The Hindu Important News Articles & Editorial For UPSC CSE

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The Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT), in its Annual Report 2024–25, has released comprehensive data on the social composition of Central government employees as of January 1, 2024. The report highlights that over 66% of Group C sanitation workers (safai karmacharis) in the Union government belong to Scheduled Castes (SCs),

Scheduled Tribes (STs), and Other Backward Classes (OBCs). This data is significant as it revives a detailed reporting practice that had been largely absent since 2018–19 and provides insights into the outcomes and limitations of

66% sanitation workers in Central govt. from SC, ST, OBC groups: DoPT report

The report shows that among all Group A posts in Union Ministries and departments, 14.2% were held by SCs, 6.54% by STs, and 19.14% by OBCs; the report provides no data on EWS employees

Abhinay Lakshman
NEW DELHI

More than 66% of the Group C *safai karmacharis* (sanitation workers) employed in the Union government come from the Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), and Other Backward Classes (OBC), show data on reservation in the annual report for 2024-25 from the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT).

The report, released last week, showed that 14.2% of the Group A posts in the Union Ministries and departments were held by SCs, 6.54% by STs, and 19.14% by OBCs. DoPT regulations on direct recruitment to all groups of posts in the Union government require reserving 15% of seats for SCs, 7.5% for STs, 27% for OBCs, and 10% for Economically Weaker Sections.

The data in the 2024-25 report on the representation of SC, ST, and OBC employees in the Union government showed that in Group C (excluding sanita-

Taking count
The Personnel Ministry, in its latest report, has published the representation of SCs, STs and OBCs in the posts and services of the Union government, as per data received from 80 Ministries and departments

Group	Total no. of employees	SC	ST	OBC
A	1,19,178	16,920 (14.2%)	7,793 (6.54%)	22,807 (19.14%)
B	3,64,307	59,006 (16.20%)	27,789 (7.63%)	79,952 (21.95%)
C (excluding sanitation workers)	27,27,930	4,56,925 (16.75%)	2,43,872 (8.94%)	7,44,527 (27.29%)
C (sanitation workers)	40,737	14,971 (36.75%)	3,331 (8.18%)	8,614 (21.15%)
Total	32,52,152	5,47,822 (16.84%)	2,82,785 (8.7%)	8,55,900 (26.32%)

tion workers) posts, 16.75% were SCs, 8.94% STs, and 27.29% OBCs. In Group B posts, SCs comprised 16.2%, STs 7.63%, and OBCs 21.95%.

Overall, among the 32.52 lakh Union government employees across 80 Ministries and departments that the latest report accounted for, the representation of SCs was at 16.84%, STs 8.7%, and OBCs 26.32%. However, the report does not provide any data on the

representation of EWS employees.

The DoPT said that this data was for Central government employees as of January 1, 2024.

Data gap
This is the first time since its 2018-19 annual report that the DoPT has put out data on the representation of SCs, STs, and OBCs across most of its Ministries and departments.

In annual reports from

2019, the DoPT has been accounting for partial data on Union government employees, showing representation figures for a total of 19-20 lakh employees.

The DoPT said that this shortfall had been occurring because not all Ministries and Departments were able to provide the data in time.

Trend shift
Compared with the representation figures from 2018-19 for Union government employees, the last time when over 32 lakh employees were accounted for across 78 Ministries and Departments, the overall representation of SC staffers went down from 17.49% to 16.84%, that of ST staffers went up slightly from 8.47% to 8.94%, and that of OBC staffers saw the highest increase from 21.57% to 26.32%.

Across Groups A, B, and C, the highest increase in representation was seen among OBCs from the figures from 2018-19, while the representation of SC and ST groups remained the same.

India's reservation policy in public employment.

Key Findings and Analysis

Skewed Occupational Distribution

While SC/ST/OBC representation is relatively close to or above prescribed reservation levels in Group B and Group C (non-sanitation) posts, their concentration in sanitation work reflects a continuation of caste-linked occupational segregation.

The dominance of historically marginalized groups in the least secure and socially stigmatized roles raises concerns about substantive equality, not merely numerical inclusion.

Under-representation in Higher Bureaucracy

In Group A services, representation of SCs (14.2%), STs (6.54%), and OBCs (19.14%) remains below mandated reservation norms, especially for OBCs (27%).

This indicates the persistence of structural and institutional barriers such as limited access to elite education, slower promotions, and potential biases in recruitment and career progression.

Group Category	SC (%)	ST (%)	OBC (%)	Total Reserved %
Group A (Senior/Elite)	14.2%	6.54%	19.14%	39.88%
Group B	16.2%	7.63%	21.95%	45.78%
Group C (Excl. Sanitation)	16.75%	8.94%	27.29%	52.98%
Sanitation Workers	> 66% (Combined SC/ST/OBC)	-	-	-
Overall (32.52 Lakh)	16.84%	8.7%	26.32%	51.86%

Trend Shift Since 2018–19

OBC representation has seen a significant increase, suggesting improved recruitment outcomes and demographic broadening.

In contrast, SC representation has marginally declined, while ST representation has remained largely stagnant, indicating uneven benefits of reservation across social groups.

Data Gaps and Transparency Issues

The absence of data on Economically Weaker Sections (EWS), despite a 10% reservation mandate, limits holistic assessment of social justice policies.

Inconsistent data reporting between 2019 and 2024 also reflects weaknesses in administrative data collection and monitoring mechanisms.

Implications for Governance and Social Justice

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The findings underscore the difference between formal equality (reservation quotas) and real equality (quality of posts and career mobility).

Persistent over-representation of marginalized communities in lower-end jobs highlights the need for:

Capacity-building and mentoring for higher services,

Transparent and regular publication of disaggregated data,

Stronger implementation of promotion-related reservation policies.

Critical Analysis

The "Glass Ceiling" Effect: While overall representation (51.86%) exceeds the 50% threshold for SC/ST/OBC combined, the Group A figures (39.88%) remain below the prescribed mandates, particularly for OBCs (19.14% vs 27%). This suggests that while entry-level recruitment is active, progression to senior decision-making roles (lateral entry, promotions, or historical backlogs) remains a challenge.

Social Stratification of Labor : The fact that over 66% of sanitation workers belong to SC/ST/OBC groups highlights the persistence of traditional caste-based occupations within modern bureaucracy.

Data Accountability and Transparency: The "Data Gap" mentioned (from 2019 to 2023) indicates administrative hurdles in monitoring social justice. For Viksit Bharat @ 2047, evidence-based policymaking requires real-time, digitized tracking of reservation rosters across all 80+ Ministries.

Constitutional Provisions at Play

Article 16(4): Enables the State to make provisions for reservation in appointments.
Article 335: Balancing the claims of SC/STs with the "efficiency of administration."
Article 340: Appointment of a Commission to investigate the conditions of backward classes (context for OBC data).

Conclusion

The DoPT report 2024–25 provides valuable empirical evidence on the working of reservation in Central government employment. While numerical representation of SCs, STs, and especially OBCs has improved overall, the continued concentration of these groups in lower-status occupations and their under-representation in senior posts points to unfinished goals of social justice.

For India's constitutional vision of equality to be fully realized, policy focus must shift from mere representation to equitable distribution of authority, dignity, and opportunity within the state apparatus.

UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question

Ques: Critically examine the performance of reservation policy in ensuring adequate representation of marginalized communities in higher civil services in India. Use recent data to substantiate your answer. **(150 Words)**

Page 07 : GS III : Science & Technology

With the advent of long-duration space missions, lunar bases, and future Mars habitation, outer space is rapidly transforming from a zone of exploration to one of permanent human presence and continuous innovation. This shift raises complex legal questions, particularly around intellectual property rights (IPR).

A recent analytical piece highlights the growing tension between international patent law, which is founded on territorial jurisdiction, and outer space, which by its very nature rejects territorial sovereignty. This issue is increasingly relevant for governance, global commons, and equitable access to space-based technologies.

Can international patent law handle a permanent presence in space?

Patent law rests on the principle of territoriality: patent holders have exclusive rights within specific jurisdictions, and authorities assess infringement based on locations; innovations on earth take place within areas subject to singular legal authority, but unbounded outer space destabilises this logic

Shrawani Shagun

Space stations, lunar bases, and Mars missions have moved from humans' imagination to engineering reality. In these environments, innovation emerges through collaboration rather than isolation.

Living on the moon or Mars will depend on continuous technological innovation, including on systems that extract water, generate energy and recycle waste and which can adapt to harsh and unpredictable conditions. Innovation in space is the condition for survival, and isn't optional.

Longer habitation means shared habitats, shared infrastructure, and multinational crews working together over extended periods. Scientists, engineers, and technicians from different jurisdictions have to collaborate closely, refining technologies in real time as operational needs evolve.

And when such innovation takes place beyond Earth, a simple question arises: who owns it? Which patent system governs an invention created in a place where no state may claim sovereignty?

These questions expose a growing mismatch between the realities of sustainable human presence in space and intellectual property law, which remains built around territorial boundaries that space itself does not recognise.

Territorial foundations

Patent law rests on the principle of territoriality. Exclusive rights are granted to patent holders within specific jurisdictions, and authorities assess infringement by locating where acts such as making, using or selling have occurred. On the earth, this framework works because innovation takes place within geographically bounded spaces subject to a singular legal authority.

Outer space destabilises this logic. International space law prohibits national sovereignty over celestial bodies yet it allows states to retain jurisdiction and control over objects registered under their authority in space. Article VIII of the Outer Space Treaty and the Registration Convention together stipulate that legal jurisdiction attaches to the state of registry of a space object, not to the physical location where activities occur.

In practice, this means an invention developed aboard a registered space object – e.g. a national space station – is treated as having occurred within the legal territory of the registering state (i.e. that nation), even when the activity takes place on the moon or in orbit. This jurisdiction-by-registration approach has become the default mechanism through which spacefaring states have extended domestic patent law into outer space.

The International Space Station (ISS) demonstrates how this model can function in a tightly controlled setting. It consists of multiple modules, each provided by a participating country. Article 21 of the ISS Intergovernmental Agreement allocates jurisdiction module by module, treating each segment as the territory of its partner state for purposes including intellectual property. Because the ISS is a static, carefully controlled facility, this arrangement has remained workable.

However, this presumes clear structural boundaries, stable installations, and nationally identifiable zones of

activity. Permanently inhabited lunar or planetary bases may not operate in such conditions. Consider a lunar settlement extracting water ice near the moon's south pole. One team operates autonomous drilling robots, another refines extraction algorithms using shared data, while life-support engineers adapt the process to local power and temperature constraints. The components can be built on the earth, the software updated remotely, and robots operate across multiple platforms. When such a system is incrementally refined by multinational teams on shared infrastructure, it's not clear where the legally relevant act of invention occurs or which jurisdiction should govern it.

In these settings, the territorial anchors that patent law depends on become weaker. Identical technological activity may fall within patent jurisdiction or outside it entirely, depending solely on registration choices rather than on substantive contribution, operational control or the location of innovation. In such contexts, registration no longer reflects how innovation actually occurs.

Non-appropriation principle

These challenges intersect with the foundational principles of international space law. Article I of the Outer Space Treaty frames outer space as a domain to be explored and used for the benefit of all humankind. Article II reinforces this vision by prohibiting any form of national appropriation of celestial bodies, including the moon.

While patents don't amount to territorial claims, they do confer exclusive control over technologies that may be essential for survival or exploration in space. In permanently inhabited environments, where access to water and energy could depend on patented

International space law prohibits national sovereignty over celestial bodies yet it allows states to retain jurisdiction and control over objects registered under their authority in space

technologies, such exclusivity carries real structural consequences.

This raises an unresolved question: at what point does patent-based exclusivity begin to operate as *de facto* exclusion in a domain that international law insists must remain accessible?

The concern is that fragmented enforcement driven solely by registration could indirectly constrain the freedom to explore and use space. If access to a patented life-support process or resource-extraction technique depends on the registry of a particular platform, operators on other platforms may be legally barred from using or modifying technologies essential to survival or mission continuity, even in non-competitive settings.

Article 5 of the Paris Convention for the Protection of Industrial Property is concerned with the doctrine of temporary presence. It limits patent enforcement in the public interest to ensure patented articles in transit are not treated as infringing. On the earth, this provision preserves freedom of transport across borders.

Whether this doctrine applies to space objects, however, remains unclear. Does temporary presence cover equipment launched through foreign territory, docked at multinational space stations or operated onboard platforms registered to another state? No treaty or authoritative interpretation provides an

answer.

Registration-based jurisdiction also creates powerful incentives for strategic behaviour. Technologies can be developed in states with strong patent protection but deployed onboard space objects registered in jurisdictions with weaker enforcement, allowing innovation to slip beyond the reach of the legal system that enabled it.

This is not unlike the use of flags of convenience in maritime operations – and it risks hollowing out patent protection through regulatory arbitrage rather than genuine innovation.

Further, while more than 110 states are parties to the Outer Space Treaty, only a few shape how registration interacts with patent law, producing a system that is global in form but uneven in practice. Operational coordination mechanisms, such as those under the NASA Artemis Accords, could reduce interference. But coordination is also not jurisdiction, meaning they can't resolve questions of ownership and enforcement in permanently inhabited space environments.

The challenge of patent protection in outer space is not a marginal legal puzzle. It reflects a structural mismatch between legal regimes designed for territorially bounded activity and environments defined by shared infrastructure and jurisdictional fragmentation.

International institutions have begun to acknowledge these tensions, and proposals for specialised space-related IP mechanisms are emerging. But coordination remains limited and uneven. Most states remain rule-takers rather than rule-makers in the evolving legal architecture of space innovation.

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Ownership question: An artist's illustration of a future Artemis Base Camp operated by NASA. NASA

Core Issue: Territorial Patent Law vs Borderless Space

Patent law operates on the principle of territoriality, granting exclusive rights within a sovereign jurisdiction. This works on Earth because innovation occurs within clearly demarcated legal boundaries. However, outer space destabilises this logic:

International space law prohibits national sovereignty over celestial bodies.

At the same time, states retain jurisdiction over space objects registered under them, not over the physical space itself.

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As a result, patent jurisdiction in space is determined by registration of spacecraft or modules, not by where innovation substantively occurs.

This jurisdiction-by-registration approach creates legal uncertainty when innovation is:

Incremental,

Multinational,

Conducted on shared infrastructure,

Enabled through remote updates, AI, robotics, and real-time collaboration.

Limits of Existing Models (ISS Example)

The International Space Station model demonstrates that registration-based jurisdiction can function in:

Static,

Clearly segmented,

Nationally identifiable modules.

However, future lunar or Martian bases are likely to be:

Functionally integrated rather than modular,

Operated by mixed crews,

Dependent on shared life-support and resource-extraction systems.

In such environments, it becomes unclear:

Where the "act of invention" takes place,

Which state's patent law applies,

Whether exclusive rights reflect actual contribution or mere registration choices.

Conflict with the Non-Appropriation Principle

International space law treats outer space as the common heritage of humankind, prohibiting national appropriation of celestial bodies.

While patents do not claim territory, exclusive control over critical technologies (water extraction, energy generation, life-support systems) can create de facto exclusion:

Survival in space may depend on patented technologies.

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Restricting access could undermine free exploration and use of space.

Patent enforcement may indirectly contradict the spirit of non-appropriation.

Thus, a key normative question emerges: When does patent exclusivity begin to function like prohibited appropriation?

Additional Legal Gaps and Risks

Temporary Presence Doctrine Uncertainty

Existing international patent law allows limited use of patented inventions in transit.

Its applicability to space objects, docking stations, or multinational platforms remains undefined.

Regulatory Arbitrage

States may register space objects in jurisdictions with weaker patent enforcement.

This mirrors "flags of convenience" in maritime law and can dilute patent protection.

Unequal Rule-Making Power

Although many states are parties to space treaties, only a few shape IP governance.

This risks creating a system that is formally global but substantively unequal.

Limits of Coordination Frameworks

Agreements like operational accords can facilitate cooperation but cannot resolve ownership and enforcement disputes, as they lack jurisdictional authority.

Conclusion

The challenge of patent protection in outer space reflects a structural mismatch between Earth-centric legal frameworks and the realities of permanent, cooperative human presence beyond Earth. As space becomes a site of survival-driven innovation rather than episodic exploration, reliance on territorial and registration-based patent systems appears increasingly inadequate.

Addressing this gap will require new international norms or specialised space-IP regimes that balance innovation incentives with the principles of shared access and non-appropriation. How the global community resolves this issue will shape not only the future of space governance, but also the credibility of international law in managing emerging global commons.

UPSC Prelims Exam Practice Question

Ques : The "jurisdiction-by-registration" principle in outer space implies that:

(a) patent rights are governed by the location of the celestial body

(b) patent rights depend on the nationality of astronauts

(c) legal jurisdiction attaches to the state that registers the space object

(d) outer space is outside the scope of all domestic laws

Ans: c)

UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question

Ques : The jurisdiction-by-registration approach has been the default mechanism for extending domestic patent law into outer space. Critically analyse its suitability for future multinational space habitats. **(150 Words)**

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Page 08 : GS III : Indian Economy

The recently concluded Free Trade Agreement (FTA between India and the European Union marks a significant milestone in India's external economic engagement. Beyond the scale of trade involved, the agreement is notable for the maturity, balance, and strategic pragmatism displayed by Indian negotiators while dealing with a powerful economic bloc. It reflects India's growing confidence as a rule-shaper rather than merely a rule-taker in global trade negotiations.

Key Features and Strategic Gains

Scale and Significance

- The EU alone accounts for nearly 12% of India's total trade, making this FTA far more consequential than India's recent agreements with smaller economies.

- Tariff elimination by the EU on 99.5% of Indian exports, and by India on 97.5% of EU exports, substantially improves market access on both sides.

Protection of Strategic Sectors

- India successfully excluded sensitive agricultural and dairy sectors, safeguarding farmer livelihoods and food security.

- The EU similarly protected its own vulnerable agricultural sectors, indicating mutual respect for domestic political economy constraints.

Pragmatic Solutions to Long-Standing Disputes

- Automobiles and auto parts, which had derailed talks in 2013, were resolved through a quota-based tariff system.

  - This shields Indian manufacturers in the mass segment.

  - Simultaneously, it opens opportunities for European luxury carmakers.

- A similar quota-based approach to wine tariffs balances French export interests with protection for India's nascent domestic wine industry.

Beyond Trade in Goods

- Parallel agreements on mobility, defence, and technology highlight a shift from a narrow FTA to a broader strategic economic partnership.

Concerns and Challenges

Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM)

Mature and pragmatic

Indira did well to negotiate a fair deal with the European Union

The free trade agreement (FTA) between India and the European Union (EU) is significant not just on account of the sizes of the economies involved, but also because it showcases Indian negotiators' skill and maturity when dealing with a powerful counterparty. India has managed to negotiate favourable terms in each of the previous eight FTAs of the last four years or so, but those were with much smaller economies or groupings. For context, the other eight FTAs together accounted for about 16% of India's total trade in 2024-25, while the EU itself accounted for nearly 12%. Under the latest deal, the EU will drop tariffs on 99.5% of the items that India exports, with most going down to zero immediately upon implementation. India has given tariff concessions on 97.5% of Europe's exports. Both sides did well to address issues that were previously intractable. India ensured that strategic agricultural sectors and dairy were excluded from the deal. The EU too managed to exclude several of its sensitive agricultural sectors. What stood out was how the two sides arrived at a workable solution on automobiles. It had been disagreements over auto and auto parts that had derailed negotiations in 2013. The quota-based system now arrived at not only protects India's domestic manufacturers at the lower end of the price band, but also provides a big opportunity for Europe's luxury carmakers. Similarly, the quota-based wine tariffs not only give French winemakers an opportunity – a fervent demand on their part – but also provide protections to India's burgeoning domestic industry. Such a mature and pragmatic approach to persistent hindrances is the way large economies must negotiate with each other. This is further illustrated by the mobility, defence, and technology agreements that were signed separately.

That said, there are some concerns. India could not negotiate any concessions under the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM). At the moment, this tariff applies to only six products, but is designed to include all industrial goods in some years. The upside is that CBAM applies to all countries equally, and India has done well to negotiate a deal wherein any concession granted to a third country would automatically apply to it as well. Second, if India is to attract foreign investors looking to take advantage of a cheaper export route to Europe, it will have to quickly implement reforms that encourage large-scale manufacturing. Finally, with the FTA document to be translated into 27 European languages before it can be cleared by each country and finally the European Parliament, actual implementation will likely take a while. India must push for as speedy a clearing process as possible. Otherwise, the gains so painstakingly bargained for will be too late to offset the U.S. tariff pain.

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India failed to secure exemptions from the EU's CBAM, which could expand from six products to cover most industrial goods in the future.

However, India negotiated a non-discriminatory safeguard clause, ensuring that any concession granted to another country would automatically extend to India.

Domestic Reform Imperative

To fully leverage the FTA, India must accelerate manufacturing reforms, particularly to attract foreign firms seeking a cost-effective export base for Europe.

Implementation Delays

The requirement to translate the FTA into 27 European languages and secure approval from all member states and the European Parliament could delay implementation.

Any delay risks blunting the FTA's benefits, especially in the context of rising U.S. tariffs impacting Indian exports.

Conclusion

The India–EU FTA exemplifies a mature, pragmatic, and interest-balanced approach to trade negotiations between large economies. India has managed to secure substantial market access while protecting its core strategic sectors, reflecting enhanced negotiating capacity and confidence.

While challenges remain—particularly regarding CBAM, domestic manufacturing readiness, and procedural delays—the agreement positions India favourably in a fragmenting global trade order. If complemented by swift domestic reforms and proactive diplomatic follow-up, the FTA can become a cornerstone of India's long-term export-led growth and strategic autonomy.

UPSC Mians Exam Practice Question

Ques: Discuss the key economic opportunities and challenges arising from the India–EU FTA for India's manufacturing and export sectors. How can India maximise the benefits of the agreement? **(150 Words)**

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Despite its civilisational depth, natural diversity, and cultural richness, India continues to underperform as a global tourism destination. As highlighted by Shashi Tharoor, India attracted only 5.6 million foreign tourists by August 2025, a modest figure when compared to much smaller countries such as Singapore or Thailand. This gap underscores a critical reality: India's challenge is not beauty, but functionality. Tourism success depends not only on attractions, but on safety, infrastructure, ease of travel, and overall experience.

India, the beautiful — but first, India the functional

India is a land of astonishing contrasts. It offers snow-capped peaks and sun-drenched beaches, ancient temples and cutting-edge tech parks, spiritual retreats and bustling bazaars. Yet, despite this kaleidoscope of experiences, India welcomed just 5.6 million foreign tourist arrivals till August 2025 – a modest figure for a country of 1.4 billion. Singapore, with a population smaller than Delhi's, drew 11.6 million by August 2025. Thailand earned over $60 billion from tourism; India made barely a third of that.

These numbers are not just statistical curiosities. They reflect a deeper malaise in India's tourism strategy – one that demands urgent attention if we are to unlock the sector's full potential. Tourism is not merely about showcasing monuments or selling sunsets; it is about creating experiences that are seamless, safe, and memorable. And on that front, India has work to do.

Three main problems

India's problems can be summarised in three "I"s: image, infrastructure and 'India itself'. Let us analyse each. First, image: the perception of the country abroad. India's 'Incredible India' campaign is evocative, but branding alone cannot overcome the weight of negative headlines. Concerns about safety, especially for women, with many foreigners considering India to be unsafe for women travelling alone; scams; sanitation; and bureaucratic hassles often shape the global imagination more than our cultural richness. Tourists want to feel welcome, not wary. Singapore and Thailand have succeeded not just by being clean or affordable, but by being consistent in their messaging as safe, efficient, and, especially in Thailand's case, fun.

India's vastness makes a single narrative difficult, but that does not mean marketing the country is impossible. We must segment our appeal – Spiritual India, Adventure India, Luxury India – and market each with clarity and conviction to different audiences abroad. It is time for 'Incredible Indias', in the plural, to be sold to the world. The Buddhist circuit, the Ramayana circuit, even the cricketing circuit should all be marketed to appropriate foreign constituencies.

Infrastructure is the second problem area. The tourist experience begins the moment one lands. Airports, immigration counters, taxis, Wi-Fi – these are first impressions. A luxury hotel means little if the road outside is potholed and the signage indecipherable. Last-mile connectivity to remote destinations remains a challenge. Clean public toilets, reliable internet, and well-maintained heritage sites are foundational. Paradoxically, while India can be a budget

Shashi Tharoor

MP (Congress) for Thiruvananthapuram (Lok Sabha), an award-winning author, a former Minister of State for Human Rights Resources Development, and a former Chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Information Technology

Until India addresses the fundamentals — image, infrastructure, and experience — it will remain a tantalising idea rather than a top-tier destination

destination, mid-range and luxury travel often comes at a premium, making the country less competitive than its Southeast Asian neighbours.

Then comes 'India itself'. The sheer scale can overwhelm the uninitiated. Crowds, noise, and a service culture that is not always tourist-friendly can cause frustration. Scammers, touts, beggars and sexual harassers exist, and they erode trust. The hospitality sector reportedly faces a 40% shortfall in trained staff, and many graduates prefer the predictability of office jobs to the unpredictability of guest relations. We need vocational training, multilingual guides, and a professional workforce that sees tourism not as a fallback, but as a calling.

Immigration, too, must evolve. While e-visas have helped, India still ranks behind many Asian countries on ease-of-travel indexes. A 'Visa on Arrival for the World' policy may sound ambitious, but it is worth exploring – though I am certain that would require a major transformation in the attitude of the Home Ministry. Stories of foreigners turned away at Indian airports because of past criticisms of the country do disproportionate damage. India is a large and confident nation; it can absorb dissent without rejecting the dissenter. We need to train immigration officers to be friendly and welcoming to foreigners. And as a nation, Indians need to accept criticism of policies as part of democratic discourse.

Fixing the deficit

Fixing India's tourism deficit therefore requires a multi-pronged strategy that addresses both perception and reality. First, rebrand and relaunch. Let us move beyond generic campaigns and build targeted narratives. Promote well-defined circuits – the Golden Triangle, the Himalayan trail, the coastal belt – with impeccable infrastructure and safety. Invest in digital storytelling: immersive virtual tours, influencer partnerships, and user-generated content that showcases India's magic through authentic lenses. If I were to write India's tourism tagline, I would say, 'Incredible Indias: Experience the Infinite'. 'Not just a place to visit, but a world to inhabit – spiritually, culturally, and emotionally.'

Second, build infrastructure that matches ambition. Encourage public-private partnerships to adopt and maintain heritage sites. Scale up the 'Adopt a Heritage' scheme for companies to renovate and maintain sites everywhere in India. Improve roads, rail, and sustainable transport to lesser-known gems. Launch a nationwide 'Clean Tourism' campaign with clean restrooms, signage, and waste management at every major destination. Make museums more digital, more interactive, less dusty and worn.

Third, prioritise safety and training. Expand the tourist police force, especially by hiring and training large numbers of women; ensure multilingual support; and crack down on scams and harassment. Create centralised apps for verified guides and transport. Invest in skill development – not just for five-star hotels, but for homestays, eco-lodges, and local artisans.

Fourth, streamline the visa process. Make e-visas faster, simpler, and more intuitive. Offer long-term multi-entry visas for frequent travellers. Reciprocity is the usual rule, but India can identify countries whose nationals are unlikely to pose any immigration risk, and make an exception to that rule. It is important to remove bureaucratic hurdles that deter rather than protect.

Fifth, promote sustainability and authenticity. Today's global traveller seeks eco-tourism and meaningful experiences. India must balance growth with preservation. That means regulating footfalls at fragile sites, promoting community-based tourism, and ensuring that development does not come at the cost of cultural or environmental degradation.

Economic opportunity, strategic imperative

Tourism must be a national priority. A World Tourism Organisation report notes investment on tourism creates multiple times more jobs than the same amounts spent on manufacturing. As automation reshapes industry, the differential will only increase. Tourism offers employment not just to more people, but particularly to the unskilled and semi-skilled – precisely the demographic that needs to be uplifted. In a region where youth unemployment can fuel unrest (as we have seen in Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Nepal), tourism is not just an economic opportunity; it is a strategic imperative. This is why it deserves to be supported by the government as a vital industry, with tax breaks and policy support.

The hospitality industry is a curator of India's image in the eyes of the world. It is a shame that the otherwise rightly hailed GST reforms have left the hospitality industry behind. The denial of input tax credit across the full range of hotels' revenue sources ironically means that they were better off at 12% GST than they now are at 5%. This must be fixed.

India has the history of Egypt, the natural beauty of New Zealand, and the cultural depth of a continent. But until we address the fundamentals – image, infrastructure, and experience – we will remain a tantalising idea rather than a top-tier destination.

India doesn't need to reinvent itself. It needs to refine itself. The world is waiting. Let us give it a reason to come - and to stay.

Core Argument: The Three 'I's Deficit

The article diagnoses India's tourism malaise through three interconnected problems:

1. Image

Global perception of India is shaped less by its heritage and more by concerns over:

Safety (especially for women),

Sanitation,

Scams and bureaucratic hurdles.

Branding initiatives like Incredible India are insufficient if ground realities contradict the narrative.

A key suggestion is segmented branding: projecting multiple, targeted identities such as Spiritual India, Adventure India, or Luxury India, instead of a single generic image.

2. Infrastructure

Tourism infrastructure is uneven and often weak at the last mile:

Poor roads, signage, sanitation, Wi-Fi, and public amenities.

High-quality hotels cannot compensate for poor surrounding infrastructure.

India paradoxically becomes expensive in the mid-range and luxury segments, reducing competitiveness vis-à-vis Southeast Asia.

Heritage sites and museums often lack modern, interactive, and digital presentation.

3. 'India Itself' (Experience and Human Interface)

Crowding, noise, harassment, and an inconsistent service culture erode tourist confidence.

A 40% shortfall in trained hospitality staff reflects weak vocational training and low prestige attached to tourism jobs.

Immigration experiences also matter:

Despite e-visas, India ranks poorly on ease-of-travel indices.

Arbitrary denial of entry harms India's global image and contradicts democratic openness.

Suggested Reform Agenda

The article proposes a multi-pronged strategy:

Rebranding with Precision

Promote thematic tourism circuits (Golden Triangle, Himalayan trail, coastal belt).

Leverage digital storytelling, influencers, and virtual tours.

Infrastructure Push

Public–private partnerships for heritage conservation.

Expansion of the Adopt a Heritage scheme.

Nationwide Clean Tourism campaign.

Safety and Skill Development

Strengthening tourist police, with more women officers.

Certified guides, verified transport systems, multilingual support.

Tourism-specific vocational training.

Visa and Immigration Reforms

Faster and simpler e-visas.

Long-term, multi-entry visas.

Exploring selective visa-on-arrival regimes.

Sustainable and Community-Based Tourism

Regulating footfalls at fragile sites.

Encouraging eco-tourism and local participation.

Balancing growth with environmental and cultural preservation.

Economic and Strategic Significance

Tourism is labour-intensive and generates more jobs per unit of investment than manufacturing.

It provides employment to unskilled and semi-skilled youth, reducing the risk of unemployment-driven instability.

In the context of automation and regional unrest, tourism is not just economic—it is strategic.

Policy anomalies, such as GST-related disadvantages for the hospitality sector, undermine its growth and must be corrected.

Conclusion

India's tourism challenge is not a lack of attractions, but a lack of systemic readiness. As Shashi Tharoor argues, India must become functional before it can fully capitalise on being beautiful. Improving image, infrastructure, safety, and service culture is essential to convert India from a "tantalising idea" into a top-tier global destination. Tourism, if treated as a national priority rather than a peripheral sector, can become a powerful engine of inclusive growth, global soft power, and social stability.

UPSC Prelims Exam Practice Question

Ques: **'Adopt a Heritage' scheme is primarily aimed at:**

(a) Privatization of monuments

(b) Community ownership of heritage sites

(c) Public–private partnership in heritage management

(d) Transfer of monuments to State governments

Ans: c)

UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question

Ques: Examine the role of tourism as a tool for employment generation and inclusive growth in India. What structural constraints limit its potential? (**150 Words)**

Tirumal Classes

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In News : Prelims Exam

Recently, the Union Minister of State for Panchayati Raj launched the PANCHAM – Panchayat Assistance and Messaging Chatbot.

About PANCHAM

It is a digital tool developed in collaboration with UNICEF.

Aim: It is a flagship digital initiative aimed at empowering Panchayat Elected Representatives and Functionaries.

It is designed as a digital companion for Panchayats, providing timely and contextual guidance, simplified workflows, and easy access to information to support day-to-day governance and service delivery functions.

Features of PANCHAM

Direct Connect: It enables, for the first time, a direct digital connect between the Government of India and Elected Representatives and Panchayat Functionaries across the country.

Language Support: It is integrated with BHASHINI and will support 22 Indian languages, enabling Panchayat representatives to interact with the platform in their preferred local language.

Citizen Access: Citizens would be able to access PANCHAM through a QR-code-based entry mechanism.

It will facilitate quicker decision-making, faster resolution of field-level issues, and stronger feedback loops between the grassroots and decision-making centers.

Tirumal Classes — Quality education

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Two way communications: PANCHAM facilitates two way communication and officials can send feedback, ask questions, and flag local problems directly to the ministry.

Information Dissemination: The Ministry would be able to directly disseminate circulars, advisories, key messages, and updates to Panchayat Elected Representatives and Functionaries.

UPSC Prelims Exam Practice Question

Ques: PANCHAM is integrated with which platform to provide multilingual support in 22 Indian languages?

A. DigiLocker

B. UMANG

C. e-Bhasha

D. BHASHINI

Ans : d)

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The new logic of the Chinese economy

As the global economic and trade order suffers a severe blow, the giant ship of the Chinese economy once again demonstrates its strong resilience, with its GDP exceeding 140 trillion yuan (approximately $20 trillion) in 2025. This represents a year-on-year increase of 5%. China's contribution to global economic growth is expected to reach around 30%. This hard-won achievement has drawn significant global attention. I would like to share some views on several specific issues that Indian friends are concerned about.

Xu Feihong

Chinese Ambassador to India

What drives China's economic growth?
In 2025, China's economy moved forward, driven by consumption, exports, and investment, but its internal structure is undergoing a profound and positive transformation.

Domestic demand is the primary engine of China's growth. In 2025, final consumption expenditure contributed 52% to economic growth. Some people may conclude that China has "insufficient consumption" simply because the prices of Chinese goods and services are significantly lower than the global average. In fact, measured by internationally accepted standards of physical consumption, China ranks among the world's top countries in terms of total basic consumption. Among these, the average number of mobile phones owned per person is 1.28, which is among the world's leading levels. The average daily protein intake is 124.6 grams, which is higher than that of the U.S. and Japan. The average annual vegetable consumption is 109.8 kilogrammes, the highest in the world.

China's exports of goods and services demonstrated strong resilience, contributing 32.7% to economic growth and becoming a key booster. Despite an unfavourable international trade environment, 'Made in China', especially high-tech products, were widely popular thanks to its complete industrial chain and continuously improving innovation capabilities, with high-tech

It provides new opportunities for China-India cooperation

product exports growing by as much as 13.2% throughout the year. Exports to major markets such as ASEAN and the European Union maintained stable growth, effectively offsetting market fluctuations in other regions.

In contrast, gross capital formation contributed 15.3% to growth, which reveals that the Chinese economy is undergoing a difficult but necessary transformation of growth engines: from relying on investment and exports to a better model in which domestic consumption takes the lead, while export and innovation add impetus. Amid this transition, breakthroughs have been consistently achieved in cutting-edge fields such as AI, quantum technology, and brain-computer interfaces. The output of high-end manufacturing, including servers and industrial robots, has maintained rapid growth. Green industries such as renewable electricity and clean energy have flourished. These emerging drivers are clearly outlining the future course of the Chinese economy.

Why export production capacity?
China is not exporting "overcapacity," but rather high-quality production capacity and advanced solutions that are widely welcomed by developing countries. From the supply side, there is no "overcapacity" in China. In 2025, the capacity utilisation rate of China's above-designated-size industry stood at 74.4%, equivalent to that of the U.S. and the EU across all sectors. The global competitiveness of Chinese products stems from long-term, high-intensity R&D investment, robust domestic competition, and the most comprehensive industrial system, rather than subsidies or dumping.

From the demand side, the fundamental driving force behind the booming development of China's production capacity is the real demand from the global market. Many developing countries have enhanced their infrastructure, achieved energy transition and embarked on industrialisation by introducing high-quality Chinese equipment and technology. As the American economist, Jeffrey Sachs, pointed out, the Western labeling of Chinese manufacturing as "overcapacity" is out of "jealousy."

Mitigating India's trade deficit with China
According to data from General Administration of Customs of China, China-India trade reached a historic high of $155.6 billion in 2025. Many of the goods imported from China are raw materials and components that are much needed in India and that are conducive to India's economic development. This fully demonstrates the strong economic complementarity and great potential for cooperation between the two countries.

Meanwhile, India's exports to China have shown positive momentum, reaching $19.7 billion in 2025 and marking a year-on-year increase of 9.7%. Notably, growth rates in the last two months of 2025 were particularly strong, reaching 90% and 67% respectively. China has never deliberately pursued a trade surplus and is willing not only to be the world's factory but also the world's market. China's tariff level remains low by international standards at 7.3%. The negative list for foreign investment access has been continuously shortened, and China's visa-free policy keeps expanding. In particular, the Central Economic Work Conference identified "expanding domestic demand" as the top priority for economic work in 2026. With a population of over 1.4 billion, including more than 400 million in the middle-income group, China offers huge opportunities for high-quality Indian products.

We welcome more Indian enterprises to leverage platforms such as the China International Import Expo to bring more premium Indian products to the Chinese market, transforming trade deficits into cooperative surpluses. By moving towards each other, we can share dividends of development and jointly create a brighter future for Asia.

GS Paper III : Indian Economy

UPSC Mains Practice Question: Despite growing trade volumes, India continues to face a large trade deficit with China. Analyse the structural reasons behind this imbalance and suggest policy measures India should adopt to convert trade complementarities into sustainable gains. **(250 Words)**

Context :

In the backdrop of a weakening global economic and trade order, China's economy has displayed notable resilience, with its GDP crossing $20 trillion in 2025 and contributing nearly 30% to global economic growth. In an opinion piece by the Chinese Ambassador to India, the evolving growth logic of the China economy is articulated, addressing concerns related to consumption, exports, alleged overcapacity, and India–China trade imbalance.

Drivers of China's Economic Growth

Shift Towards Domestic Consumption

- Domestic demand has emerged as the primary growth engine, with final consumption contributing over 50% to GDP growth.

- China challenges the perception of "weak consumption" by highlighting high physical consumption levels (food, electronics, daily necessities), suggesting that low prices — not low demand — explain consumption patterns.

- This indicates a structural shift from an export- and investment-led model to a consumption-led growth framework, aligning with long-term sustainability goals.

Resilient and Upgraded Exports

- Exports contributed nearly one-third of growth, driven increasingly by high-tech and value-added products rather than low-end manufacturing.

- Stable exports to ASEAN and the EU highlight China's success in diversifying markets amid geopolitical and trade uncertainties.

Declining Role of Investment, Rising Role of Innovation

- Lower contribution of capital formation signals a conscious transition away from investment-heavy growth.

- Breakthroughs in AI, quantum technology, green energy, robotics, and advanced manufacturing indicate a move towards innovation-driven development.

Debate on 'Overcapacity'

- China rejects Western allegations of exporting "overcapacity," arguing instead that it supplies globally demanded, high-quality productive capacity.

- Comparable capacity utilisation rates with the U.S. and EU are used to counter claims of dumping or subsidy-driven exports.

- From a developing-country perspective, Chinese exports are framed as enablers of infrastructure creation, energy transition, and industrialisation.

![Tirumal Classes]

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This reflects a broader ideological divide between developmental demand in the Global South and industrial protectionism in advanced economies.

India–China Trade and Strategic Implications

Trade Complementarity

Bilateral trade touching $155.6 billion reflects strong economic interdependence.

India's imports largely consist of critical inputs, supporting domestic manufacturing and infrastructure.

Trade Deficit Concerns

While India's exports to China are growing, the trade imbalance remains structurally high.

China projects itself as a future market for Indian goods, citing low tariffs, investment liberalisation, and expanding visa access.

Opportunities and Constraints for India

Platforms like international import expos offer entry points for Indian exporters.

However, realising these opportunities depends on India's competitiveness, diversification of export basket, and non-tariff barrier management.

Critical Assessment

The article represents China's official economic position, hence may underplay issues such as state subsidies, market access barriers, and asymmetric dependencies.

While consumption-led rebalancing is desirable, questions remain about:

Household income growth,

Demographic pressures,

Geopolitical risks affecting exports.

For India, economic engagement with China must balance economic pragmatism with strategic caution, especially in sensitive sectors.

Conclusion

The "new logic" of the Chinese economy reflects a strategic transition towards consumption, innovation, and high-quality exports, while projecting China as a stabilising force in a fragmented global economy. For India, the narrative underscores both opportunities for trade expansion and risks of structural dependency.