

The Hindu Important News Articles & Editorial For UPSC CSE
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Page 03 :GS II :International Relations

The India-Bangladesh relationship, often cited as a model for "Neighbourhood First" diplomacy, is currently navigating a period of diplomatic friction. The core of this tension lies in the long-standing issue of **illegal immigration** and the stalled **repatriation process**.

- Recent "Notes Verbale" (diplomatic notes) sent by India's Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) highlight a significant lack of cooperation from Dhaka regarding nationality verification—a prerequisite for legal deportation. This development comes against a backdrop of domestic political shifts in both nations, emphasizing how internal regional politics can influence bilateral foreign policy.

Bangladesh failed to give 'actionable response': India

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

Kallol Bhattacharjee
 NEW DELHI

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

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



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

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

2,862 cases

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

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

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

The Indian allegation of

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

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

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



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News Analysis: The Core Issues

1. The Repatriation Bottleneck

India has identified the lack of "actionable responses" from Bangladesh as the primary hurdle.

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- **The Data:** Since September 2020, New Delhi has sent over **1,137 diplomatic notes** and **456 reminders**.
- **Pending Cases:** Currently, **2,862 cases** of nationality verification are pending with Bangladesh. Some have been stalled for over five years.
- **The Stalemate:** Without nationality verification from the home country (Bangladesh), India cannot legally deport individuals, as unilateral "push-ins" violate international norms and are contested by Dhaka.

2. Diplomatic Flashpoints

The friction escalated following remarks by Indian regional leaders (specifically the Chief Minister of Assam) regarding the "pushing in" of suspected illegal immigrants through unguarded border segments.

- **Bangladesh's Response:** Dhaka summoned the Indian envoy and put its border guards on alert, viewing these statements as a threat to its territorial sovereignty and a violation of established bilateral protocols.
- **India's Counter-Stance:** The MEA has termed repatriation the "**core issue**." By shifting the focus back to the 2,862 pending verifications, India is signaling that the "push-back" concerns are a symptom of Bangladesh's administrative delays.

3. Political Context (2026)

- **Change in Dhaka:** Following the election of a new government in Bangladesh (BNP) in early 2026, the bilateral rapport is undergoing a period of recalibration.
- **Electoral Resonance in India:** The BJP's recent electoral victories in **West Bengal and Assam**—where illegal immigration is a high-decibel political issue—have intensified the Union government's push for a swift resolution to the repatriation crisis.

4. Challenges in the Repatriation Mechanism

- **Nationality Verification:** This is a rigorous process where the receiving country must confirm the individual is their citizen. Delays here often result in suspected immigrants languishing in Indian detention centers.
- **Border Management:** Despite the presence of the BSF and border fencing, the porous nature of the 4,096 km border makes monitoring difficult, leading to continuous friction over "illegal crossings" versus "forced push-backs."

Strategic Implications

- **Security vs. Diplomacy:** While India views illegal immigration as a national security concern, aggressive rhetoric can alienate a strategic partner essential for connectivity and counter-terrorism in the Northeast.
- **International Image:** Adherence to "established bilateral arrangements" is crucial for India to maintain its image as a responsible regional power that respects international legal standards regarding migration.

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Conclusion

The impasse over the 2,862 pending nationality verifications underscores a "trust deficit" that has resurfaced in the India-Bangladesh dynamic. For the relationship to stabilize, both nations must move beyond reactive diplomacy. India needs to ensure that its internal political rhetoric does not bypass formal diplomatic channels, while Bangladesh must expedite the administrative process of verification to demonstrate its commitment to the 1972 bilateral agreements. A functional, transparent repatriation mechanism is no longer just an administrative requirement; it is a necessity for the regional stability of South Asia.

UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question

Ques: "The Supreme Court's decision to empower District Collectors for enforcing the Solid Waste Management Rules, 2026 reflects judicial activism aimed at overcoming governance deficits." Critically examine. (150 Words)

Page 05 :GS II :Governance and Social Justice / Prelims Exam

The NITI Aayog's latest decadal analysis, "School education system in India — temporal analysis and policy roadmap for quality Enhancement," paints a dual-track picture of Indian education. While the nation has successfully achieved **near-universal primary access**, it is struggling with a **"Leaky Pipeline"** at the secondary level. The report identifies structural fragmentation and the lack of a "cradle-to-career" continuity as the primary drivers of high attrition rates.

Key Findings: The "Pyramid" Problem

1. Structural Fragmentation

The report describes the current system as a **sharp pyramid**.

- **Access Gap:** There are 7.3 lakh primary schools but only 1.64 lakh higher secondary schools.
- **Transition Hurdles:** Only **5.4% of schools** offer a continuous education from Grade 1 to 12.
- **The Result:** 40% of students drop out before completing higher secondary education because the transition between different institutions for middle and high school acts as a systemic barrier.

2. The "Zero Enrolment" Paradox

A significant administrative lapse was flagged: nearly **7,993 schools** have zero student enrolment but remain "active" on paper.

- **States affected:** West Bengal (3,812) and Telangana (2,245) have the highest numbers.
- **Resource Wastage:** These "ghost schools" continue to receive financial and human resources, highlighting a massive disconnect between ground reality and centralized planning.

3. Infrastructure and Health

Despite improvements, the "last mile" of infrastructure remains incomplete:

- **Electricity:** 1.19 lakh schools still lack functional electricity.
- **Hygiene:** Approximately 59,829 schools lack hand-washing facilities, and over 14,000 lack functional water sources.

Learning Outcomes: A Persistent Crisis

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A NITI Aayog report reveals that India faces challenges in retaining students at the secondary level. GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

NITI Aayog flags low student retention, learning outcomes

Maitri Porecha
 NEW DELHI

A decadal analysis of India's school education system by NITI Aayog reveals that while India has achieved a near-universal access to school at the primary level, it faces challenges in retaining students at the secondary level. There is also a persistent crisis in achieving learning outcomes.

The report, titled "School education system in India – temporal analysis and policy roadmap for quality Enhancement", highlights the "pyramid" problem.

The education system currently resembles a sharp pyramid, housing 14.71 lakh schools and 24.69 crore students.

While the country boasts 7.3 lakh primary schools, that number plummets to 1.64 lakh at the higher secondary level.

Four out of every 10 children who enter the system drop out before completing higher secondary education.

"This structural fragmentation means only 5.4% of schools offer a continuous journey from Grade 1 to 12. For the vast majority of students, moving up through the grades requires changing institutions multiple times – a hurdle that contributes to a steep attrition rate," the report said. "This fragmentation without any established linkage between schools for transitioning requires students to shift schools at key stages, depending on local availability, which further contributes to declining retention rates and limits the likelihood of progression to higher stages of education."

To add to this, close to 7,993 schools across the country reported zero student enrolment, with the highest numbers seen in West Bengal (3,812) and Te-

langana (2,245). "While these schools appear operational in administrative records, they no longer serve any student population. These schools, despite zero enrolment, continue to receive financial and human resources due to the lack of updating of records, showing the difference between on-ground reality and planning," the report said.

Composite schools
 The report recommends "cylindrical" schooling to fix the "leaky pipeline" of student dropouts, which involves creating composite schools that cover Grades 1-12 under one roof. The report points to the fact that the Right to Education Act ends at age 14, leaving families to bear the costs of tuition, books, and transport for older children.

The report highlights that according to UDISE+ 2024-25, 1.19 lakh schools lack access to functional electricity.

Access to water and hygiene facilities is also inconsistent. The share of schools with drinking water facilities has increased from 96.5% in 2014 to 99% in 2025, but 14,505 schools still lack functional water sources, and nearly 59,829 lack hand-washing facilities, compromising student health and hygiene.

The report pointed out that in October 2025, the Education Ministry announced that AI and Computational Thinking will be introduced from Grade 3. However, the report warns that without ethical frameworks and better teacher training, an over-reliance on AI could "diminish independent thinking" in younger learners.

Despite high enrolment, reading proficiency in Grade 8 has dropped. In 2014, 74.7% of Grade 8 students could read a Grade 2 text; by 2024, that figure fell to 71.1%. In mathematics, only 45.8% of Grade 8 students can solve a basic division problem.

Daily News Analysis

The report highlights a "Learning Poverty" trap where enrolment does not equate to education.

Metric	2014 Performance	2024/25 Performance
Grade 8 Reading Proficiency	74.7% (could read Grade 2 text)	71.1% (Decreased)
Grade 8 Math Proficiency	-	45.8% (can solve basic division)

The AI Concern: While the Education Ministry is introducing AI and Computational Thinking from Grade 3 (as of October 2025), NITI Aayog warns that without proper teacher training, this could lead to a decline in **independent thinking** and cognitive development.

Policy Roadmap: The "Cylindrical" Model

To fix the "Leaky Pipeline," NITI Aayog proposes moving from a **Pyramid Structure** to a **Cylindrical Structure**.

- **Composite Schools:** Integration of Grades 1-12 under a single administrative roof. This eliminates the need for students to change schools at key developmental stages.
- **Extending the Safety Net:** The report suggests reconsidering the **Right to Education (RTE) Act**, which currently ends at age 14. Extending this would help cover the costs of books, tuition, and transport for secondary education, which are currently a major cause of dropouts in low-income families.

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Conclusion

The NITI Aayog report serves as a wake-up call that **enrollment is a vanity metric** if it is not supported by retention and actual learning. The transition from "Primary for All" to "Quality Secondary for All" requires more than just building schools; it requires the creation of **Composite Schools** and the modernization of the RTE framework. As India integrates AI into its curriculum, the focus must remain on foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN) to ensure that technology enhances rather than replaces human cognition.

UPSC Prelims Exam Practice Question

Ques: Consider the following statements regarding the Right to Education (RTE) Act:

1. The RTE Act currently guarantees free and compulsory education up to the age of 14 years.
2. The Act covers secondary education up to Class XII.
3. Extending the ambit of RTE to secondary education may help reduce dropout rates.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 1 and 3 only
- C. 2 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

Ans: B)

UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question

Ques: The challenge before India is no longer merely 'Schooling for All' but 'Learning for All'. Discuss in the context of declining learning outcomes and the emerging role of Artificial Intelligence in education. **(150 Words)**

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Page 05:GS II&III :Governance and Indian Economy / Prelims Exam

The financial year 2025–26 marks a historic turning point in India's social security landscape. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS), once the backbone of rural livelihood support, has seen a sharp contraction in scale.

- This decline coincides with the enactment of the Viksit Bharat - Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) Act, 2025 (VB-GRAM G), which is set to replace the two-decade-old MGNREGA. While the government positions this as a strategic upgrade, civil society reports highlight a "paradoxical contraction" that has led to significant income losses for rural households.

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

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

Sobhana K. Nair
 NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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



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

household during the financial year.

Uncertain transition

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

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

Fewer working days

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

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

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

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

The Decline of MGNREGS: Key Findings (2025-26)

1. The "Participation Paradox"

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Daily News Analysis

Despite a **3.2% rise** in registered households (increasing to 15.46 crore), actual employment generation plummeted:

- **Worker Attrition:** 44 lakh fewer households and 67 lakh fewer workers found employment compared to the previous year.
- **Persondays Collapse:** Total workdays generated fell by **21.5%** (from 268.44 crore to 210.73 crore).
- **Average Work Intensity:** The average days of work per household dropped from 50 to roughly **43 days**.

2. Failure of the 100-Day Guarantee

The hallmark of MGNREGA—the 100-day work guarantee—saw its weakest performance:

- There was a **40.5% drop** in households successfully completing 100 days of work.
- **Economic Impact:** LibTech India estimates an average income loss of **₹1,221 per household** due to this contraction, even in states where wage rates were increased.

3. Regional Disparities

The decline was widespread, with **15 out of 20 major states** recording a fall in workdays.

- **Steepest Declines:** Tamil Nadu (-42.8%) and Haryana (-41.7%).
- **The West Bengal Factor:** The state continued to generate **zero persondays** due to the ongoing standoff over fund misappropriation allegations and the subsequent stoppage of central funds.

The Transition: VB-GRAM G Act, 2025

Parliament passed the new Act in December 2025 to align rural employment with the **Viksit Bharat @2047** vision.

Feature	MGNREGA (Old)	VB-GRAM G (New)
Guarantee	100 days per household	125 days per household
Funding Model	Demand-driven (Open-ended)	Normative Allocation (Capped)
Cost Sharing	Centre (90% approx.)	60:40 (Centre:State)
Work Window	Year-round	Statutory Pause (up to 60 days)
Priority Areas	Various	Water, Infra, Livelihood, Climate

Major Concerns with the Transition

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- **Fiscal Federalism:** The shift to a **60:40 cost-sharing ratio** (from the Centre bearing nearly all wage costs) places a massive financial burden on states.
- **Supply-Driven vs. Demand-Driven:** Critics argue that "normative allocation" (pre-fixing state budgets) effectively ends the "right to work" on demand, turning it into a scheme limited by budgetary ceilings.
- **The "Pause" Provision:** The Act allows for a 60-day pause during peak agricultural seasons to ensure labor availability for farmers, which labor activists argue could leave the most vulnerable without a safety net during crises.

Conclusion

The transition from MGNREGA to VB-GRAM G represents a fundamental shift from a rights-based entitlement to a development-linked mission. While the increase to 125 days is a positive statutory step, the simultaneous reduction in MGNREGS funding (to ₹30,000 crore for the interim) and the sharp drop in actual workdays suggest a turbulent transition. For the new mission to succeed, the government must address the "administrative friction" caused by new digital requirements (biometrics/eKYC) and ensure that the fiscal burden on states does not lead to a further dilution of the rural safety net.

UPSC Prelims Exam Practice Question

Ques :Which of the following best describes the concept of "Fiscal Federalism" in the Indian context?

- A. Distribution of judicial powers between Centre and States
- B. Financial relations and resource-sharing arrangements between different levels of government
- C. Regulation of inter-state trade and commerce
- D. Decentralization of monetary policy powers to States

Ans:B)

UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question

Ques:Discuss the significance of MGNREGA as a rural safety net in India. Why has the scheme witnessed declining participation despite rising rural distress in recent years?(150 Words)

In the era of "Big Data," India faces a unique paradox: an abundance of information but a scarcity of **standardised, usable data**. While digital platforms like the National Data and Analytics Platform (NDAP) exist, the core "grammar of governance"—data standardisation—remains neglected. As highlighted in recent parliamentary sessions, the lack of a unified data architecture forces policymakers to rely on fragmented figures, leading to fiscal leakages, administrative duplication, and missed economic potential.

The elephant in India's data room

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

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

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

Anatomy of the problem

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

According to a NITI Aayog report released in June 2025, welfare programme databases often list the same beneficiary multiple times, leading



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India must ensure data standardisation for better governance outcomes

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

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

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

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

Common standard for data

The solution to the inefficiencies can be seen under the National Data Governance Framework

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

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

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

As a benchmark

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

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

The views expressed are personal

The Anatomy of India's Data Crisis

1. Fragmentation and Lack of Interoperability

The Indian data ecosystem is currently a collection of "departmental silos."

- **Inconsistent Definitions:** Ministries often use different definitions for the same attributes (e.g., varying definitions of a "household" or "time period").

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Daily News Analysis

- **Lack of Integration:** Data collected for one scheme (e.g., Health Management Information System) does not "talk" to another (e.g., Immunisation registries), leading to patients being counted multiple times.
- **The "Pyramid" of Questions:** A significant portion of Parliamentary questions seek basic facts (e.g., number of toilets) that should already be available in a standardised public repository.

2. The Fiscal Cost of Poor Data

Incoherent data leads to "ghost beneficiaries" and duplicate entries. According to NITI Aayog (June 2025), these leakages inflate government spending by **4%–7% annually**.

Impact of Data "Clean-ups" (Estimates):

Scheme	Action Taken	Estimated Savings
PM-KISAN	Deleted 17.1 million ineligible names	₹90 billion (FY2024)
PAHAL (LPG)	Removed 35 million bogus connections	₹210 billion (2 years)
PDS (Ration)	Eliminated 16 million fake cards	₹100 billion (Annual)

3. Economic and Global Implications

- **GDP Potential:** The OECD suggests that improving public and private data sharing could add **1.5% to 2.5% to a nation's GDP**.
- **Global Benchmarking:** In the Global Innovation Index 2024, India's ranking was hampered by outdated or missing data for ten indicators, masking its actual performance on the world stage.

Proposed Reforms: A Policy Roadmap

1. The India Data Management Office (IDMO)

Under the **National Data Governance Framework Policy (NDGFP)**, the IDMO must be the keystone of reform.

- **Authority:** It must have the mandate to set binding standards and audit compliance across Ministries.
- **Harmonisation:** Aligning domestic data with the **UN's System of National Accounts** ensures global comparability.

2. Scaling Open Data (data.gov.in)

The government's open data platform needs to transition from a simple repository to a **centralised, schema-consistent platform**. This would allow:

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- Real-time, district-level data access for MPs and citizens.
- Reduced administrative burden on departments for responding to basic factual queries.

3. Data Governance Quality Index (DGQI)

NITI Aayog should institutionalize the DGQI as an annual benchmark.

- **Incentivisation:** Tying Ministry funding or performance reviews to data quality can trigger "competitive federalism" in data management.

Conclusion

Data standardisation is not merely a technical checkbox; it is a prerequisite for a **\$5 trillion economy**. Without interoperability, welfare schemes will remain prone to leakages, and policy decisions will continue to be driven by anecdotes rather than evidence. Addressing the "elephant in the data room" requires moving beyond data collection to **Data Stewardship**, ensuring that India's digital footprint becomes a strategic asset rather than an administrative liability.



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UPSC Prelims Exam Practice Question

Ques: The term "Data Stewardship" refers to:

- A. Exclusive state ownership of all digital data
- B. Responsible management, standardisation, security, and governance of data assets
- C. Privatization of public databases for commercial use
- D. Restricting data access to government agencies only

Ans: B)

UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question

Ques: Critically analyse the role of data standardisation and interoperability in improving welfare delivery and reducing fiscal leakages in India. **(250 Words)**

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Page 13:GS II &III : International Relations & Science and Tech / Prelims Exam

In a significant departure from Silicon Valley's traditional secularism, major AI players like OpenAI and Anthropic are seeking ethical guidance from global religious leaders. This shift, exemplified by the inaugural **"Faith-AI Covenant" round-table in New York**, signals a recognition that technical regulation alone may be insufficient to govern a technology that mimics human cognition and decision-making. As AI integrates into every facet of life, the quest for a "moral AI" has moved from philosophical debate to a strategic corporate and diplomatic necessity.

Technology is increasingly turning to religion in a quest to create ethical AI

Religious leaders and AI industry representatives met last week at a round-table in New York to discuss infusing ethics into technology; the emerging tech-faith coalition seeks to create moral AI, a contested and debated concept that raises questions about whether that is possible and what it means

Associated Press
LOS ANGELES

As concerns mount over artificial intelligence and its rapid integration into society, tech companies are increasingly turning to faith leaders for guidance on how to shape the technology – a surprising about-face on Silicon Valley's longstanding scepticism of organised religion.

Leaders from various religious groups met last week with representatives from companies including Anthropic and OpenAI for the inaugural "Faith-AI Covenant" round-table in New York to discuss how best to infuse morality and ethics into the fast-developing technology. It was organised by the Geneva-based Interfaith Alliance for Safer Communities, which seeks to take on issues such as extremism, radicalisation and human trafficking. The round-table is expected to be the first of several around the globe, including in Beijing, Nairobi and Abu Dhabi.

Tech executives need to recognise their power – and their responsibility – to make the right decisions, said Baroness Joanna Shields, a key partner in the initiative. She worked as a tech executive with stints at Google and Facebook before pivoting to British politics.

"Regulation can't keep up with this," she said. But

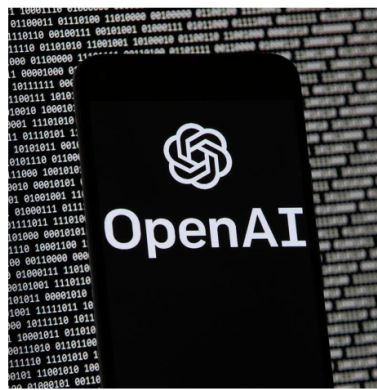
the leaders of the world's religions, with billions of followers globally, have the "expertise of shepherding people's moral safety," she reasoned. Faith leaders ought to have a voice, Ms. Shields said.

"This dialogue, this direct connection is so important because the people who are building this understand the power and capabilities of what they're building and what they want to do it right – most of them," she said of AI tech executives.

The goal of this initiative, according to Ms. Shields, is an eventual "set of norms or principles" informed by different groups and faiths, from Christians to Sikhs to Buddhists, that companies will abide by.

Present at the meeting were a variety of faith groups, including representatives from the Hindu Temple Society of North America, the Baha'i International Community, The Sikh Coalition, the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, widely known as the Mormon church.

Before these companies initiated outreach, some traditions had issued their own ethical guidance on using AI. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has given a qualified approval of the technology in its handbook. "AI cannot replace the gift of divine inspiration or the individual



Wider discussion: Critics fear conversations on ethical AI distract from broader debates about the technology's role in society. AP

work required to receive it. However, AI can be a useful tool to enhance learning and teaching," it reads.

Common ground worry
The Southern Baptist Convention, the largest Protestant denomination in the U.S., passed a resolution in 2023: "We must proactively engage and shape these emerging technologies rather than simply respond to the challenges of AI and other emerging technologies after they have already affected our churches and communities."

One challenge in creating a list of common principles is that global faiths, despite common ground, differ in their values and

made with the help of a host of religious and ethics leaders.

In this burgeoning alliance, Anthropic has been the most assertive, at least publicly, in their efforts to court faith leaders. The move follows a public dispute earlier this year with the Pentagon over military use of artificial intelligence after Anthropic said it would restrict its technology from being used to develop autonomous weapons or for mass surveillance of Americans.

"There's some aspect of PR to it. The slogan was 'Move fast and break things.' And they broke too many things and too many people," said Brian Boyd, the U.S. faith liaison for the nonprofit Future of Life Institute. "There's both a moral obligation on the part of the companies that they're belatedly recognising, as well as I think, for some members of the companies, an earnest questioning."

But other advocates for AI regulation and safety aren't so sure these efforts are genuine.

"At best it's a distraction. At worst it's diverting attention from things that really matter," said Ruman Chowdhury, the CEO of the nonprofit Humane Intelligence and the U.S. science envoy for AI under the Biden administration.

Mr. Chowdhury says she's not inclined to believe religion is the best

place to help answer questions surrounding AI and ethics, but thinks she understands why companies are increasingly turning to it.

'Naive take'

"I think a very naive take that Silicon Valley has had for a couple of years related to generative AI was that we could arrive at some sort of universal principles of ethics," she said. "They have very quickly realised that that's just not true. That's not real. So now they're looking at maybe religion as a way of dealing with the ambiguity of ethically grey situations."

It's unclear to what extent these notoriously opaque companies are translating what they hear from faith leaders into action – and what that action might look like. But some critics fear the conversation about creating ethical versions of the technology distract from broader conversations about AI and its role in society.

"Under the guise of, 'We're gonna build all this stuff. That's a given. And when we do build these things in these ways, how do we make sure that the end result is maybe good,'" said Dylan Baker, the lead research engineer at the Distributed AI Research Institute.

"It's like, 'Wait, wait. We need to question whether we want to be building these things at all.'"



Key Highlights of the Initiative

1. The Faith-AI Covenant

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- **Organization:** Led by the **Interfaith Alliance for Safer Communities** (Geneva), the initiative aims to bridge the gap between rapid technological advancement and moral safety.
- **Participants:** A diverse coalition including representatives from Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Baha'i, Greek Orthodox, Jewish, and Latter-day Saint (Mormon) traditions.
- **Global Scope:** Following the New York meet, future dialogues are scheduled for **Beijing, Nairobi, and Abu Dhabi**, reflecting the global nature of AI impact.

2. The Rationale for Religious Involvement

- **Regulatory Lag:** As Baroness Joanna Shields noted, formal legislation often moves too slowly for AI development. Religious leaders, however, have millennia of experience in "shepherding moral safety."
- **Defining the "Claude Constitution":** Companies like Anthropic have already begun integrating religious and ethical perspectives into their "constitutions"—the set of rules that guide how an AI responds to sensitive queries.
- **Societal Legitimacy:** For tech companies, alignment with faiths representing billions of people provides a form of social license that purely corporate ethics cannot achieve.

Critical Perspectives and Challenges

1. The Problem of Universalism

- **Value Pluralism:** Critics and participants alike point out that while faiths share common ground, they often differ on specific priorities. Creating a single set of "universal" AI ethics remains a daunting, perhaps impossible, task.
- **Ambiguity Management:** Some experts argue that tech companies are turning to religion not for answers, but to help them navigate the "grey areas" where binary logic fails.

2. "Ethics Washing" vs. Genuine Concern

- **Diversionary Tactics:** Skeptics, including former AI officials, fear that these high-level moral discussions distract from more immediate, tangible harms like bias, mass surveillance, and job displacement.
- **The PR Angle:** There is concern that this is a "belated" attempt by Silicon Valley to soften its "move fast and break things" image after causing significant societal disruptions.

3. The Fundamental Question of "Why"

- Some researchers argue that discussing how to make AI ethical bypasses the more critical question of whether certain AI systems should be built at all, particularly those used for autonomous weaponry or mass surveillance.

UPSC Relevance: Dimensions of the Issue

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Daily News Analysis

Dimension	Significance
Ethics (GS IV)	Explores the application of "Constitutional Morality" vs. "Religious Morality" in emerging technologies.
Governance (GS II)	Highlights the limitations of traditional regulation and the rise of multi-stakeholder international governance.
International Relations	The involvement of Geneva-based alliances and meetings in Beijing/Abu Dhabi shows AI ethics as a tool of "soft power" and global diplomacy.
Social Issues (GS I)	Analyzes how technology impacts traditional social structures and the role of religious institutions in the 21st century.

Conclusion

The marriage of Silicon Valley's computational power with the moral frameworks of global religions marks a new chapter in the evolution of AI. While this collaboration offers a more human-centric approach to technology, it must not serve as a substitute for robust, enforceable legal frameworks. The true test of the **Faith-AI Covenant** will lie in whether it leads to substantive changes in AI architecture—such as restricting autonomous weapons—or remains a sophisticated public relations exercise. For a technology that knows no borders, a synthesis of diverse moral perspectives is welcome, provided it addresses the structural risks AI poses to global society.

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UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question

Ques:The rapid advancement of Artificial Intelligence has outpaced traditional regulatory frameworks.Discuss the need for multi-stakeholder governance in AI ethics and regulation.(150 Words)

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A watershed moment in India's defence posture

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

New era Indian doctrine

India's historical posture of "reactive restraint" provided a strong rationale for a "dossier approach", in which military inaction was often portrayed as extraordinary restraint and was frequently encouraged and lauded by the West. "What if" loops about attacking terror targets in a nuclear-armed adversary provided the final blow to India's decision-makers. Post-Operation Sindoor, the "zero tolerance" policy declared by Prime Minister Narendra Modi was pivoted further and reinforced, whereby any act of cross-border terrorism would be considered an "act of war".

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

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

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

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



R.K.S. Bhadauria

Former Air Chief
Marshal and served as
Chief of the Air Staff
of the Indian Air Force

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

Military audaciousness at its best

This total, integrated and calibrated response, characterised by masterful control of the escalation ladder, reflects the seamless synergy between India's civil and military institutions. In my opinion, India's achievements could not have been better. After 88 hours of Operation Sindoor, by noon on May 10, Pakistan was reeling from massive destruction at 11 bases by the IAF. Karachi was nervously monitoring Indian naval deployments poised for action, while aggressive Indian Army operations along the Line of Control and the International Border had rendered drone attacks unviable. A robust, networked air-defence system, including the S-400 missile system had completely denied airspace not only over Indian territory but also deep inside Pakistan. Pakistan had no choice but to rush and request a ceasefire.

Given the dynamics and complications of escalation control under a nuclear overhang, India's Chief of Defence Staff and the Service Chiefs deserve high praise for the ferocious targeting on May 10 and the brilliant seizing of the escalation opportunity to coerce a termination. This was military audaciousness at its very best.

The Indian armed forces responded in full measure to the political mandate, leaving no doubt regarding the nation's capacity for rapid, high-impact operation. The sheer scale and speed of India's action on May 10 was watched with awe across the country.

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

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

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

Accelerate indigenous defence growth

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

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

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

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



India's strategic doctrine has evolved sharply after Operation Sindoor

GS Paper III: Internal Security

UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question: Operation Sindoor marked a shift from "reactive restraint" to "proactive deterrence" in India's security doctrine. Critically analyse the strategic significance of this transformation in the context of cross-border terrorism. **(250 Words)**

Context : In May 2025, India executed **Operation Sindoor**, a high-intensity, multi-service military response to the **Pahalgam carnage** of April 22, 2025, where cross-border terrorists killed 26 civilians. Unlike previous "reactive restraint" policies, this operation signaled a "new normal" in Indian defense doctrine. By transitioning from a defensive posture to one of **calibrated, proactive retribution**, India demonstrated a willingness to climb the escalation ladder even under a nuclear overhang, effectively redrawing the red lines of cross-border engagement.

Strategic Paradigm Shift: "The New Normal"

1. Departure from "Reactive Restraint"

For decades, India's response to terror was characterized by a "dossier approach"—compiling evidence to seek international condemnation. Operation Sindoor replaced this with a **zero-tolerance** mandate. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's declaration that cross-border terrorism would be treated as an **"act of war"** fundamentally changed the risk calculus for adversaries.

2. Masterful Escalation Control

One of the most significant aspects of the operation was India's ability to control the **escalation ladder**.

- **Phase 1 (May 7):** Precision strikes on nine terror hubs, including high-value targets in **Bahawalpur and Muridke**, deep inside Pakistan.
- **Phase 2 (May 9-10):** When the Pakistan Air Force (PAF) attempted to retaliate, the Indian Air Force (IAF) responded with waves of airstrikes hitting **11 airbases** (including Nur Khan and Sargodha).
- **Result:** The sheer speed and scale of the 88-hour operation compelled Pakistan to request a ceasefire by noon on May 10, 2025.

3. Military Audaciousness & Integration

The operation showcased a high degree of **Jointness** among the three services:

- **IAF:** Demonstrated precision at scale, neutralizing both terror infrastructure and military assets.
- **Indian Navy:** Poised for action off Karachi, creating a psychological and strategic blockade.
- **Indian Army:** Aggressive LoC operations and the deployment of the **S-400 missile system** created an "A2/AD" (Anti-Access/Area Denial) zone, effectively shutting down Pakistani airspace.

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Implications for National Security and Industry

1. Atmanirbharata (Self-Reliance)

The success of indigenous systems during the conflict—including **BrahMos missiles**, **Akash air defense**, and loitering munitions—has invigorated the domestic defense ecosystem. The operation underscored that true strategic autonomy requires the ability to "**Innovate, Design, and Manufacture**" at scale.

2. Global Defence Profile

The conflict served as a "live" demonstration of Indian military hardware. In the year following the operation, India's defense exports surged to nearly **₹39,000 crore (2025-26)**, a 62% increase, as global interest in Indian-made anti-drone platforms and precision missiles peaked.

3. Strategic Signaling

Operation Sindoor sent a clear message to three distinct audiences:

- **Terrorists:** There is no sanctuary, even deep within the adversary's heartland.
- **The Global Community:** India will no longer be deterred by "nuclear blackmail."
- **The Pakistani People:** A call to recognize the costs of their military leadership's "reckless involvement" in proxy wars.

Conclusion

Operation Sindoor was not merely a military victory but a **doctrinal revolution**. It shattered the myth that nuclear-armed neighbors cannot engage in a conventional, calibrated conflict. By seizing the initiative and maintaining the "escalation advantage," India has established a permanent "new normal" where the cost of state-sponsored terrorism is prohibitively high. For India, the path forward involves doubling down on indigenous innovation to ensure that the "Modi redlines" remain backed by the world's most agile and technologically advanced armed forces.