

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

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The Union Home Ministry and the Manipur government have signed a re-negotiated Suspension of Operations (SoO) pact with Kuki-Zo insurgent groups. This development comes just before Prime Minister Narendra Modi's scheduled visit to Manipur on September 13, marking a significant step in addressing the long-standing ethnic conflict and insurgency in the State. The pact is not only a security arrangement but also a political move with potential implications for peace, governance, and federal integrity.

### Key Highlights of the Pact

- **Revised Ground Rules:**
  - Verification of cadres and de-listing of foreign nationals, followed by deportation.
  - Reiteration of **territorial integrity of Manipur** and relocation of insurgent camps.
- **Shift in Demands:**
  - Earlier demand: **Autonomous Territorial Councils** within Manipur (pre-May 2023).
  - Current focus: **"Negotiated political settlement within the Constitution of India,"** which leaves scope for future political dialogue.
- **Civil Society Role:**
  - The Kuki-Zo Council (KZC) committed to open National Highway-2 (Imphal-Dimapur), vital for connectivity of the Imphal Valley to Nagaland and Assam.
  - However, differences persist, as KZC claims the highway was never formally blocked.

### Political and Security Significance

1. **Peace-building Efforts:** The pact attempts to reduce hostilities between Kuki-Zo groups and the State, especially after ethnic clashes with the Meitei community since May 2023.
2. **Federal Integrity:** By reaffirming Manipur's territorial integrity, the government aims to prevent fragmentation, while still allowing space for constitutional negotiations.
3. **Security Implications:** Relocation of insurgent camps and deportation of foreign nationals (reportedly from Myanmar) are crucial for stabilising border areas.
4. **Economic and Humanitarian Relief:** Reopening of NH-2 is critical to restore supply chains of essentials to the Imphal Valley, thereby easing the humanitarian crisis.

## Centre and Manipur govt. ink peace pact with Kuki-Zo groups

**Vijaita Singh**  
NEW DELHI

The Union Home Ministry and the Manipur government signed a Suspension of Operations (SoO) pact with the Kuki-Zo insurgent groups on Wednesday with "re-negotiated terms and conditions or ground rules", the Ministry said on Thursday. The development comes days ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's expected visit to Manipur on September 13, his first visit since ethnic violence between the Kuki-Zo and Meitei people erupted in the State on May 3, 2023.

Security forces will conduct verification of cadres and de-list foreign nationals, if any, the Ministry said. A senior government official said that once identified, the foreign nationals would be deported. The revised ground rules reiterate territorial integrity of Manipur and relocation of camps run by insurgent groups.

Prior to May 3, 2023, the SoO groups demanded autonomous territorial councils within Manipur, but post-violence the demands changed.

Asked if the SoO groups have given up their demand for a separate administration or Union Territory with a legislature, Seilen Haokip, spokesperson Kuki National Organisation (KNO), one of the signatories, told *The Hindu*, "Though the agreement speaks about territorial integrity of Manipur, it also mentions political settlement within the Constitution of India. The Constitution speaks about the integrity of the country, not a district or a State."

He added that "negotiated political settlement within Constitution of India" is a new inclusion in

### Core pact

The agreement was signed with 're-negotiated terms and conditions or ground rules'

- The revised ground rules reiterate territorial integrity of Manipur and relocation of camps run by insurgent groups



- The rules also stress need for a negotiated solution to bring lasting peace and stability to the State

the agreement as it was not there in the 2008 text when the demand was for territorial councils in Manipur.

The Kuki-Zo Council (KZC), a conglomerate of civil society organisations, agreed to open the National Highway-2 (Imphal-Dimapur) passing through Kangpokpi district "for the free movement of commuters and essential goods", the Ministry said.

### Highway shut

The highway, key to connect the Imphal Valley, where the Meitei people live, to Nagaland and Assam, and critical for the supply of essentials and other commodities, has been shut for the past two years for the movement of the Meitei people.

"The decision came after a series of meetings between officials of MHA and a delegation of KZC in the last few days at New Delhi. KZC has given commitment to cooperate with Security Forces deployed by Government of India (GoI) to maintain peace along NH-02," the government said.

The KZC, however, said that the highway has never been blocked and remained open for commuters and for transportation of essential goods.

## Daily News Analysis

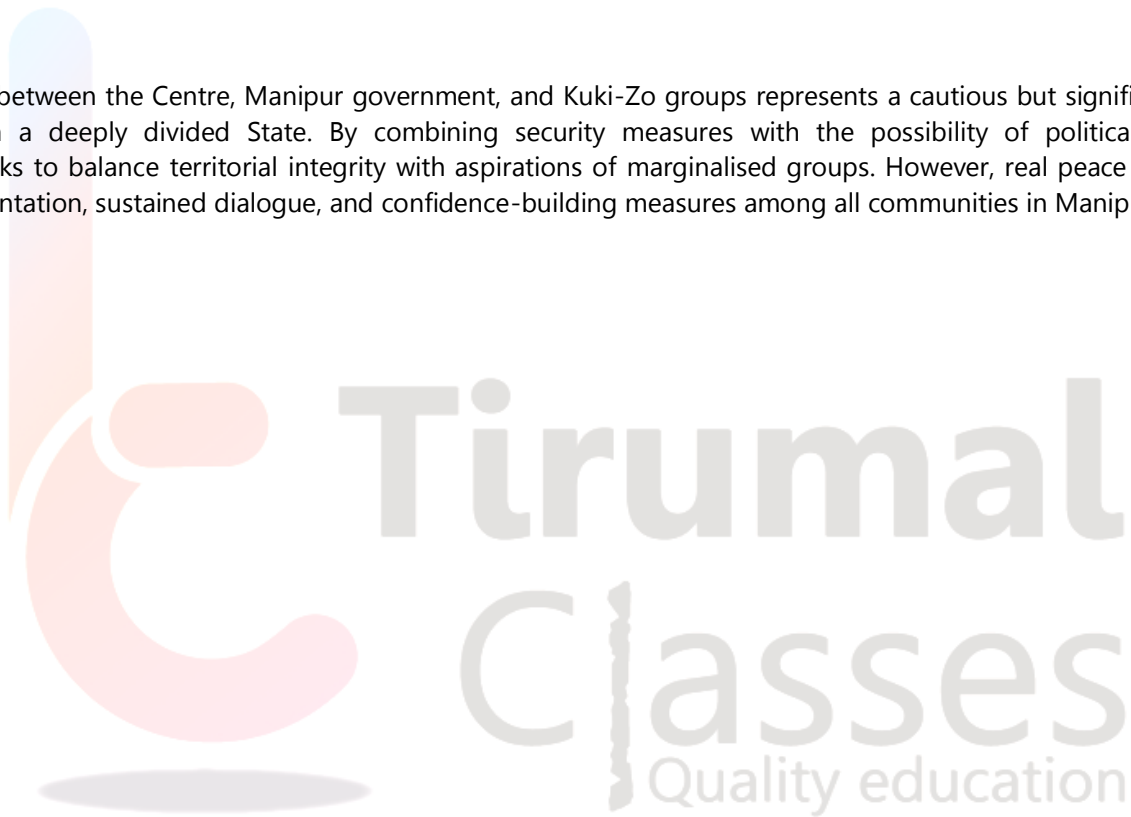
5. **Symbolic Timing:** Signing the pact just ahead of PM's visit signals political intent to showcase progress on the ground.

### Challenges Ahead

- **Trust Deficit:** Both Kuki-Zo and Meitei communities remain divided; violence and mistrust are still fresh.
- **Ambiguity in Demands:** The phrase "negotiated political settlement" could lead to differing interpretations, possibly reviving calls for separate administration.
- **Implementation Hurdles:** Verification of insurgent cadres, camp relocation, and ensuring free movement on highways will test state capacity.
- **Role of Civil Society:** Cooperation of local organisations like KZC is essential, but claims of "no blockade" highlight narrative mismatches.

### Conclusion

The peace pact between the Centre, Manipur government, and Kuki-Zo groups represents a cautious but significant attempt at reconciliation in a deeply divided State. By combining security measures with the possibility of political dialogue, the government seeks to balance territorial integrity with aspirations of marginalised groups. However, real peace will depend on sincere implementation, sustained dialogue, and confidence-building measures among all communities in Manipur.



## Daily News Analysis

### UPSC Prelims Practice Question

**Ques:** With reference to the “Suspension of Operations (SoO)” agreement recently in news, consider the following statements:

1. It is a ceasefire arrangement signed between the Government of India, State governments, and insurgent groups.
2. The agreement allows insurgent groups to retain arms without restrictions.
3. The revised SoO pact with Kuki-Zo groups reiterates the territorial integrity of Manipur.

**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 : c)**

### UPSC Mains Practice Question

**Ques:** Insurgency in the North-East is often rooted in identity, autonomy, and governance issues. Discuss how the recent peace pact with Kuki-Zo groups reflects the challenges of balancing security imperatives with political aspirations. **(150 Words)**



The National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) 2025 has once again placed IIT-Madras at the top overall position for the seventh consecutive year, highlighting the dominance of premier centrally funded institutions in India's higher education landscape. However, the Union Education Minister has raised concerns over the "peer perception" criterion, sparking debate over whether the NIRF adequately captures the diversity and ground realities of India's educational institutions.

### Key Highlights of NIRF 2025 Rankings

- **IIT-Madras:** Retains first place overall and as the best engineering institution.
- **IISc Bengaluru:** First in universities and research institutions categories.
- **IIM Ahmedabad:** First in management for the sixth year.
- **AIIMS New Delhi:** Best in medical institutions.
- **Other notable winners:**
  - Hindu College (Delhi) topped colleges category.
  - JamiaHamdard (Pharmacy).
  - IIT Roorkee (Architecture).
  - NLSIU Bengaluru (Law).
  - IGNOU (best open university).
- **Participation:** Rankings now cover 17 categories with wider institutional participation, reflecting the expansion of India's higher education sector.

### Concerns and Criticism

- **Peer Perception Bias:**
  - Accounts for 10% weightage, but favours metropolitan and centrally funded institutions over state-run or regional ones.
  - States allege "regional bias," as elite institutions in Delhi, Bengaluru, or Chennai naturally enjoy greater brand visibility.
- **Equity vs. Excellence Debate:**
  - Centrally funded institutions dominate top slots, while many state universities and colleges with large student populations remain underrepresented.
  - Raises the question of whether rankings reinforce existing hierarchies rather than encourage broad-based improvement.
- **Need for Evolving Parameters:**
  - Minister suggested inclusion of new indicators such as:
    - Number of entrepreneurs created.
    - Innovation and start-up culture.

## IIT-M tops NIRF rankings; Minister criticises its 'peer perception' parameter

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

For the seventh straight year, the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Madras claimed the top overall position in the higher education rankings announced by the National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) on Thursday. It also remained the country's best engineering college for the 10th straight year.

The NIRF's methodology, however, came in for some criticism from Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan, who presented the India Rankings 2025 awards. He was especially sceptical about the 'peer perception' parameter, that carries 10% of marks for the ranking, and suggested that the NIRF should ensure that government-funded institutions do not fall behind because of this yardstick.

After the 2024 rankings, States and State-run educational institutions had alleged that the rankings reflected "regional bias" as metropolitan education institutions score higher on the 'peer perception' criteria, in comparison to suburban or State-run higher education institutions.

The other parameters that the NIRF currently considers for the overall category are teaching, learning, and resources; research and professional practice; graduation outcomes; and research and inclusivity.

Mr. Pradhan said he was confident that the NIRF would evolve into one of the best accreditation frameworks by including more parameters such as entrepreneurs created by an institution, involving more data-driven approaches, and including

**Overall top 10**

Six IITs make it to the **best 10** higher educational institutions in the overall ranking

1	Indian Institute of Technology, Madras
2	Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru
3	Indian Institute of Technology, Bombay
4	Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi
5	Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur
6	Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur
7	Indian Institute of Technology, Roorkee
8	All India Institute of Medical Sciences, Delhi
9	Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi
10	Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi

SOURCE: NATIONAL INSTITUTIONAL RANKING FRAMEWORK

more categories and institutions in the future.

In the tenth edition of the NIRF rankings, awards were given in 17 categories and more institutions have joined in the process, he said. "This shows the stable growth of our higher education sector," Mr. Pradhan said, maintaining that the challenge is to increase the number of students and the quality of education in the higher education sector. "Very soon, a new mechanism for institutional ranking will be placed. We will go by the theory of one nation, one data," he noted.

The top 100 institutions in the overall category comprised 24 State universities, 22 private deemed universities, 19 IITs and the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), nine private universities, eight National Institutes of Technology, seven Central universities, five medical institutions, four Indian Institutes of Science Education and Research, one college, and the Indian Agriculture Research Institute.

The IISc, Bengaluru topped the Universities category for the tenth consecutive year and also stood first in the Research Institutions category for the fifth consecutive year. IIM Ahmedabad was the best institution for Man-

agement studies for the sixth consecutive year. The All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), New Delhi occupied the top slot among Medical institutions for the eighth consecutive year.

Jamia Hamdard, New Delhi is the best place for studying Pharmacy and IIT Roorkee retained its top position in Architecture and Planning. Hindu College in Delhi secured the first rank among Colleges for the second consecutive year, replacing Miranda House. The National Law School of India University, Bengaluru retained its first position in Law for the eighth consecutive year.

In the Universities category, IISc ranked first, followed by Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi; Manipal Academy of Higher Education, Manipal; Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi; and University of Delhi, Delhi. Jadavpur University, Kolkata was declared the best among State Public Universities, followed by Anna University, Chennai; Panjab University, Chandigarh; Andhra University, Visakhapatnam; and Kerala University, Thiruvananthapuram.

The Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), New Delhi was the best among Open Universities.

- Broader data-driven analysis ("one nation, one data").
- Current framework emphasises teaching, learning, resources, research, graduation outcomes, inclusivity, and perception.

## Implications for Higher Education

1. **Policy Shift Expected:** The government plans to revise the ranking system to address criticisms and make it more inclusive.
2. **Global Benchmarking:** A more robust NIRF could enhance India's credibility in international rankings, attracting global students and collaborations.
3. **Encouraging Competition:** Rankings push institutions to improve quality, research, and outcomes, but fairness of parameters is critical.
4. **Equity in Access:** Highlighting state and rural institutions is essential for balanced regional development.

## Conclusion

The **NIRF 2025 rankings reaffirm the academic excellence of elite institutions like IIT-Madras and IISc**, but also expose structural challenges in India's higher education system. While rankings play a crucial role in encouraging competition and setting benchmarks, their methodology must ensure inclusivity and fairness. The proposed reforms—such as incorporating entrepreneurship, innovation, and "one nation, one data"—could make NIRF a truly comprehensive and globally respected framework. Ultimately, India's goal should be to balance **excellence with equity**, ensuring both world-class universities and upliftment of state-run institutions.



### UPSC Prelims Practice Question

**Ques: Which of the following pairs are correctly matched (NIRF 2025 Rankings)?**

1. Engineering – IIT Madras
2. Management – IIM Ahmedabad
3. Universities – Jawaharlal Nehru University
4. Medical – AIIMS, New Delhi

**Select the correct answer using the code below:**

- (a) 1, 2 and 4 only
- (b) 1, 3 and 4 only
- (c) 2 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

**Ans : a)**

### UPSC Mains Practice Question

**Ques:** Discuss the significance of institutional rankings like NIRF in promoting quality education in India. How can the framework be improved to ensure inclusivity and fairness across regions?(150 Words)



The **Sample Registration Survey (SRS) Statistical Report 2023** highlights a crucial demographic shift: India's **Crude Birth Rate (CBR)** has declined from 19.1 in 2022 to 18.4 in 2023, while the **Total Fertility Rate (TFR)** has dipped to **1.9**, falling below the replacement level (2.1) for the first time in two years. This signals India's ongoing demographic transition and its potential implications for population growth, labour force, and social policy.

## Key Findings of the Report

- **National Averages:**
  - CBR: 18.4 (2023) vs. 19.1 (2022).
  - TFR: 1.9 (2023), down from 2.0 (2021 & 2022).
- **State Variations:**
  - **Highest CBR & TFR:** Bihar (CBR – 25.8, TFR – 2.8).
  - **Lowest CBR:** Tamil Nadu (12).
  - **Lowest TFR:** Delhi (1.2).
  - Northern States (Bihar, UP, MP, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh) still above replacement level.
  - Southern & Western States (Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Maharashtra, WB, Delhi) well below replacement.
- **Ageing Population:**
  - Elderly (60+) now **9.7% of population**, up 0.7% in one year.
  - Kerala has highest elderly proportion (15%), while Assam, Delhi, Jharkhand report lowest (~7.6–7.7%).
- **Data Gaps:** CRS and MCCD datasets for 2023 are yet to be released, slowing a full demographic assessment.

## ‘India’s birth rate down, first dip in TFR in 2 years’

**Abhinav Lakshman**  
NEW DELHI

India's Crude Birth Rate (CBR), the number of children born per 1,000 people in the population in a year, has declined 0.7-points from 19.1 in 2022 to 18.4 in 2023. The country's Total Fertility Rate (TFR) has fallen for the first time in two years to 1.9 in 2023, according to the latest Sample Registration Survey Statistical Report for 2023. In 2021 and 2022, India's TFR remained constant at 2.0.

The report, released by the Office of the Registrar General of India this week, revealed that the highest CBR was in Bihar at 25.8, and the lowest was in Tamil Nadu at 12. Bihar reported the highest TFR (2.8) among the bigger States and Union Territories (UTs), and Delhi reported the lowest (1.2).

The report pointed out that 18 States and UTs had

**The latest data was sourced from Sample Registration Survey Statistical Report released this week**

reported a TFR of below the replacement level TFR of 2.1. Replacement level TFR denotes the average number of children each woman needs to give birth for one generation to replace the other.

The RGI released the Civil Registration System (CRS), Sample Registration System (SRS), and Medical Certification of Cause of Death (MCCD) reports for 2021 after a four-year delay in May this year, and in June, the SRS, CRS, and MCCD data for 2022 were released. While the SRS for 2023 has been made public, the corresponding CRS and MCCD datasets are yet to appear on the Census website.

The SRS 2023 datasets

showed that the proportion of the elderly in the country (people above 60) rose by 0.7 percentage points in a year to 9.7% of the population. Kerala has the highest proportion of elderly population at 15%. Assam (7.6%), Delhi (7.7%), and Jharkhand (7.6%) reported the lowest proportion of their respective populations to be above 60.

The TFR data, which denotes the average number of children expected to be born per woman during her entire span of reproductive period, further showed that all States reporting TFR that is higher than replacement level were in northern India - Bihar (2.8), Uttar Pradesh (2.6), Madhya Pradesh (2.4), Rajasthan (2.3), and Chhattisgarh (2.2). The States and UTs reporting the lowest TFR included Delhi (1.2), West Bengal (1.3), Tamil Nadu (1.3), and Maharashtra (1.4).

## Analysis & Implications

1. **Demographic Transition**
  - India has moved closer to **replacement-level fertility**, with wide regional disparities.
  - Southern and Western States are experiencing **population stabilisation and ageing**, while Northern States still drive overall population momentum.
2. **Economic & Social Impact**
  - Declining fertility reduces **population growth rate**, impacting future labour supply.
  - Rising elderly share will increase demand for **pension, healthcare, and social security systems**.
  - Young population advantage ("demographic dividend") may taper off earlier than expected if jobs, skills, and productivity are not aligned.
3. **Regional Divide**

## Daily News Analysis

- High fertility in northern States may create **migration pressures**, while low fertility in southern States may lead to **labour shortages and ageing societies**.
- This could intensify inter-State economic and political tensions (e.g., debates on delimitation, fiscal transfers).

#### 4. Policy Challenges

- Need to balance **population control policies** with **pronatalist measures** in low-fertility States.
- Expansion of **geriatric care infrastructure** and healthcare financing.
- Leveraging youth in high-fertility States through education, skill-building, and job creation.

### Conclusion

India's declining TFR to 1.9 marks a **historic demographic shift**, signalling that the country is entering a phase of **slowing population growth and rising ageing population**. While this offers opportunities for sustainable development and better resource allocation, it also raises challenges of regional imbalance, migration, and elderly care. Policymakers must adopt a **differentiated approach**—focusing on **population stabilisation in the north** and **ageing and labour-force concerns in the south**—to ensure India's demographic transition becomes a strength rather than a liability.

### UPSC Prelims Practice Question

**Ques :**With reference to India's demographic trends as per the Sample Registration Survey (SRS) 2023, consider the following statements:

1. India's Total Fertility Rate (TFR) has fallen below the replacement level of 2.1.
2. Bihar reports the highest TFR among major States, while Delhi reports the lowest.
3. Kerala has the highest proportion of elderly population in the country.

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

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

**Ans : d)**

### UPSC Mains Practice Question

**Ques:** "India's demographic dividend is narrowing faster than expected." Critically analyse this statement in the context of the Sample Registration Survey 2023 findings. **(150 Words)**

India's battle against **antimicrobial resistance (AMR)** has largely been framed as a **public health and infectious disease crisis**. However, emerging research reveals a less-discussed dimension — the impact of antibiotic overuse on **mental health via the gut-brain axis**. This raises the need to reconceptualise antibiotic misuse not just as a medical hazard, but also as a contributor to psychiatric morbidity, particularly in a country already grappling with gaps in mental healthcare.

## Key Concerns

- **High Antibiotic Consumption in India**
  - India ranks among the world's largest consumers of antibiotics.
  - Easy **over-the-counter access, self-medication, and unregulated pharmacies** drive misuse.
  - A 2022 Lancet study found nearly **50% of antibiotics used in India were unapproved formulations**.
- **Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR)**
  - Responsible for an estimated **2.67 lakh deaths in 2021**; projected to rise to **1.2 million by 2030**.
  - Weak regulation and economic incentives encourage over-prescription.
- **Gut-Brain Axis Disruption**
  - Antibiotics disturb gut microbiota, which produce **serotonin, dopamine, and other neurotransmitters** essential for mood, cognition, and stress regulation.
  - Gut dysbiosis linked to **depression, anxiety, and cognitive decline**.
  - Studies from **NIMHANS and AIIMS** show early evidence of gut-psychiatric linkages in India.
- **Mental Health Implications**
  - Dysbiosis-induced **inflammation and cytokine release** (e.g., IL-6, TNF-alpha) can cross into the brain, altering neuroplasticity.
  - Loss of microbial diversity reduces resilience against psychiatric disorders.
  - Growing interest in **psychobiotics** (probiotics/prebiotics as therapy) highlights new treatment avenues.

## Policy and Systemic Challenges

1. **Cultural Habits:** Quick-fix antibiotic reliance, low awareness of long-term harm.
2. **Weak Regulation:** Easy pharmacy access, poor enforcement of prescription-only rules.
3. **Healthcare Incentives:** Doctors may over-prescribe to meet patient expectations.

## How the antibiotic culture in India imperils mental health

While threat of antimicrobial resistance is acknowledged as a formidable public health hazard, its implications on mental well-being remain under-examined; public health campaigns must pivot towards education and empowerment and regulatory reform is imperative to address the issue

Rashikhha Ra Iyer

**A**s mental health awareness gains momentum in India, a surreptitious menace is insidiously undermining this edifice of progress: the unbridled use of antibiotics. While the threat of antimicrobial resistance (AMR) is ubiquitously acknowledged as a formidable public health hazard, its profound implications on mental well-being remain under-examined. At the epicentre of this conundrum lies the intricate gut-brain axis — a labyrinthine communication nexus between the gastrointestinal apparatus and the cerebral cortex.

Nascent research suggests that perturbations in gut microbiota, frequently precipitated by overzealous antibiotic consumption, may significantly contribute to the aetiology of anxiety, depression, and cognitive degeneration. In a country where antibiotics are often taken sans prescription or medical oversight, this gut-brain axis nexus demands an urgent and paradigmatic shift in attention for remedial measures to mitigate this silent yet calamitous crisis.

**Antibiotic consumption** India occupies a distressing prominence in the global hierarchy of antibiotic consumption. The trifecta of over-the-counter accessibility, rampant self-medication, and limited public awareness has cultivated an entrenched culture of antibiotic overutilisation. According to the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, antimicrobial resistance (AMR) was accountable for an estimated 2.67 million fatalities in India in 2021, with projections forecasting an escalation to 1.2 million by 2030, should prevailing trends continue. A seminal study published in 2022 in *The Lancet Regional Health - Southeast Asia* revealed a disquieting statistic: nearly half of all antibiotics consumed in India comprised unapproved formulations, exacerbating the threat of resistance. This egregious misuse not only fuels the configuration of AMR but also precipitates a deleterious impact on the gut's microbial diversity — a vital constituent of mental well-being.

**What's in the gut** The gastrointestinal tract harbours trillions of microorganisms that exert a profound influence on the biosynthesis of pivotal neurotransmitters, including serotonin and dopamine. These chemical messengers orchestrate the regulation of mood, sleep-wake cycles, and stress responses, and so, the gut plays an integral role in maintaining neurological homeostasis. When antibiotic systems, as adjuvant to conventional psychiatric care, especially in a nation like India where mental health infrastructure remains woefully inadequate, the repercussions can resonate throughout the nervous system, potentially precipitating a cascade of downstream effects.

Pioneering research from institutions such as the National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences (NIMHANS) and the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) has initiated an exploration of the intricate relationship between gut dysbiosis and psychiatric maladies. Although the scientific discourse is still evolving, the



In Focus: Students raising awareness about antimicrobial resistance. RA IYER

accumulating evidence is sufficiently compelling to justify the implementation of targeted public health interventions towards a proactive and informed response to mitigate the burgeoning threat of gut-related psychiatric disorders. The ramifications of microbial perturbation extend beyond mere biochemical imbalances; they encompass a broader psychosocial dimension that implicates the very fabric of human experience. The gut microbiota, often romanticised as the "second brain", is not merely a passive consortium of bacteria, but an active participant in neurochemical symphony. Through the production of short-chain fatty acids, modulation of immune responses, and interaction with the vagus nerve, these microorganisms wield influence over neurodevelopmental trajectories and behavioural phenotypes.

Indeed, the burgeoning field of psychobiotics — a portmanteau term coined to describe probiotics and prebiotics that confer mental health benefits — has illuminated the therapeutic potential of modulating gut flora to ameliorate psychiatric symptoms. A 2020 meta-analysis published in *Frontiers in Psychiatry* revealed that probiotic supplementation was associated with significant reductions in depressive symptoms, particularly among individuals with mild to moderate depression. Such findings underscore the plausibility of leveraging gut health as an adjunct to conventional psychiatric care.

Compounding this crisis is the paucity of public awareness regarding the gut-brain axis and its susceptibility to pharmacological insult. The average Indian consumer, often bereft of access to nuanced medical counsel, remains oblivious to the long-term consequences of indiscriminate antibiotic use. The cultural proclivity towards "quick fixes" and the valorisation of pharmaceutical interventions over lifestyle modifications further entrench this paradigm. In rural and semi-urban locales, where healthcare

access is fragmented and regulatory oversight lax, antibiotics are dispensed easily, and without prescription — frequently for viral infections where they are not only ineffective but actively deleterious.

Moreover, the economic incentives that drive antibiotic overprescription cannot be ignored. Private practitioners, operating within a fee-for-service model, may be inclined to prescribe antibiotics to appease patient expectations or expedite symptomatic relief. Pharmacies, often unregulated, serve as de facto dispensaries, offering potent medications without requisite prescriptions. This confluence of systemic vulnerabilities and behavioural prodigality has rendered India a fertile ground for AMR proliferation and microbial dysbiosis. The implications for mental health are manifold. Dysbiosis-induced inflammation has been implicated in the pathogenesis of major depressive disorder, with elevated levels of pro-inflammatory cytokines such as IL-6 and TNF-alpha observed in affected individuals. These inflammatory mediators can traverse the blood-brain barrier, altering neurotransmitter metabolism and neuroplasticity. Furthermore, gut-derived metabolites like butyrate and propionate have been shown to influence gene expression in the brain, modulating synaptic function and stress reactivity.

**Need for interventions** In this context, the intersection of microbiology and psychiatry assumes profound significance. It invites a reconceptualisation of mental illness — not merely as a cerebral aberration but as a systemic dysfunction with gastrointestinal antecedents. Such a paradigm shift necessitates interdisciplinary collaboration, integrating gastroenterology, psychiatry, nutrition, and public health to forge holistic interventions. Encouragingly, India possesses a rich repository of traditional knowledge that can be harnessed to promote gut health. Fermented foods — ubiquitous in Indian

cuisine — such as curd, idli, dosa, and pickles, serve as natural probiotics, fostering microbial diversity and resilience.

Public health campaigns must pivot towards education and empowerment. The National Health Mission and Ayushman Bharat can incorporate gut-brain literacy into their outreach programmes, elucidating the dangers of antibiotic misuse and the virtues of dietary modulation. School curricula can embed modules on microbiome science, cultivating a generation of informed citizens. Media platforms, both traditional and digital, can amplify narratives that valorise microbial stewardship and therapeutic innovation.

Simultaneously, regulatory reform is imperative. The Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation must enforce stringent controls on antibiotic dispensation, mandating prescription-only access and penalising non-compliance. More surveillance systems such as INSA (Indian Network for Surveillance of Antimicrobial Resistance), which is now part of a broader network, should be created and integrated with mental health metrics to elucidate correlations and inform policy. Investment in microbiome research, particularly within Indian populations, can yield context-specific insights and therapeutic innovations.

Crucially, too, must recalibrate their praxis. Antibiotic stewardship should be embedded within medical training, sensitising practitioners to the collateral damage of pharmacological interventions. Psychiatric evaluations can incorporate gastrointestinal assessments, recognising the bidirectional interplay between gut and mind. Nutritional counselling, often relegated to ancillary status, must be foregrounded. As India strides towards a more enlightened discourse on mental health, it must not overlook the microbial foundations of well-being.

*Rashikhha Ra Iyer is a multidisciplinary clinician working in the UK, specialising in the delivery of clinical interventions in forensic settings.*  
[rashikhha.ra@outlook.com](mailto:rashikhha.ra@outlook.com)

## Daily News Analysis

4. **Mental Health Blind Spot:** Current public health discourse rarely integrates microbiome science into psychiatric care.

### Way Forward

- **Public Health Campaigns:**
  - Integrate gut-brain literacy into **Ayushman Bharat** and **National Health Mission**.
  - Promote dietary practices supporting gut health (e.g., traditional fermented foods).
  - Embed microbiome awareness in school curricula.
- **Regulatory Reforms:**
  - Stricter controls on **antibiotic sales** and penalisation of illegal dispensing.
  - Expand **surveillance systems** like INSAR to track AMR alongside mental health outcomes.
- **Clinical Practice:**
  - Incorporate **antibiotic stewardship** in medical training.
  - Encourage psychiatrists to consider gut health in assessments.
  - Make **nutritional counselling** integral to psychiatric care.
- **Research & Innovation:**
  - Invest in **India-specific microbiome studies**.
  - Explore **psychobiotic therapies** as adjuncts to conventional treatment.

### Conclusion

The **antibiotic culture in India**, if unchecked, risks creating a dual crisis: **rising antimicrobial resistance and deteriorating mental health**. Recognising the gut as the "second brain" underscores the need for an **interdisciplinary approach** that connects microbiology, psychiatry, nutrition, and public health. India's fight against AMR must, therefore, expand beyond infectious disease management to safeguard the **psychological resilience and cognitive health** of its population.

## Daily News Analysis

### UPSC Prelims Practice Question

**Ques:** Which of the following best explains the term gut-brain axis, often seen in health research?

- (a) Communication system between the immune system and the brain
- (b) Hormonal link between the endocrine system and the nervous system
- (c) Bidirectional communication between the gastrointestinal system and the central nervous system
- (d) Neural connection between the spinal cord and the intestines

**Ans : (c)**

### UPSC Mains Practice Question

**Ques:** Examine the role of regulation, awareness, and clinical practices in addressing the misuse of antibiotics in India. Suggest policy measures to balance infectious disease management with mental health concerns. **(150 words)**



The India-China boundary question is one of the most complex and enduring disputes in Asia, rooted in colonial legacies and competing territorial claims. Unlike other international borders, much of the Himalayan frontier was historically indeterminate, shaped by British cartography and Tibetan suzerainty. Post-Independence, India insisted on British-era maps as sacrosanct, while China, after consolidating control over Tibet, rejected them and advanced its own claims. This divergence in perception has produced decades of conflict, negotiations, and uneasy peace.

## Historical Background and Early

- **Colonial inheritance:** The was a product of two empires — India and the Qing dynasty. uninhabited Himalayan terrain, it remained imprecisely demarcated.
- **Eastern sector:** India based its the 1914 Simla Convention, produced the McMahon Line. however, never accepted this agreement.
- **Western sector (Aksai Chin):** side had a permanent presence, China built a strategic highway Xinjiang and Tibet. India's attempts to assert control here escalation.
- **The 1962 War:** China offered compromises, including recognition of India's eastern exchange for Aksai Chin, but rejected them. The conflict in China retaining Aksai Chin withdrawing east of the McMahon Line.

## Post-War Developments

- **Freeze and cautious engagement (1962–79):** For nearly 15 years, both sides avoided the border. India constituted the China Study Group and strengthened patrolling.
- **Political outreach:** Vajpayee's 1979 visit and Deng Xiaoping's 1980 revival of the "swap" proposal signalled attempts at normalisation, but India rejected them, citing the "betrayal" of 1962.
- **Military posturing:** The 1980s witnessed flare-ups at Wangdung and elsewhere. Operation Falcon (1986) demonstrated India's improved military preparedness compared to 1962.

## India-China: the making of a border

Being high up in the Himalayas, in a largely unpopulated area, the India-China border has been largely indeterminate and inaccurate. While at present peace and tranquillity at the boundary is what is important, the issue is far from being resolved.

## WORLD INSIGHT

Manoi Ioshi

**I**ndia has a complicated history with regards to its border with China.

The border was the product of two empires – the Manchu and the British. Being in the Himalayas and in an unpopulated area, it was not precise. After Independence, it would have been prudent for both countries to sit and

lay down a precise and accurate border. Unfortunately, India took the position that it knew where the border was and that there was no need for negotiations. The Indian position was based on its confidence in British-era maps, but not on actual control on the ground.

**The beginning of the conflict**  
While neither India nor China had a permanent presence in the Aksai Chin, a barren, high-altitude desert, China in order to facilitate its control of Tibet built a highway through the Aksai Chin from

Xinjiang and occupied it. Similarly, in the east, India established control over Tawang, a major monastery town in what is now Arunachal Pradesh. It did so on the basis of the fact that it had signed a border agreement with Tibet in 1914, at a time when Tibet had been independent, which defined the boundary by the so-called McMahon Line.

The Chinese suggested various ways to deal with what they said was an undefined border. In 1959, they proposed that the two sides accept a Line of Actual Control as the border and move forces 20 kms back from it. In 1960, Zhou Enlai, former Premier of China, came to New Delhi and proposed a swap where India would concede the Chinese position in Aksai Chin in exchange for Chinese acceptance of India's claim over Arunachal Pradesh.

However, India refused. When India belatedly tried to recapture Aksai Chin, it led to friction with China and eventually resulted in the 1962 India-China war. After the war, the Chinese withdrew to the areas north of the McMahon Line in the east, but in the west (Ladakh), they retained some areas they had captured in the war.

### Post war developments

For nearly one and a half decades, both sides stayed away from the border. In 1975, India constituted a high-level China Study Group to monitor the Sino-Indian border. It was under the directions of this body that the border was mapped with satellite imagery, and Indian police/Army patrols were ordered to regularly police the border by establishing patrolling points along it.

In February 1979, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, who was the foreign minister of the then Janata Party government, visited Beijing and became the first senior Indian leader to go there since the war. Vajpayee, a veteran parliamentarian, had been a critic of Nehru's China policy. But in 1979, he saw his mission as one to restore normalcy with India's two neighbours, Pakistan and China. Though his visit had to be cut short because of the Chinese invasion of Vietnam, it did succeed in restoring a degree of normalcy in India-China ties. The Chinese motivation for accepting the Indian outreach was to ensure that New Delhi did not get too close to the Soviet Union which was, at the time, viewed as China's principal antagonist.

Deng Xiaoping, China's supreme leader, suggested a revival of the 1960 Zhou proposal. In June 1980, in an



**New relations:** Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru greets Zhou Enlai, the Chinese Premier, on his arrival in New Delhi, on April 19, 1960. HINDU ARCHIVE

## THE GIST

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## Conflict

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## Negotiation Attempts and Shifts

- **1981–88 border talks:** While China preferred a package deal (swap), India sought a sector-by-sector approach. Talks stalled as Beijing pressed for concessions in Tawang, citing its significance to Tibet.
- **Rajiv Gandhi's 1988 Beijing visit:** Marked a turning point, as India accepted normalisation of bilateral ties in parallel with boundary discussions. The creation of the Joint Working Group (JWG) institutionalised the process.
- **Principle of MUMA (Mutual Understanding and Mutual Accommodation):** Both sides agreed to manage the dispute peacefully while pursuing cooperation in other areas.

## Significance and Lessons

1. **Colonial legacies persist:** The dispute highlights how colonial-era cartography left ambiguous frontiers, particularly in sparsely populated high-altitude areas.
2. **Missed opportunities:** India's rigid stance in the 1950s–60s arguably foreclosed early compromise solutions, deepening mistrust.
3. **Strategic calculations:** China's proposals often reflected its broader geopolitical priorities (e.g., countering the Soviet Union, managing US-India proximity).
4. **From confrontation to management:** The Rajiv Gandhi–Deng Xiaoping understanding shifted the focus from resolution to maintaining peace and tranquillity — a template that underpins agreements since the 1990s.

## Conclusion

The India-China boundary issue remains unresolved, a legacy of colonial frontiers, differing perceptions, and strategic mistrust. Yet, the history of the dispute underscores a crucial lesson: while final settlement may be elusive, peace and stability at the border can be managed through dialogue, restraint, and confidence-building measures. For India, the challenge is to balance its territorial integrity with pragmatic diplomacy, ensuring that unresolved boundaries do not derail broader national interests.

## Daily News Analysis

### UPSC Prelims Practice Question

**Ques:** With reference to the India–China border issue, consider the following statements:

1. The McMahon Line was drawn in 1914 at the Simla Convention between British India and Tibet, and was accepted by China.
2. The Aksai Chin region was historically inhabited and under continuous Indian administration before 1950.
3. The Line of Actual Control (LAC) was first formally proposed by China in 1959.

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

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

**Ans: (b)**

### UPSC Mains Practice Question

**Ques:** Evaluate the significance of Rajiv Gandhi's 1988 visit to China in redefining India–China relations. How did it mark a shift from confrontation to management of the boundary issue? **(150 Words)**



### Trump's tariff war as opportunity for the Global South

**A**lthough much has been made of what the United States and U.S. President Trump are doing, it is critical for India (and the world) to dissect the *raison d'être* behind the disruptions being imposed on them today. The economic, geopolitical and technological polycrisis necessitates a strategic recalibration, to insulate ourselves and to forge a more equitable world order.

Mr. Trump's economic warfare is motivated by three imperatives. First, he is consciously pandering to America's silent majority (and not just the 'Make America Great Again' Republicans) which feels shortchanged by globalisation's nucleus, namely capital accumulation, cheap labour, the environment's colonisation and trickle-down economics. This neo-liberal status quo has caused an unprecedented concentration of wealth and power on the one hand, and mushrooming inequalities on the other. Instead of comprehensively restructuring economic paradigms and thereby redressing legitimate grievances (which the Global South also feels acutely), he has unleashed xenophobic, racist and centrifugal politics, veneered by economic populism.

#### Trump's motivations

Domestic politics partly explains why Mr. Trump hawkishly vilifies the liberal international order as antithetical to American interests. This has translated into sanctions on 30-plus nations and tariffs on nearly 70 (impairing the free movement of goods and ideas), the forging of trade blocs, the undermining of transnational organisations and treaties, circumscribing of foreign aid to vulnerable nations (reversing solidarity commitments dating back to the First World War) and a crackdown against immigration (impeding the free movement of labour). This 360° attack on the norms and institutions of the liberal world order is just a fig-leaf for the ruthless pursuit of sovereign self-interest.

Second, sidestepping that the tariffs are a camouflaged super-tax on American companies and consumers (who will collectively absorb 70% of tariffs costs, according to Goldman Sachs), they are designed to bolster America's economic strength by extorting nations and companies. Even though America accounts for 26% of global GDP, China, at 17%, is fast catching up (and nearly on a par with the other G-7 members, which collectively account for 20%-22% of global GDP). This is why America continues to heavily subsidise agricultural production, deepens unilateralist industrial, technology and climate change policies, bludgeons nations into making investment commitments, and strives to retrench the dollar's privileged position (including circumscribing global-currency alternatives). This coercive statecraft has historical precedent, with protectionism and punitive mercantile capitalism being leveraged to bolster economies and force sovereign nations to open markets. This hypocrisy continues and is exemplified in America pressuring India to eschew protections for the agricultural sector, while it imposes tariff



**Salman Khurshid**

is India's former  
External Affairs  
Minister



**Pushparaj  
Deshpande**

is Director,  
Samruddha  
Bharat Foundation

walls of 350% on tobacco products, 200% on dairy products and 120% on fruits. India's textiles, jewellery and gems, auto components and metals sectors are being severely impacted by these discriminatory tariffs. Clearly, old (imperial) habits die hard.

Third, even though tariff-weaponisation is singularly Trumpian, reversing America's perceived deindustrialisation and checking China's ascendance has bipartisan support. The escalating tariffs against India were purportedly designed to pressurise Russia to end the war with Ukraine (one of Mr. Trump's key election promises). However, despite the U.S.-Russia meeting on Ukraine, penalties against India continue (perhaps as leverage against nations pursuing multipolarity). Irrespective of when Mr. Trump can claim "peace in our time", his attention will inevitably shift to what America sees as its biggest challenge to a unipolar world – the China theatre. It is no coincidence that the tariffs also included provisions to check China's strategic influence while furthering American national security goals (as an investigation by *The Washington Post* on the U.S.'s "supplemental negotiation objectives" action memo reveals).

#### What New Delhi must do

These upheavals hold multiple lessons for India. Its response to the epistemic polycrisis the world faces today has to address both the substantive and the symbolic. For example, the unstated assumption that Washington sees India as a democratic counterweight to China needs to be seriously re-examined. India needs to ask the degree of geopolitical convergence it has with America given that the U.S. has renewed its vows to Pakistan (possibly to retain an inside track with China), is trying to re-hyphenate India and Pakistan, may skip the Quad Summit that India will host later this year, and inhibits American companies manufacturing in India and having advanced technology collaboration. Mr. Trump's actions have disrupted the India-U.S. partnership built painstakingly over 25 years, compelling the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government to make major concessions to China to avoid a two-front problem (without any reciprocal concessions). America needs to accept that India's northern borders are live fault-lines. While India must defend its territorial integrity vigorously, for now, India must manage competition, avoid conflicts and substantively strengthen itself.

Second, the government must confront Mr. Trump more aggressively in the pursuit of India's national interest. It is no coincidence that America has not levied tariffs on China, even though their bilateral trade deficit is \$295 billion, while China imports oil from Russia and trades with Iran. This is partly because of Chinese restrictions on rare metals and magnets, which are critical to the U.S.'s defence and technology sectors. In contrast, the BJP government complied twice to American diktats, stopping oil imports from Iran and Venezuela and temporarily waiving the 11% import duty on cotton. The BJP would do well to learn that bullies only respond

to strength. Third, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's foreign policy adventurism (personalised diplomacy, manufactured diaspora events, and click-bait acronyms) have not furthered India's strategic interests and must be immediately re-calibrated. For example, the government and right-wing diaspora outfits tried in vain to ingratiate themselves to Republican legislators and right-wing influencers/lobbyists close to Mr. Trump. Likewise, BJP Ministers misread American support by myopically conflating India's economic size with strategic utility. And, equally problematically, the BJP partially eschewed non-alignment (now globally feted as multi-alignment) and sacrificed India's material interests for a symbolic seat at the high table. Sadly, the Modi-doctrine has bound China and Pakistan in an "iron-clad alliance" (creating a unified threat to India's northern flank), isolated India in its neighbourhood, put India's wealth-creators in the cross hairs of punishing tariffs, and subject American-Indians to virulent racism.

#### India must capitalise on disruptions

India must leverage this polycrisis to reshape the world's geo-economic and political architecture. This window could narrow after America's mid-term elections next year. Therefore, India must champion multipolarity as an alternative to both unipolarity and bipolarity. India can also capitalise on this opportunity to forge a New Economic Deal that works equitably for all nations. After all, neoliberal globalisation has not worked well, especially for those in the Global South. This has been compounded by weak and imbalanced multilateral institutions, an extreme concentration of global power and wealth in the hands of a few in the Global North, the forced reduction of taxes and high levels of sovereign debt (leading to reduced government revenues, a scaling back of state-driven functions, and limited fiscal space to invest in national developmental goals).

But to do this effectively, the government must urgently redress India's structural problems. Manufacturing is at a four-decade low, unemployment is unacceptably high, private investment is stagnant, scientific research is abysmal and public sector units are still not being re-deployed strategically (such as China's State-Owned Enterprise). The government must make concerted efforts to restore trust in economic stakeholders, spearhead policies that ensure equitable growth (without which India will not appear as an attractive market to investors), and a bold new vision.

This necessitates eschewing transactional instrumentalities, and investing time in forging relationships with multiple stakeholders within and outside government. It also means making constructive efforts to forge a bipartisan consensus both domestically and with the Global South. To expedite the realisation of India's manifest destiny, the government must shed its partisan blinkers, reach across the aisle, and lead a unified approach in the national interest.

India must  
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and political  
architecture

**GS. Paper 02-International Relations**

**UPSC Mains Practice Question:** The tariff war has been described as both a challenge and an opportunity for the Global South. Analyse this statement in the context of India's leadership role in multipolarity.

## Context :

The disruptive trade and tariff policies under former U.S. President Donald Trump marked a decisive departure from the liberal international order. While aimed at strengthening America's economic and geopolitical leverage, these unilateral measures exposed the fragility of globalisation and created both risks and opportunities for the Global South. For India, caught between U.S. protectionism and China's assertive rise, the challenge lies in recalibrating foreign policy and economic strategy to safeguard its interests while championing a more equitable world order.

### Motivations Behind Trump's Tariff Policies

1. **Domestic Politics:**
  - Appealing to America's "silent majority" disillusioned by globalisation.
  - Economic populism cloaked in xenophobia and nationalism.
2. **Economic and Strategic Aims:**
  - Protect U.S. industries through tariffs and subsidies while coercing partners to open markets.
  - Retain dollar supremacy and global economic dominance despite China's rapid rise.
  - Historical continuity of protectionist and mercantile practices, though presented as safeguarding U.S. workers.
3. **Geopolitical Calculations:**
  - Tariffs extended beyond economics to weaken rivals like China and Russia.
  - Measures targeted multipolar initiatives and attempted to limit India's strategic space.
  - Bipartisan consensus in the U.S. to counter China ensured longevity of protectionist instincts.

### Implications for India

- **Economic Impact:**
  - Indian exports in textiles, jewellery, auto components and metals face tariff barriers.
  - Agriculture is vulnerable, with U.S. hypocrisy evident in its own high tariffs while pressuring India to liberalise.
- **Geopolitical Strains:**
  - Trump-era policies disrupted 25 years of India-U.S. partnership building.
  - U.S. overtures to Pakistan and lack of sensitivity to India's border issues created strategic unease.
  - Modi government's "personalised diplomacy" failed to prevent punitive tariffs.
- **Foreign Policy Lessons:**
  - Overdependence on the U.S. can constrain India's policy space.
  - A tilt away from non-alignment has contributed to China-Pakistan convergence.
  - Need for assertive pursuit of national interest rather than symbolic alignment.

### Opportunities for the Global South

## Daily News Analysis

1. **Redefining Multilateralism:**
  - Push for stronger, balanced global institutions less dominated by the Global North.
  - Advocate reforms in WTO, IMF, and World Bank to reflect developing country interests.
2. **Championing Multipolarity:**
  - Position India as a leader of a multipolar world order, resisting both U.S. unipolarity and U.S.-China bipolarity.
3. **Building South-South Solidarity:**
  - Use platforms like BRICS, G-77, and the Global South Summits to articulate shared developmental concerns.
4. **Domestic Imperatives:**
  - Strengthen manufacturing base, address unemployment, and boost scientific research.
  - Restore trust between government and economic stakeholders.
  - Ensure inclusive, equitable growth to enhance India's attractiveness as a market and strategic partner.

### Conclusion

Trump's tariff wars highlighted the fragility of the liberal economic order and exposed the asymmetries of globalisation. For India and the Global South, these disruptions present an opportunity to push for a fairer, multipolar world. However, to translate this window into meaningful change, India must first address its structural weaknesses, recalibrate its foreign policy away from personality-driven approaches, and lead with a vision of equitable development and global solidarity. The tariff war, therefore, is not merely a challenge but a call for strategic renewal.

