence-based Expansion: Pilot and evaluate regional programs before national rollout.

Philosophical Significance

A UBI represents a shift from welfare dependency to economic citizenship. It acknowledges that dignity and security are not rewards for productivity but fundamental rights. By placing people — not markets — at the centre of policy, it modernises India's social contract for the 21st century.

Conclusion

As inequality deepens and traditional jobs shrink, India must redesign its welfare architecture. A Universal Basic Income, if phased and fiscally managed, can act as both a safety net and a springboard — protecting citizens from economic shocks while fostering opportunity and autonomy. The real question, as Ulaka argues, is no longer *"Can India afford UBI?"* but *"Can India afford not to?"* A universal, dignified, and rights-based social protection model is not merely desirable — it is essential for sustaining democracy, inclusion, and equitable growth in the decades ahead.

