

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

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The Union Home Ministry's release of PRAHAAR, India's first-ever comprehensive National Counter Terrorism Policy and Strategy, marks a paradigm shift in the country's internal security doctrine. Released on February 23, 2026, it moves India from a reactive stance to a proactive, "intelligence-guided" framework.

Centre unveils policy to tackle terror threats

PRAHAAR states that India faces terrorist threats on all three fronts – water, land and air; capacities have been developed to protect critical sectors of the economy, it adds; policy aims at criminalising all terrorist acts and denying terrorists, their financiers and supporters access to funding, weapons and safe havens, says Union Home Ministry

Vijaita Singh
NEW DELHI

The Union Home Ministry on Monday released the country's first-ever anti-terror policy, emphasising that other than terror sponsored from across the border, "criminal hackers and nation states continue to target India through cyber-attacks".

The policy – titled PRAHAAR – has been uploaded on the Ministry's website.

It states that India faces terrorist threats on all three fronts – water, land and air – and that capacities have been developed to protect critical sectors of the economy, including power, railways, aviation, ports, defence, space and atomic energy, from both state and non-state actors.

The Hindu first reported

on December 23, 2025, that the National Counter Terrorism Policy and Strategy had been finalised and would be released soon. The policy underlines that "India does not link terrorism to any specific religion, ethnicity, nationality or civilisation".

Cross-border terrorism However, it notes that India has been affected by "sponsored terrorism" from across the border, with "Jihadi terror outfits as well as their frontal organisations" continuing to plan, coordinate, facilitate and execute terror attacks. "India has been on the target of global terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda and IS, which have been trying to incite violence in the country through sleeper cells," it says, adding that extremists operating from foreign countries



have hatched conspiracies to promote terrorism.

"Their handlers from across the border frequently use the latest technologies, including the use of drones, for facilitating terror-related activities and attacks in Punjab and J&K. Increasingly, terrorist groups are engaging organised criminal networks for

logistics and recruitment to execute and facilitate terror strikes in India," the policy says.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah had announced on November 7, 2024, that a National Counter Terrorism Policy and Strategy was being drafted to fight terrorism and its ecosystem.

Following the April 22, 2025, Pahalgam terror incident, the National Investigation Agency (NIA) conducted meetings with anti-terror units of all States and apprised them of the measures aimed at preventing and pre-empting such attacks.

The policy further states that for propaganda, communication, funding and guiding terror attacks, these terror groups use social media platforms as well as 'instant messaging applications' and technological advancements such as encryption, dark web, crypto wallets etc, enabling them to operate anonymously.

"Disrupting/Intercepting terrorist efforts to access and use CBRNED (Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear, Explosive, Digital) materials remains a challenge for

Counter Terrorism (CT) agencies. The threat of state and non-state actors misusing drones and robotics for lethal purposes remains another area of concern," it flags.

As a way forward, the policy suggests that to make appropriate cases against the perpetrators of acts of terrorism, there is a need to associate legal experts at every stage of investigation.

"Terrorist groups based outside (from abroad) nowadays use the infrastructure, logistics and terrain knowledge of local outfits for launching attacks. National actions, coupled with international and regional cooperation, are key elements in addressing the transnational terrorism challenge," it emphasises.

The MHA said Indian intelligence and law enforcement agencies have been

continuously working to prevent the recruitment of Indian youth by extremist groups.

Underscoring the role of community and religious leaders, the policy states that moderate preachers and NGOs are engaged to spread awareness about the adverse consequences and impacts of radicalisation and extremist violence.

The Ministry said there is a move to establish a uniform anti-terrorism structure across States, as standardisation of processes and procedures would ensure similar and synergistic responses to terror attack.

It said that the policy aims to criminalise all terrorist acts and deny access to terrorists, their financiers and supporters access to funds, weapons and safe havens.

News Analysis for UPSC

1. The Core Philosophy: "PRAHAAR"

The policy is structured around the acronym **PRAHAAR**, representing seven critical pillars:

- Prevention of terror attacks.
- Responses (swift and proportionate).
- Aggregating internal capacities (Whole-of-Government approach).
- Human Rights and Rule of Law.
- Attenuating conditions conducive to terrorism (De-radicalization).
- Aligning international efforts.
- Recovery and Resilience (Whole-of-Society approach).

2. Multi-Domain Threat Assessment

The policy acknowledges that the modern terrorist threat is no longer limited to physical infiltration. It identifies a "triple-front" threat:

Geographic Domains: Threats across Land, Water, and Air.

Technological Domain: Use of drones (especially in Punjab and J&K), encrypted messaging, the dark web, and crypto wallets for anonymous operations.

CBRNED Threats: A significant focus on preventing access to Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear, Explosive, and Digital materials.

3. Institutional and Legal Strengthening

To ensure the policy has "teeth," the government has proposed several structural changes:

Standardization: Establishing a uniform anti-terrorism structure across all States to ensure synergistic responses.

Legal Integration: Associating legal experts at every stage of the investigation (from FIR to prosecution) to ensure high conviction rates.

Critical Infrastructure Protection: Explicitly shielding power, railways, aviation, ports, defence, space, and atomic energy from state and non-state actors.

4. Socio-Psychological Approach

Moving beyond "kinetic" action, the policy emphasizes "Attenuating" the ecosystem of terror:

Graded Response to Radicalization: Legal action is calibrated based on the level of radicalization.

Community Engagement: Involving moderate religious leaders, NGOs, and psychologists to reintegrate affected youth and spread awareness.

Conclusion

PRAHAAR represents a maturing of India's security apparatus. By integrating cutting-edge technology (to counter drones and cyber-terror) with a "Whole-of-Society" approach (involving community leaders), India is seeking to dismantle not just the terrorist, but the entire terror ecosystem. Its success will ultimately depend on the seamless coordination between Central agencies like the NIA/NSG and State police forces, ensuring that "standardization" becomes a reality on the ground.

UPSC Prelims Exam Practice Question

Ques: Consider the following statements regarding the PRAHAAR policy:

1. It is India's first comprehensive National Counter Terrorism Policy.
2. It links terrorism to a particular religion for strategic classification.
3. It addresses threats from both state and non-state actors.
4. It includes measures against cyber terrorism and misuse of drones.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

Ans: b)

UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question

Ques: India's counter-terrorism approach is shifting from reactive response to preventive and ecosystem-based disruption. Discuss in the context of the recently unveiled PRAHAAR policy. **(250 words)**



The Supreme Court is currently hearing an appeal by Meta and WhatsApp against a ₹213.14 crore penalty imposed by the Competition Commission of India (CCI) and upheld by the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT). The case stems from WhatsApp's 2021 Privacy Policy update, which mandated data sharing across Meta-owned platforms.

WhatsApp tells SC it does not share data with Meta

Will fully comply with National Company Law Appellate Tribunal directions on user consent for sharing data with parent company, it says as both challenge imposition of penalty of ₹213.14 crore

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The instant messaging platform WhatsApp maintained in the Supreme Court on Monday that it was not "quite right" to say the online entity was sharing data with other Meta platforms.

Appearing before a three-judge Bench headed by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant, senior advocate Kapil Sibal, for WhatsApp and its parent company, Meta, said its technology was very clear and put a premium on privacy. "There is no question of violating the law," Mr. Sibal submitted.

He said the Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023, comprehensively addressed the privacy concerns raised in the Supreme Court.

The court was hearing petitions filed by Meta and WhatsApp against a National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) decision to uphold a ₹213.14-crore penalty imposed by the Competition Commission of India (CCI).

The CCI had found WhatsApp's "take-it-or-leave-it" approach in its

Privacy message

WhatsApp submits its view before SC on user consent and sharing of data with Meta

- WhatsApp and Meta challenge NCLAT order upholding ₹213.14-crore penalty imposed by CCI
- CCI found WhatsApp's 2021 privacy policy a "take-it-or-leave-it" practice
- Regulator said users were forced to share data with Meta to keep using the app
- Tribunal stressed user choice and consent for non-essential data use

DEFENDING STATEMENTS

- WhatsApp denies improper sharing, cites encryption and DPDP Act
- Company says it will follow NCLAT directions by March 16, 2026
- CCI argued the matter also involves competition law and consumer protection

2021 privacy policy an abuse of its market dominance. It found the prior consent sought from users to share their data with Meta "manufactured". It had concluded that users were forced to share data for continued access to WhatsApp messaging services.

In an appeal last year, the NCLAT concluded that the "core principle is to remove exploitation by restoring user choice".

"The users can be given choice if users retain the right to decide what data is collected from them, for which purposes, and for how long. We had also stated

in our findings that any non-essential collection or cross-use (like advertising etc.) can occur only with the concerned user's express and revocable consent," the NCLAT had observed.

On Monday, WhatsApp said it would fully comply with the NCLAT directions relating to user consent for sharing data with Meta under its controversial 2021 privacy policy by March 16, 2026. The tribunal had, however, found the CCI's five-year ban on sharing data for advertisement purposes "redundant", considering that the user

had already been given a choice to opt in or out.

WhatsApp has filed a comprehensive affidavit explaining its technology of end-to-end encryption, following scathing oral remarks from the Bench in the previous hearing on February 3.

The Bench had cautioned that it would not permit the platform and Meta to breach the right to privacy of millions of their "silent consumers" in India through the sharing and commercial exploitation of personal data. It had even compared sharing of private data to a "decent way of committing theft". Though WhatsApp and Meta had protested that users could "opt out" of the data-sharing provision, the court had persisted in its criticism.

Senior advocate Madhavi Goradia Divan, for CCI, said there was also a competition law concern attached to the case.

"Data-sharing has many facets. One may be privacy and data protection. But there is another aspect, protecting market and consumer, which stands on a totally different footing," Ms. Divan submitted.

2. The "Take-it-or-Leave-it" Dilemma

The central legal issue is whether a dominant player like WhatsApp can impose a mandatory data-sharing policy as a condition for service.

CCI's View: This constitutes an "Abuse of Dominant Position" under the Competition Act, 2002. The CCI argues that such policies "manufacture" consent rather than obtaining it.

Supreme Court's Stand: The Bench, led by CJI Surya Kant, described the policy as a "mockery of constitutionalism" and compared the commercial exploitation of data to a "decent way of committing theft."

3. Key Legal Developments (Feb 2026)

Commitment to Compliance: WhatsApp has agreed to implement the NCLAT's directions by March 16, 2026. This includes providing users with a clear "opt-in/opt-out" choice for data sharing.

DPDP Act, 2023: Meta argued that the new Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act already covers these concerns. However, the Court noted that while the Act protects privacy, it remains silent on "Rent-sharing"—the economic profit Meta gains by monetizing Indian users' behavioral data.

Market Monopoly: The Court observed that for an Indian citizen, opting out of WhatsApp is akin to "opting out of the country" due to its status as the "digital town square."

4. Data as an Economic Asset

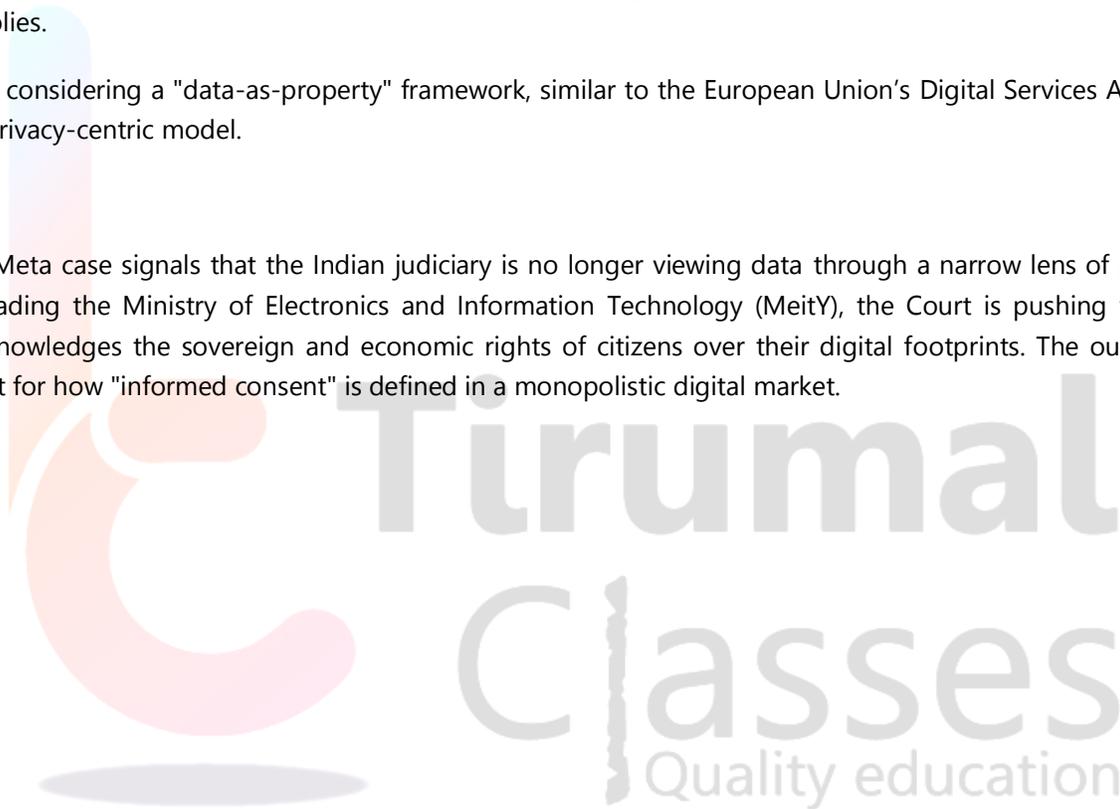
A significant shift in this case is the focus on the economic value of data.

Unlike traditional privacy cases, the judiciary is now examining how data footprints are used to strengthen market monopolies.

The Court is considering a "data-as-property" framework, similar to the European Union's Digital Services Act, rather than a purely privacy-centric model.

Conclusion

The WhatsApp-Meta case signals that the Indian judiciary is no longer viewing data through a narrow lens of personal privacy alone. By imploding the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY), the Court is pushing for a regulatory regime that acknowledges the sovereign and economic rights of citizens over their digital footprints. The outcome will set a global precedent for how "informed consent" is defined in a monopolistic digital market.



UPSC Prelims Exam Practice Question

Ques : Consider the following statements regarding the recent WhatsApp–Meta case:

1. The penalty was imposed by the Competition Commission of India (CCI).
2. The National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) completely overturned the penalty.
3. The issue involves both privacy law and competition law dimensions.
4. The case relates to WhatsApp's 2021 Privacy Policy.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

Ans: b)

UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question

Ques: Examine the tension between user consent and market dominance in digital platforms. **(250 Words)**



Classes
Quality education

Page 07 : GS III : Environment / Prelims Exam

This news report from January 2026 highlights a critical environmental and public health crisis in India, revolving around the concept of **Total Applied Toxicity (TAT)**.

News Analysis for UPSC

1. The Concept of Total Applied Toxicity (TAT)

Unlike simple "volume of use," TAT measures the **actual lethal impact** of pesticides on non-target species.

The Findings: India, along with China, Brazil, and the U.S., contributes **70% of global TAT**.

Non-Target Victims: The study reveals that **terrestrial arthropods** (like bees and spiders) are the most affected, followed by soil organisms and fish.

Invisible Presence: Pesticides are no longer restricted to farms; they are now found in incense sticks, wall paints, aircraft cabins, and even religious offerings (*prasad*).

2. The Legislative Gap: 1968 vs. 2025

The primary criticism highlighted is the obsolescence of India's current regulatory framework.

Insecticides Act, 1968: Designed during the Green Revolution, it lacks provisions for "ordinary use" (homes, hotels, etc.) and does not account for modern, highly persistent chemicals.

The "Dirty Dozen" & Beyond: India continues to use **66 pesticides** that are banned in other parts of the world due to their high toxicity.

Pesticides Management Bill (PMB) 2025: While it aims to promote "biological" pesticides and traditional knowledge, experts warn that without strict **liability clauses** and scientific oversight, it may fail to address the systemic "overuse" culture.

3. International Commitments

Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (2022): India is a signatory to the pact aimed at reducing pesticide risk by **50% by 2030**.

Current Trend: The *Science* paper indicates that instead of decreasing, toxicity levels in India are actually **increasing**, putting our 2030 targets at risk.

Key Issues & Challenges

Green Revolution Legacy: The "package" of high-yield seeds and chemical fertilizers/pesticides is now hitting a ceiling of diminishing returns and high environmental cost.



A farmer spraying pesticide in Jind district of Haryana on January 14, 2026. (K. Kocir/REUTERS)

India a big contributor to global toxicity by pesticides

Divya Gandhi
India is among just four countries that contribute almost 70% to the world's total applied toxicity (TAT) in the form of pesticides directed at agricultural pests, but in effect unleashes collateral damage among "non-target" species. In 2022, at the United Nations Biodiversity Conference, countries committed to reducing pesticide risk by 50% by 2030. According to a new paper in *Science*, however, efforts to fulfill the pact are not on track. Researchers, for the very first time, calculated the TAT from 2013 to 2022 across more than 600 pesticides, in 65 countries, and found that it had increased. China, Brazil, the U.S., and India are the biggest contributors of global TAT, accounting for nearly 70%. Pesticides were used copiously on fruits, vegetables, maize, soybean, rice, and other cereals. The study also found that toxicity increased in India, the U.S., Brazil and countries in Africa.

China, Brazil, the U.S., and India are the biggest contributors of global TAT, accounting for nearly 70%. Pesticides were used copiously on fruits, vegetables, maize, soybean, rice, and cereals

To estimate TAT at a national level, the scientists checked the annual amount of pesticide used in agriculture in the study countries and the compounds' toxicity and lethality for different non-target species, such as pollinators, aquatic plants, invertebrates, fish, terrestrial arthropods, soil organisms, terrestrial vertebrates, and plants. The researchers found that terrestrial arthropods were most affected, followed by soil organisms and fish. The toxicity has been affecting people as well. "These chemicals now permeate daily life in ways that are often invisible: in wall paints, incense sticks, furniture, aircraft cabins, stored grains, and even temple *prasad*," the author, Narasimha Reddy Donthi, an independent public policy expert, wrote.

The Insecticides Act 1968 focuses on agricultural use, with few provisions for "ordinary use" in homes, hotels, construction sites, and transport systems, he added. The 1968 Act is obsolete. Mr. Donthi told *The Hindu*. "The use, misuse, and overuse have changed since 1968. Pesticides have become more toxic. They are persistent across food, water and soil." India uses at least 66 pesticides that are banned elsewhere, he added.

The new Pesticides Management Bill 2025 is expected to be passed in March this year. It aims to reduce the risk to the environment and push for pesticides that are "biological and based on traditional knowledge". But without taking export inputs, it could be worse-off than the 1968 Act, he said. "India needs a long-term transformation policy in agriculture, shifting away from 'green revolution' packages, which includes pesticides, in view of the farmers' crisis, climate change, chemical-residue laden environment. Liability has to be inbuilt into law, as a policy," Mr. Donthi said.

To ensure comprehensive monitoring, it is essential that all countries regularly report updated annual data on agricultural pesticide use, broken down by active ingredient, study co-author Jakob Wolfram, of the Institute for Environmental Sciences, University Kaiserslautern-Landau in Germany, said. As the environmental activist Rachel Carson wrote in her 1962 book *Silent Spring*: "If we are going to live so intimately with these chemicals eating and drinking them, taking them into the very marrow of our bones, we had better know something about the power of the 'who's who of pesticides'."

Data Deficiency: Lack of transparent, ingredient-wise annual reporting makes it difficult for scientists to track which specific chemicals are causing the most damage.

Health Impact: Pesticide residues in food and water are linked to long-term chronic illnesses, affecting the "very marrow of our bones," as noted by Rachel Carson.

Conclusion

The shift from the 1968 Act to the Pesticides Management Bill 2025 is a necessary evolution, but it must not be a mere name change. India needs a "Long-term Transformation Policy" that moves toward Integrated Pest Management (IPM) and Natural Farming. To avoid a "Silent Spring" in the Indian countryside, the law must move beyond regulating "sale" to regulating "impact" and ensuring corporate and user liability for environmental damage.

UPSC Prelims Exam Practice Question

Ques: "Total Applied Toxicity (TAT)" refers to:

- (a) Total quantity of pesticide used in a country
- (b) Toxic effect of pesticides only on human beings
- (c) Combined measure of pesticide quantity and its toxicity on non-target species
- (d) Greenhouse gas emissions from agriculture

Ans: c)

UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question

Ques: India's agricultural growth has come at an ecological cost. Discuss in the context of rising pesticide toxicity. (250 Words)

The India AI Impact Summit 2026, held at Bharat Mandapam in New Delhi (February 16–21, 2026), represents a landmark moment where India pivoted from being a mere consumer of technology to a primary architect of its global governance.

Key Analysis

Introduction: The New Delhi Declaration

The summit concluded with the adoption of the New Delhi Declaration on AI Impact, endorsed by 89 countries and international organizations. Departing from the "existential risk" focus of Western summits (like Bletchley Park), this declaration prioritizes "Sarvajan Hitaya, Sarvajan Sukhaya" (Welfare and Happiness for All), framing AI as a tool for developmental outcomes.

The Strategic Framework: 3 Sutras & 7 Chakras

India introduced a unique conceptual architecture to guide global AI cooperation:

Three Sutras (Pillars):

People: Empowering citizens through healthcare, education, and inclusion.

Planet: Using AI for climate resilience and sustainable agriculture.

Progress: Driving economic growth and transparent governance.

Seven Chakras (Working Groups): These cover specific operational domains:

Democratizing AI Resources, AI for Science, Safe & Trusted AI, Inclusion, Human Capital, Economic Development, and Resilient Systems.

Key Takeaways & "Sovereign AI"

The summit was not just about policy; it featured massive technological and infrastructure commitments:

Indigenous Breakthroughs: Launch of Sarvam AI's 105-billion parameter models and the government-backed BharatGen Param2, supporting 22 Indian languages.

Infrastructure Push: The government announced a "whole-of-nation" strategy to add 20,000 GPUs to the national compute portal, aiming for a "frugal and scalable" sovereign ecosystem.

Pax Silica Initiative: In a major geopolitical move, India joined this U.S.-led framework to secure supply chains for semiconductors and advanced computing, signaling a closer alignment with "trusted" technology coalitions.

Critical Analysis: The "Inference Gap"

AI for all

The AI Impact Summit was a sign of things to come in India

The attendance at the AI Impact Summit, in New Delhi, showed an extreme enthusiasm for Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies by digitally connected Indians. While statistics shared by AI firms have frequently cited India as the biggest user base outside the U.S., the crowds over the week were the biggest indicator of just how keen many Indians are to adopt this technology. At its core, the summit was a continuation of a series of annual multilateral discussions on AI, and 89 countries have signed a declaration laying out a voluntary set of commitments to share knowledge on AI democratisation. The summit's context comes with foreboding challenges for India: namely, deploying and diffusing a technology whose capital and infrastructure reside abroad, and finding a place in the global AI ecosystem that will place Indians well in the economic transformations that this technology's adoption promises. India's data centre capacity is growing healthily, but the AI moment calls for further momentum, a difficult ask when the costs of graphics processing units (GPUs) driving AI push up the cost of domestic deployment so much, not to mention the additional electrical capacity that must be built. A national strategy that relies overwhelmingly on becoming a hub for the deployment of models, with less emphasis on their training and finetuning, could pose risks; after all, with fewer labour costs, the advantage that India has will be smaller than in the ITes era.

On the international cooperation front, it is disappointing that India has so eagerly enabled the U.S.'s hands-off impulses for AI. This is a technology with enormous scope for economic and social disruption. Countries must use the annual AI forum to collectively build tools and safety standards that can exercise actual leverage over how LLMs diffuse throughout society. Leadership of the Global South entails empowering countries that are individually vulnerable to collateral damage in an era of great power rivalries. AI is increasingly defining that era more and more acutely. Consensus at all costs is not the appropriate approach. As a country of enthusiastic AI adopters, India has the leverage and capacity to articulate an optimistic but prudent way forward for AI governance, and the summit declaration showed no signs of this power. The summit's central pillar remains an important one: for AI to be a net good, its capabilities need to be democratised. As India closes its digital divide, there cannot be an inference gap. If the summit made anything clear, it was that India is as capable of organically contributing to worldwide growth as it has the capacity, should it choose, to be a force to shape its orderly growth.

The editorial flags a vital concern: while India is a hub for *deploying* AI, the underlying capital and infrastructure (GPUs) largely reside abroad.

Risk: If India remains only a "deployment hub" without mastering "training and fine-tuning," it risks losing its competitive edge in the post-ITeS era where labor costs matter less.

Energy Challenge: The summit acknowledged that massive AI deployment requires an equally massive build-out of electrical capacity.

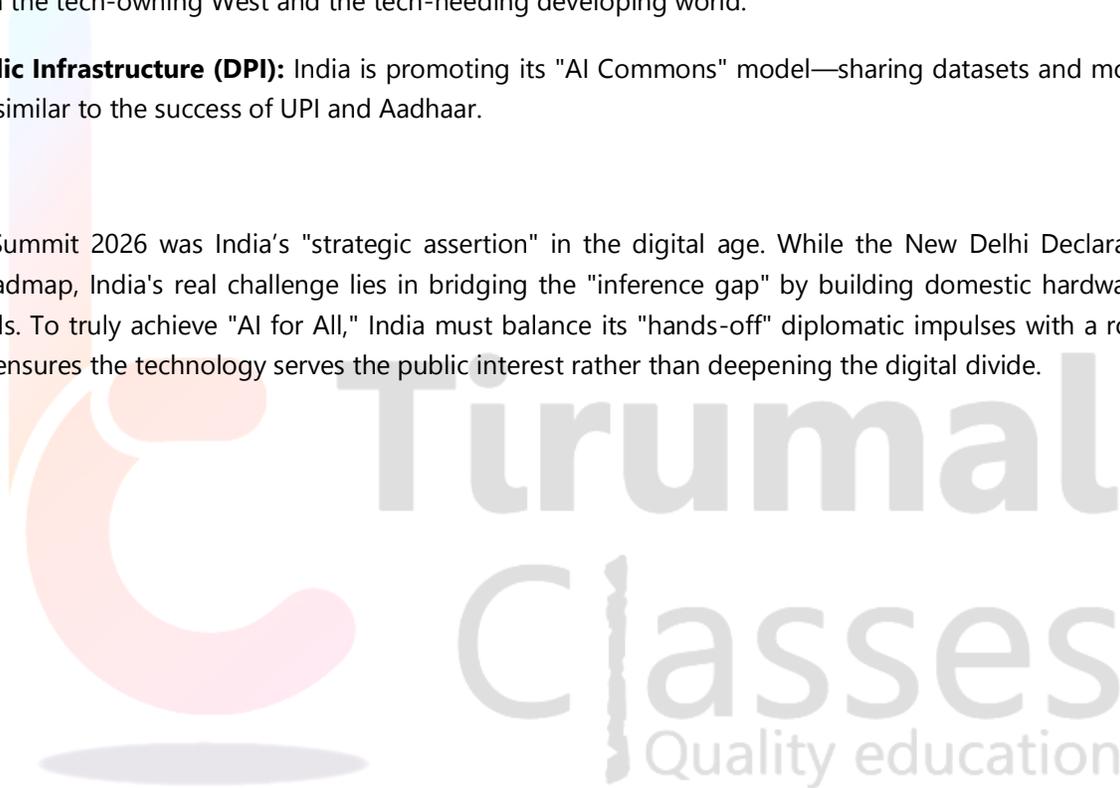
Significance for UPSC

Global South Leadership: By hosting the first major AI summit in the Global South, India has positioned itself as a bridge between the tech-owning West and the tech-needing developing world.

Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI): India is promoting its "AI Commons" model—sharing datasets and models as a public utility—similar to the success of UPI and Aadhaar.

Conclusion

The AI Impact Summit 2026 was India's "strategic assertion" in the digital age. While the New Delhi Declaration provides a collaborative roadmap, India's real challenge lies in bridging the "inference gap" by building domestic hardware capacity and sovereign models. To truly achieve "AI for All," India must balance its "hands-off" diplomatic impulses with a robust regulatory framework that ensures the technology serves the public interest rather than deepening the digital divide.



UPSC Prelims Exam Practice Question

Ques: Graphics Processing Units (GPUs) are crucial for AI because:

- (a) They reduce internet bandwidth usage
- (b) They accelerate parallel processing required for AI model training
- (c) They store encrypted user data
- (d) They regulate AI ethics

Ans: b)

UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question

Ques: "India risks becoming a mere consumer of AI technologies unless it strengthens domestic model training capacity."
Discuss. **(250 words)**



The following analysis examines the recent controversies and constitutional developments surrounding the independence of the Election Commission (EC) of India as of February 2026.

On the independence of the EC

An independent Election Commission is the bedrock of Indian democracy. To ensure that it remains so, various safeguards are built into the basic structure of the Constitution

LETTER & SPIRIT

C.R.P. Srivastava

Free and fair elections are key to a successful and vibrant democracy, a maxim included in the Basic Structure of the Constitution via *Indira Gandhi versus Raj Narain* (1975). However, in recent times, the fairness of the electoral process in India has been under question for many reasons, culminating in a resolution by the Opposition alliance to remove the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC). These controversies centre around the issue of alleged 'vote theft', and the manipulation of electoral rolls in the much-talked about Special Intensive Revision (SIR).

It has been alleged that the Election Commission (EC) has allowed massive irregularities in voter lists, specifically targeting minority and Opposition-supporting voters. It was alleged that the SIR in Bihar was rushed and designed to delete voters in order to target minorities. The names of approximately 65 lakh voters have been deleted during the SIR exercise which was challenged in the Supreme Court.

This is quite a casual way of doing away with a citizen's right to vote. Adult franchise as provided in Article 326 of the Constitution is the bedrock of democracy. Any procedural impropriety would affect its merit and sanctity.

On selecting the EC

The process of appointing election commissioners had caused controversy when the Government passed the Chief Election Commissioner and other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Office and Term of Office) Act, 2023, which regulates the appointment and removal of the CEC and election commissioners, replacing the 1998 Act. The 2023 Act stipulates that election commissioners should be appointed by the President based on a selection committee comprised of the Prime Minister, a Union Minister and the Leader of Opposition. It was alleged that the passing of the Act was in contravention of the decision of the Supreme Court in *Anoop Baranwal versus Union of India*, 2023 in which the Court held that the Chief Justice of India should also be included in the committee. However, this provision was removed which created a controversy on the grounds that the independence of the EC would be adversely affected. The Act has been challenged again in *Jaya Thakur versus Union of India*, 2024. The next hearing for the same is scheduled for March 2025.

The Constitutional mandate
The Constitution of India, under Article 324, provides for a permanent Election Commission with powers of superintendence, direction and control of the elections of the President, Vice-President, Parliament and of the legislature of the States. This constitutional basis and permanency of the Commission creates a background for its independence. The 2023 Act provides that the CEC will hold office for six years or until the age of 65, whichever is earlier. By far the most significant provision ensuring independence of the EC is the provision for the removal of the CEC and other election commissioners. Clause (5) of Article 324 says that the CEC can be removed only in the manner prescribed for the removal of a Supreme Court judge under Article 124(4), which are either



Spontaneous anti-SIR activists from various groups stage a protest against the SIR at Freedom park in Bengaluru on February 7. ALLEN SIDHWIN...

proved misbehaviour or incapacity. Under Article 24(5), the CEC's conditions of service cannot be varied to their disadvantage during their tenure. The removal of other election commissioners is done by the President on the advice of the CEC. However, the Supreme Court in *Vinod Chandra versus Union of India*, 1997 held that the CEC shall not give his advice *suo motu*. This provision strikes a balance between the executive power and the independence of the election commissioners.

The CEC's position
Article 324 provides for an EC with a CEC and other commissioners, and also includes a provision for regional commissioners. In 1998, the commission was made multi-member but the two additional posts were abolished in 1990. Again on October 1, 1993 after drawing strength from clause (2) of Article 324, it was made a multi-member commission permanently which was validated by the Supreme Court in *T.N. Seshan versus Union of India* (1995). Interestingly, Clause (3) of Article 324 provides that when an Election Commissioner is so appointed the CEC, he/she shall act as the Chairman of the EC. The language of Article 324 makes it crystal clear that the CEC is appointed and commissioned as the commissioner having certain exclusive powers, and in case of making the Commission multi-member, he shall preside over the meeting as its chairman. The idea behind this provision is to ensure that the conduct of elections is done by an administrator and at the same time to make the decision of the Commission consensus-based or democratic. Such provisions also ensure the independence of this constitutional body. The procedure to remove the CEC is

very complex and rigorous. It is a quasi-judicial Parliamentary procedure. The complexity of the process ensures its independence from any possible arbitrary action by the government. While the Representation of the People Act of 1950 and 1951 focuses on electoral procedures, voter registration, and candidate qualifications, Section 11 of the CEC and other ECs (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Act, 2023 gives the procedure to remove the CEC and other Commissioners. For the removal of the CEC, Article 324 (5) shall be read with Article 124(4) in order to understand the grounds for removal and the procedure. Section 3 of the Judges (Inquiry) Act, 1968, deals with the investigation into misbehaviour or incapacity by a commission member. It says that if notice is given to the Lok Sabha, at least 100 members must sign, while in the case of the Rajya Sabha, the minimum number of signatories to such a motion shall not be less than 50. Following this, the Speaker or, as the case may be, the Chairman may admit or refuse the motion. The Speaker or Chairman thereafter constitutes a three-member committee comprising the Chief Justice of India or a Supreme Court Judge, the Chief Justice of a High Court and a distinguished jurist. In order to ensure coordination between the two Houses of Parliament, a provision is made that if the notice is given to both Houses on the same day, the committee shall be constituted only after both Houses accept the motion. Further, definite charges must be framed and communicated on which investigation needs to be conducted. The CEC should be given reasonable time and opportunity to present his statement of defence. This is a provision which ensures the protection of the Doctrine of

Natural Justice by way of protecting the 'Rule of Fair Hearing'. This is again one of the most significant features of India's Constitution. In the case of allegations of any physical or mental incapacity, medical examination by a medical board appointed by the Speaker or Chairman, as the case may be, needs to be conducted.

The political angle
Though the Opposition has said that it will adopt democratic tools to move the motion against the CEC, it is unlikely to get passed as the ruling alliance holds sufficient majority in Parliament. The ruling government has rejected the allegations of any bias. The most point is that constitutional bodies must be well-respected by all, be it citizens, ruling parties or the Opposition; otherwise, it sends a wrong signal to the masses across the country. All political parties need to consider that constitutional or statutory bodies operate according to the provisions provided in the Constitution or in the respective statutes. While dissent against the actions of such bodies is not wrong, it should also be considered that the abolition of the Constitution or constitutional bodies would be detrimental to Indian democracy. The political safeguard provided by the Constitution must be taken care of and any dilution would be politically sensitive mainly because it would affect fairness in the electoral process and in the balance of power between the Government and independent and credible democratic institutions. The rule of thumb in Indian democracy is that it thrives on a blend of liberty and command, by balancing the authority of the state with the liberty of its citizens. C.R.P. Srivastava is President, Centre for Applied Research in Governance, Delhi.

THE GIST

- It has been alleged that the Election Commission (EC) has allowed massive irregularities in voter lists, specifically targeting minority and Opposition-supporting voters.
- Article 324 provides for an EC with a CEC and other commissioners, and also includes a provision for regional commissioners.
- Though the Opposition has said that it will adopt democratic tools to move the motion against the CEC, it is unlikely to get passed as the ruling alliance holds sufficient majority in Parliament.

Key Analysis

1. The Controversy of "Special Intensive Revision" (SIR)

The **Special Intensive Revision (SIR)** of electoral rolls has recently emerged as a significant point of contention between the government and the Opposition.

Mass Deletions in Bihar: It is alleged that approximately **65 lakh voters** were deleted from the rolls in Bihar during the SIR exercise leading up to the state elections.

The Deletion Breakdown: In a response directed by the Supreme Court on August 14, 2025, the EC clarified the reasons for these deletions: **22.34 lakh** were cited as deceased, **36.28 lakh** had migrated, and **7.01 lakh** were duplicate entries.

Allegations of Bias: Opposition groups and activists (like the ADR) claim the exercise "targeted" minority and marginalized communities. The Supreme Court intervened in August 2025, ordering the EC to publish the names and reasons for deletion booth-wise to ensure transparency.

2. Appointment Process: The Legislative vs. Judicial Tug-of-War

The independence of the EC hinges on the appointment of the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and Election Commissioners (ECs).

Anoop Baranwal Judgment (2023): The Supreme Court originally mandated a selection committee consisting of the **Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition (LoP), and the Chief Justice of India (CJI)**.

The 2023 Act: The Parliament subsequently enacted the CEC and other ECs (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Act, 2023, which replaced the CJI with a **Union Cabinet Minister**.

Legal Challenge: Critics argue this gives the Executive a 2:1 majority, potentially compromising the "neutrality" of the body. The constitutionality of this Act is currently being challenged in **Jaya Thakur versus Union of India**, with a crucial hearing scheduled for **March 10, 2026**.

3. Constitutional Safeguards and Removal Procedures

To protect the EC from political pressure, the Constitution provides specific safeguards under **Article 324**:

Security of Tenure: The CEC enjoys the same protection as a **Supreme Court Judge**. Removal requires a "quasi-judicial" parliamentary procedure (impeachment) involving a motion signed by 100 Lok Sabha or 50 Rajya Sabha members, followed by an investigation by a committee including a SC judge and a jurist.

The EC vs. CEC Gap: Unlike the CEC, other Election Commissioners can be removed by the President simply on the **recommendation of the CEC**. Reformers have long argued that all three members should have equal protection to ensure a truly consensus-based multi-member body.

Comparative Table: Evolution of the Selection Committee

Era	Selection Committee Composition	Authority
Pre-2023	President acts on advice of the Council of Ministers	Executive Discretion
March 2023	PM + LoP + Chief Justice of India	Anoop Baranwal Case
Jan 2024–Present	PM + LoP + Union Cabinet Minister	2023 Act

Conclusion

The independence of the Election Commission is not just a legal requirement but a "Basic Structure" necessity for a vibrant democracy. The current friction over the SIR exercise and the 2023 Appointment Act highlights a deeper concern regarding the "capture" of neutral institutions by the executive. As the Supreme Court prepares for the March 2026 hearing, the focus remains on whether the exclusion of the judiciary from the selection panel dilutes the "fairness" mandated by the *Indira Gandhi vs. Raj Narain* (1975) precedent.

UPSC Prelims Exam Practice Question

Ques: Consider the following statements regarding removal of the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC):

1. The CEC can be removed in the same manner as a Supreme Court judge.
2. Grounds for removal are proved misbehaviour or incapacity.
3. Other Election Commissioners can be removed only by impeachment by Parliament.

Which of the above are correct?

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

Ans: a)

UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question

Ques: "An independent Election Commission is the bedrock of Indian democracy." Examine in light of recent controversies. ((250 Words)

Parliament's historic law, an extended wait for women

When Parliament passed the Women's Reservation Act in September 2023, millions of Indian women believed that their moment had finally arrived. One-third of all Lok Sabha and State Assembly seats would be reserved for them. The legislation was hailed as a historic victory for gender justice, ending decades of parliamentary stalemate. But the Act contains a clause that changes everything: reservation will begin only "after the first Census taken after the year 2026" and the subsequent delimitation of constituencies. Thus, on the Act's own terms, implementation in 2029 is constitutionally impossible.

This is not a political prediction. It is a legal and logistical certainty. The next general election will be held in 2029 – before the constitutional prerequisites can be completed. Unless Parliament amends the Constitution again, Indian women cannot exercise their guaranteed representation until at least 2034.

The constitutional roadblock

The timeline is unforgiving. The Act mandates two sequential steps: first, a national Census; second, a delimitation exercise based on that Census data. Both are constitutionally required. Neither can be bypassed.

The next Census is scheduled for 2027. After enumeration, the data must be verified, compiled, and officially published – a process that, historically, has taken between 12 to 18 months. Only after official publication can the President of India constitute a Delimitation Commission under Article 82.

That Commission then faces an unprecedented task: redrawing 543 parliamentary constituencies and over 4,000 State Assembly constituencies. As this writer examined in these pages recently, the Commission must balance population distribution, administrative boundaries, geographic compactness, community representation, and the creation of reserved constituencies for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and now women.

India has constituted four Delimitation Commissions since Independence. Not one completed its work in fewer than three years. The most recent, established in 2002, took six years – and it was an exercise which only redrew internal boundaries without reallocating seats among States. The next Commission will be far more complex, reallocating seats among States for the first time since 1976 while implementing women's reservation simultaneously.

Even on the most optimistic timeline – Census completed in 2027, data published by early 2029, the Commission working with unusual speed – delimitation cannot conclude before 2032 or 2033. But these days, anything is possible. Without a new constitutional amendment removing the Census-delimitation linkage,



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women's reservation cannot be implemented in 2029. Was this delay accidental or by design? The political arithmetic provides the answer. If reservation was implemented immediately within the existing 543-seat Lok Sabha, 181 constituencies would become women-only, displacing an equal number of male incumbents overnight. No political party wanted to bear that electoral cost.

The solution was elegant in its political logic: tie reservation to delimitation. After the 2027 Census, when constituencies are redrawn, the total number of Lok Sabha seats is expected to increase substantially – possibly to around 800, perhaps even 888. With an enlarged House, one-third of seats can be reserved for women without displacing current male Members of Parliament.

The political pain is absorbed by expansion rather than replacement. This explains the mechanism. It does not justify the consequence: another decade-long delay for half of India's population.

A history of waiting

Indian women have already waited several years for this legislation. The first Women's Reservation Bill was introduced in 1996. It was debated, amended, reintroduced, and blocked repeatedly. The Bill lapsed with successive Lok Sabhas. It passed the Rajya Sabha in 2010 but never came to a vote in the Lok Sabha.

The 2023 Act was supposed to end that wait. Instead, it has extended it. If delimitation is completed in 2032 or 2033, reservation will apply only from the 2034 general election. Women who celebrated the Act's passage in 2023 will wait through another full election cycle before they can contest a single reserved seat.

By tying women's representation to delimitation, the Act has entangled gender justice with India's most divisive demographic issue: the north-south seat distribution imbalance. When delimitation occurs, States with faster population growth will demand significantly more parliamentary seats. States that invested in population control will see their proportional representation decline. This tension is precisely why delimitation was frozen in 1976 and extended in 2001. By linking women's reservation to this unresolved federal arithmetic, Parliament has placed women's rights hostage to a debate that has paralysed consensus for half a century. This deadlock could further delay delimitation – and with it, women's reservation.

Why should half of India's citizens wait for an exercise that has nothing to do with gender equality? The constitutional timeline is not the only problem. The Act leaves critical design questions unanswered.

First, why does reservation exclude the Rajya Sabha and State Legislative Councils? The Act applies only to directly elected lower houses.

Second, the Act provides no sub-reservation for Other Backward Class (OBC) women, even though Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe women receive proportional sub-quotas. OBC women constitute nearly 40% of India's female population.

Third, the Act mandates that reserved constituencies will rotate after each general election but offers no operational clarity. Will women candidates shift constituencies every five years? How will rotation work when delimitation itself reshuffles boundaries?

These unanswered questions compound the implementation crisis. Without clear rules, political parties will exploit ambiguities, legal challenges will multiply, and women candidates will bear the costs.

A straightforward solution

The constitutional barrier is real, but not inevitable. Parliament created it; Parliament can remove it.

There is no constitutional necessity tying women's reservation to delimitation. Article 15(3) already empowers the State to make "special provisions" for women and children. Parliament can exercise that power again to enable immediate implementation.

The solution is straightforward: amend the Constitution to permit reservation before delimitation, either by modestly expanding the Lok Sabha immediately or by applying reservation within current constituencies for two election cycles.

Alternatively, Parliament could expand the House incrementally – adding 180 seats earmarked exclusively for women – before full delimitation concludes. This would deliver on the reservation promise while avoiding displacement of incumbents.

None of these approaches is technically impossible. What is required is political will.

The government must clarify its road map now. Will it delink reservation from delimitation through amendment? Will it expand the Lok Sabha preemptively? Will it freeze State-wise seat allocation to prevent the north-south debate from derailing women's representation?

Parliament must also address the design gaps: extend reservation to the Upper Houses, include OBC sub-reservation, and publish clear rotation rules developed in consultation with women's organisations and constitutional experts.

Above all, Parliament must recognise one principle: representation delayed is representation denied.

India cannot afford another historic law that waits endlessly to take effect. If reservation is a constitutional promise – and the 2023 Act declares that it is – then it must now become a constitutional reality. Not in 2034. Not after another election cycle. Now.

India's women have waited long enough.

To tie the Women's Reservation Act – a constitutional promise – to delimitation fails India's women

GS Paper III : Indian Economy

UPSC Mains Practice Question: India's green ammonia strategy reflects a shift from energy security to energy independence. Discuss. **(250 Words)**

Context :

At the India Energy Week 2026, Prime Minister Narendra Modi underscored India's ambition to transition from energy security to energy independence, backed by a projected \$500 billion investment opportunity. Central to this vision is Green Ammonia (\$NH_3\$), produced by combining Nitrogen with Green Hydrogen (\$H_2\$). Unlike traditional "grey" ammonia produced from natural gas, green ammonia serves as a carbon-free alternative for fertilizers, marine fuel, and industrial feedstocks.

The Strategic Context: Why Green Ammonia?

India is the world's second-largest consumer of fertilizers. Currently, a significant portion of ammonia is imported or produced using expensive, volatile natural gas.

Decarbonization: Ammonia production is a major source of \$CO_2\$ emissions. Green ammonia utilizes renewable energy for electrolysis, eliminating the carbon footprint.

Cost Competitiveness: Recent auctions by the Solar Energy Corporation of India (SECI) have discovered prices between ₹49.75 and ₹64.74/kg, nearly 40-50% lower than EU benchmarks.

Economic Security: Green ammonia helps insulate the Indian economy from global gas price volatility and currency fluctuations.

Key Highlights of the SECI Auction (SIGHT Programme)

The Strategic Interventions for Green Hydrogen Transition (SIGHT) programme under the National Green Hydrogen Mission is the primary vehicle for this shift.

Feature	Details
Tender Volume	724,000 tonnes annually for 13 fertilizer plants.
Price Benchmark	\$572 to \$744 per tonne (Closing the gap with grey ammonia at ~\$515).
Incentive Structure	Direct subsidies: ₹8.82/kg (Year 1), ₹7.06/kg (Year 2), ₹5.3/kg (Year 3).
Offtake Security	10-year fixed-price agreements, providing bankability for developers.
Logistics	Focus on coastal fertilizer plants to enable easy maritime transport.

Static Positioning: The Science and Policy Link

Chemical Process: In the green route, water is split into hydrogen and oxygen via electrolysis powered by renewables. This hydrogen then reacts with nitrogen (from the air) via the Haber-Bosch process powered by clean energy:

National Green Hydrogen Mission (NGHM): Launched in 2023 with an outlay of ₹19,744 crore, aiming for 5 MMT of green hydrogen capacity by 2030.

Constitutional Mandate: Aligns with Article 48A (Protection and improvement of environment) and India's NDCs (Nationally Determined Contributions) under the Paris Agreement.

Challenges and Roadblocks

Despite the momentum, several hurdles remain:

Risk Allocation: Initial tenders faced delays due to concerns over payment security and grid access.

Technical Diligence: Integrating hybrid renewable systems (Solar + Wind) with energy storage is essential for the continuous operation of ammonia plants.

Regulatory Harmony: Disparities in state-level policies regarding "banking" of renewable energy and wheeling charges can affect final costs.

Global Standards: India needs to align its "Green" certification with EU and South Korean standards to become a global export hub.

The Way Forward

To sustain this leadership, a three-pronged approach is required:

Financial Innovation: Introduction of blended finance and risk-mitigation instruments to attract private capital.

Infrastructure: Developing "Green Hydrogen Hubs" near ports to facilitate both domestic use and exports.

Policy Stability: Uniform regulations across states for grid access and long-term tax incentives.

Conclusion

India's green ammonia route is not just a climate strategy; it is a masterstroke in strategic autonomy. By leveraging low renewable energy costs and robust auction designs, India is setting global benchmarks. If executed effectively, this transition will turn India from a top energy importer into a global exporter of clean molecules, fulfilling the vision of Viksit Bharat 2047.