

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

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Delimitation is the process of redrawing boundaries of Lok Sabha and State Assembly seats to ensure "one vote, one value" based on population changes. Since 1976 (42nd Amendment), the inter-state allocation of seats has been **frozen based on the 1971 Census** to prevent "penalizing" states that successfully implemented population control. The new proposals seek to end this freeze and use the **2011 Census** as the base for immediate redistribution.

Centre moots inter-State redistribution of Lok Sabha seats based on 2011 Census

Govt. circulates drafts of Constitution Amendment Bill and Delimitation Bill

If proposals are accepted, share of Lok Sabha seats of southern States will shrink

Bills propose increase in size of Lok Sabha to a maximum of 850 seats

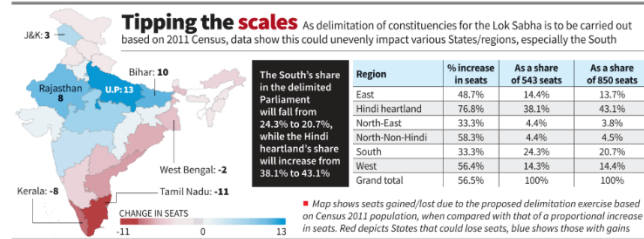
Varghese K. George
Sobhana K. Nair
NEW DELHI

States that have stabilised their populations could see their share of representation in Parliament shrinking if proposals in the drafts of a Constitution Amendment Bill and a Delimitation Bill circulated by the Centre become law.

The Budget Session is reconvening on Thursday to consider the Constitution (131st) Amendment Bill, which the government says are aimed at expediting the implementation of 33% reservation for women in the Lok Sabha and the State Assemblies.

The Congress said the government was using women's reservation as a facade to railroad inter-State redistribution of Lok Sabha seats without consultation, and ahead of the 2029 general election. "We will oppose this backdoor delimitation. We are 100% for women's reservation and demand its immediate implementation within the existing strength of the Lok Sabha and Assemblies," Congress MP Abhishek Manu Singhvi said. "In the proposals there is not a whisper of the repeated assurance by the government that the inter-State seat distribution percentages will remain intact."

The proposals emphatically seek to change the seat distribution – indeed, that is stated in the objects and reasons of the Constitutional Amendment Bill itself. The statement notes



Stalin warns of massive protest

T.N. Chief Minister M.K. Stalin warned of a massive protest that would bring the State to a standstill if the Centre decided on delimitation affecting southern States and offering more political power to northern States.



Build consensus, Revanth tells PM

Telangana Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, calling for a national consensus on the proposed rise in seats and urging immediate implementation of women's reservation without linking it to seat expansion.



Dangerous shift: Siddaramaiah

Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah opposed the proposal, saying "If numerical strength begins to determine power, the need for broad-based support across the country will diminish. That is a dangerous shift."



Attempt to divide India: Mamata

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Tuesday said that BJP-led Union govt. has tabled the Delimitation Bill to divide West Bengal and India at large. They are doing it to gain political mileage, she said.



that "while the freeze of seats on the basis of population figures of the 1971 Census served an important policy purpose, the country's demographic profile has since undergone substantial changes, as reflected in the population figures of the latest published census, including significant inter-State and intra-State population shifts." The draft Delimitation Bill mandates that "it shall be the duty of the Commission to readjust, on the basis of the latest census figures, the allocation of seats in the House of the People to the States."

If these proposals are enacted, the Hindi heartland States will see their share of Lok Sabha seats rise from 43.06% to 48.12%, while the southern States will see theirs shrink from 24.31% to 20.71%. In combination, the Bills propose an inter-State redistribution of Lok Sabha seats based on the latest Census figures and an increase in the size of the Lok Sabha to a maximum of 850 seats – 815 for States and 35 for Union Territories – against the current ceiling of 550, while carving out 33% for women.

Under the existing constitutional scheme, Lok Sabha seats are distributed between States on the basis of the 1971 Census and within each State on the basis of the 2001 Census. Article 82 provides that this arrangement will continue "until the relevant figures for the first census taken after the year 2026 have been published". The proposed amendment removes this provision altogether.

Concerns on federalism "The Bills being introduced in the name of women's reservation amount to a death warrant for federal India," said John Brittas, CPI(M) MP. The freeze on the redistribution of Lok Sabha seats written into Articles 81 and 82 was based on a political consensus negotiated by BJP Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee in 2001 and enacted through a constitutional amendment. The Narendra Modi government is now proposing to remove that safeguard and effect an immediate redistribution of Lok Sabha seats based on the latest Census – which, as of now, is that of 2011. The States of Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka, Te-

langana, and Punjab had demanded an extension of the existing freeze for another 25 years beyond 2026. Not only has that demand been overlooked, the Centre is seeking parliamentary approval for an immediate redrawing of India's representative map. "Barely 36 hours before Parliament reconvenes, without any multi-party meetings, and with no attempt to refer these Bills to a parliamentary committee, the government is trying to unilaterally enforce its wishes on the country. This has nothing to do with women's reservation and everything to do with delimitation for BJP's 2029 election plans," Mr. Singhvi said.

While all large States will receive some additional seats in the Lok Sabha, assuming all 815 permitted seats are allocated, some will see their strength rise dramatically. Uttar Pradesh will gain 58 seats over its current 80, while Kerala will gain only three, taking it from 20 to 23, if 815 seats are distributed according to the 2011 population distribution. U.P.'s share of the Lok Sabha will rise from 14.73% to 16.24%, while Kerala's will shrink from 3.68% to 2.7%. Bihar will move from 40 seats (7.37%) to 72 seats (8.47%); Maharashtra from 48 to 78; and Tamil Nadu from 39 to 50 – a reduction in its current share from 7.18% to 5.88%.

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Key Provisions of the Bills

Expansion of Strength: The Lok Sabha's maximum strength is proposed to increase from **550 to 850 seats** (815 for States and 35 for UTs).

Abolishing the 2026 Freeze: The Bills seek to remove the provision in **Article 82** that mandates waiting for the first census after 2026. This allows using the 2011 Census immediately.

Daily News Analysis

Operationalizing Women's Quota: It links this expansion to the **33% reservation for women**, arguing that an increased seat count makes the transition smoother without displacing existing male representatives.

Constitutional Changes: Article 81: Amending the ceiling of representatives.

Article 170: Adjusting the composition of State Assemblies.

The Demographic Tilt: North vs. South

The core controversy lies in the "Population Penalty." States in the North (Hindi Heartland) have higher fertility rates, while Southern states have successfully stabilized their populations.

Projected Shift in Seat Share (Based on 2011 Census)

Region / State	Current Share (%)	Proposed Share (%)	Gain/Loss Impact
Hindi Heartland	43.06%	48.12%	Significant Increase
Southern States	24.31%	20.71%	Significant Shrinkage
Uttar Pradesh	14.73% (80 seats)	16.24% (+58 seats)	Major Gainer
Kerala	3.68% (20 seats)	2.70% (+3 seats)	Major Loser in Share
Tamil Nadu	7.18% (39 seats)	5.88% (+11 seats)	Loss in Relative Weight

Critical Analysis

A. Federalism and Political Equity

Violation of the "1971 Consensus": The 1971 freeze was a "gentleman's agreement" to ensure that development-oriented states (like TN, Kerala) are not politically marginalized. Breaking this could strain the **"Union of States"** fabric.

Divergent Developmental Trajectories: Southern states contribute a higher share to the national GDP and GST. A reduced political voice alongside high economic contribution may lead to demands for greater fiscal autonomy or "sub-nationalism."

B. The "One Vote, One Value" vs. "Performance" Dilemma

Democratic Principle: Article 81 mandates that the ratio between seats and population should be uniform. Currently, an MP in North India represents far more people than an MP in South India, which is an inherent democratic deficit.

The Reward-Penalty Paradox: Using pure population as a metric rewards states that failed in population control, creating a moral hazard for future public policy.

C. Strategic Use of Women's Reservation

Critics argue that the government is using the popular "**Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam**" as a "Trojan Horse" to push through delimitation, which would otherwise face stiff resistance from the South.

Way Forward & Related Inputs

Weighted Representation: Instead of pure population, the Delimitation Commission could consider a formula that gives weightage to **Human Development Index (HDI)**, **Total Fertility Rate (TFR)**, and **Economic Contribution**.

Strengthening Rajya Sabha: To balance the population-based Lok Sabha, the Rajya Sabha could be reformed to provide equal representation to all states (similar to the US Senate), ensuring that smaller/performing states have a veto on critical issues.

Inter-State Council (ISC): Platforms like the ISC and GST Council must be used to build a political consensus before the Bills are passed, ensuring that the "South" feels like a stakeholder, not a spectator.

Conclusion

The proposed redistribution is a "double-edged sword." While it addresses the democratic necessity of equal representation, it risks deepening the North-South divide. For a diverse polity like India, any change to the "Representative Map" must prioritize **Cooperative Federalism** over mere arithmetic. The success of these Bills will depend on whether the government can provide a "Safety Valve" to protect the interests of states that have led India's developmental success.

UPSC Prelims Exam Practice Question

Ques: Consider the following statements regarding Delimitation in India:

1. Delimitation is carried out by the Election Commission of India.
2. The number of seats allocated to states in the Lok Sabha is currently based on the 1971 Census.
3. The freeze on seat allocation was introduced by the 42nd Constitutional Amendment.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Ans: c)

UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question

Ques: Delimitation is essential for ensuring democratic equality, but it may disrupt federal balance. Discuss in the context of recent proposals. **(150 Words)**



Against the backdrop of a major regional war in the Middle East, India is set to play a pivotal role in global diplomacy by hosting high-level meetings for two contrasting yet critical international groupings: BRICS and the Quad. The upcoming Foreign Ministers' meetings in May 2026 represent a significant balancing act for New Delhi, as it navigates a world reeling from a massive "energy shock" caused by the conflict between Iran and a U.S.-led coalition.

India to host Foreign Minister-level meet of BRICS, Quad

Kallol Bhattacharjee
Suhasini Haidar
NEW DELHI

India will host a Foreign Ministers-level meeting of the BRICS grouping in May, official sources have confirmed.

The meeting will be the first occasion when officials of Iran and the United Arab Emirates will be "face to face" since the conflict began with the U.S.-Israel attacking Iran in February.

Diplomatic sources and officials have also confirmed that India is on track to host the Quad Foreign Ministers meeting in the last week of May. The confirmation has come days after U.S. Ambassador



External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar had a telephone conversation with Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong on Tuesday. FILE PHOTO

Sergio Gor said on a social media post that Secretary of State Marco Rubio will visit India "next month", i.e. in May.

India is the current chair of the BRICS group-

ing, which is expected to meet from September 7-11 with heads of state expected to meet during September 9-11. Prospects of the Quad summit are not yet clear, as much depends on

U.S. President Donald Trump's schedule, especially as he has mid-term elections in the U.S. However, India has missed out on holding the Quad for two years already and is keen to finally have its turn this year.

Energy shock waves

India, Russia and China, three of the five (Brazil and South Africa being the other two) original members of BRICS, have been in contact in recent weeks against the backdrop of the conflict in the Gulf as the world is dealing with the energy shock waves from the chokehold of Iran in the Strait of Hormuz.

Iran and the UAE as well

Saudi Arabia are members of the BRICS who joined the group in 2023 in the Johannesburg summit and are part of the conflict as Iran has been hitting U.S. military, energy and industrial targets in UAE and Saudi Arabia.

In last week's Indian Ocean Conference in Mauritius, UAE's Minister Sheikh Shakhbooth Al Nahyan "condemned in the strongest terms the heinous, indiscriminate and unprovoked missile and drone attack Iran" launched against the UAE and its "neighbours in the Gulf and other Arab countries for over a month". The UAE's Minister also condemned Iran's choke-

hold on the Strait of Hormuz describing the Iranian tactic with the strait as "amounting to economic terrorism".

Working on the communication lines within Quad, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar spoke with his Japanese counterpart Toshimitsu Motegi last week.

The two Foreign Ministers discussed the situation along the Strait of Hormuz and Mr. Motegi conveyed his government's condolences for the Indian eight lives that have been lost in the conflict so far.

Mr. Jaishankar spoke with Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong on Tuesday.

The Diplomatic Calendar (May 2026)

BRICS Foreign Ministers' Meeting

Host: India (Current BRICS Chair).

Significance: This will be the first "face-to-face" meeting between high-level officials from **Iran** and the **United Arab Emirates (UAE)** since the outbreak of hostilities on February 28, 2026.

The Conflict Context: Iran has recently targeted military and energy infrastructure in both the UAE and Saudi Arabia, leading to sharp condemnations from Gulf nations at the recent Indian Ocean Conference in Mauritius.

Quad Foreign Ministers' Meeting

Timing: Expected in the last week of May.

Key Participant: U.S. Secretary of State **Marco Rubio** is confirmed to visit New Delhi for this meeting.

Objective: To stabilize the Indo-Pacific and address the global economic contagion caused by the Persian Gulf conflict.

Global Crisis: The "Energy Shock" of 2026

The meetings occur as the world faces the most severe energy disruption since the 1970s.

Daily News Analysis

The Strait of Hormuz Chokehold: Iran's tactical control over the Strait has effectively halted 25% of global oil trade and 20% of global LNG trade.

Impact on India: India has already suffered the loss of **eight lives** in the conflict. External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar has been in active communication with Japan and Australia to mitigate maritime security risks.

Global Economy: Oil prices saw their largest-ever monthly increase in March 2026. Major energy facilities, including QatarEnergy's LNG plants and Saudi refineries, have invoked *force majeure* due to Iranian strikes.

India's Strategic Balancing Act

India's leadership of the **18th BRICS Summit** (scheduled for September 2026) puts it in a unique position to mediate between the "Global South" and Western powers.

Feature	BRICS Context	Quad Context
Membership	Includes both Iran (aggressor) and UAE/Saudi Arabia (targets).	Includes U.S., Japan, and Australia (opposing Iran).
Key Focus	Maintaining unity among emerging economies and addressing "economic terrorism."	Regional security, maritime freedom, and critical supply chains.
India's Goal	Use its "Humanity First" presidency to de-escalate Gulf tensions.	Reassert the Quad's relevance after a two-year hosting hiatus.

Conclusion

The May ministerial meetings will be a "litmus test" for Indian diplomacy. While the Quad offers a security framework to counter maritime threats, BRICS provides the only viable platform where the warring parties (Iran and the Gulf states) still sit at the same table. New Delhi's ability to facilitate dialogue while managing its own energy security and protecting its citizens abroad will define its status as a leading global power in 2026.

UPSC Prelims Exam Practice Question

Ques: Which of the following best describes India's foreign policy approach in the given context?

- (a) Isolationism
- (b) Strategic Autonomy
- (c) Military Alignment
- (d) Economic Protectionism

Ans: b)

UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question

Ques: India's simultaneous engagement with BRICS and the Quad reflects a policy of strategic balancing. Discuss. (150 Words)



Page 08 : GS I : Indian Society / Prelims Exam

The editorial argues that the Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill, 2026, uses the popular cause of women's reservation (Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam) as "political cover" for an immediate delimitation exercise. By decoupling seat allocation from the post-2026 Census and reverting to the 2011 Census, the government is accused of bypassing federal safeguards that have protected population-stabilizing states for 50 years.

The "Census Calculus": Why 2011?

The author identifies a strategic shift in the government's timeline:

The Original Plan: Delimitation was supposed to happen after the first Census conducted after 2026 (likely the 2031 Census).

The Delay: The 2021 Census was delayed until 2026-27, which would have pushed the women's quota implementation beyond the 2029 elections.

The "Hurry": Realizing the 2026-27 Census won't be ready in time for the 2029 polls, the government now proposes using the **2011 Census** data to redrawn seats immediately.

Key Legal & Constitutional Concerns

A. Dilution of Constitutional Rigidity

The Bill changes the definition of "population" from a fixed Census year (1971/2001) to "as Parliament may by law determine." This shifts the power from the Constitution to Ordinary Legislation. A simple majority in Parliament can now decide which Census to use, making seat distribution vulnerable to the whims of the ruling party.

B. Removal of the "Safety Freeze"

The Bill deletes the third proviso to **Articles 82 and 170**.

Since 1976 (42nd Amendment), there has been a freeze on inter-state seat allocation to ensure states that controlled their population (mostly in the South and West) were not penalized.

The removal of this safeguard strikes at the heart of **Cooperative Federalism**.

C. Population Proportionality vs. Uniform Increase

The Govt's Promise: Oral assurances were given that all states would see a uniform increase in seats to maintain existing proportions.

Reservation ruse

Women's empowerment is an excuse to undermine federal equity

In a Parliament sitting convened from April 16, the Union government is seeking to advance women's empowerment, but as part of a wider legislative package: the Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill, 2026, and a companion Delimitation Bill. The stated rationale is the operationalisation of the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam (the 106th Amendment of 2023), which reserves one-third of Lok Sabha and Assembly seats for women but wants to a post-Census delimitation. The government's insistence on bundling women's reservation with delimitation suggests that the former is being used as political cover for the latter: a sweeping reallocation of Lok Sabha seats that would reshape the federal composition of Parliament to the advantage of States where the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) enjoys electoral dominance, and at the expense of States where it has been historically weak.

When India's decennial Census was delayed for more than five years without a definitive or rational explanation from the BJP-led Union government, the political logic was not hard to discern. The 2021 Census was first postponed citing COVID-19, but no reason was offered for the successive deferrals that followed, until it was quietly announced that the exercise would be carried out in 2026-27. Under the Constitution, the freeze on inter-State distribution of Lok Sabha seats, pegged to the 1971 Census, was set to expire only after the first Census conducted after the year 2026 was published. This meant that in the normal course, delimitation would have been based on the 2031 Census. By delaying the Census to 2026-27, the government ensured that the delimitation exercise could be initiated on its preferred timeline, using the 2026-27 Census rather than one conducted in 2031.

Now, perhaps realising that any delimitation exercise would itself take years to conclude after the 2026-27 Census, and therefore not be ready even for the 2029 Lok Sabha elections, the government appears to be in a tearing hurry to proceed with delimitation on the basis of the last completed Census, that of 2011. The 131st Amendment Bill amends Articles 55, 81, 82, 170, 330, 332, and 334A of the Constitution. Its most consequential changes are the following. First, it raises the ceiling on Lok Sabha membership from 530 elected members from States and Union Territories to 815 and 35 respectively, to a potential House of 850. Second, it replaces the existing constitutional definition of "population", which specifies the 1971 Census for seat allocation and the 2001 Census for boundary demarcations, with an open-ended formulation: population shall mean the Census as Parliament may by law determine. The choice of which Census to use is no longer left to the Constitution but will depend on ordinary legislation, changeable by simple majority. Third, it deletes the third proviso to Articles 82 and 170, guaranteed States that had stabilised their populations that they would not lose parliamentary seats as a consequence. This safeguard is now removed.

Members of the Union Cabinet, including Home Minister Amit Shah and Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal, had assured the country that the existing proportion of seats held by each State will be maintained through a uniform increase. But this assurance finds no place in the constitutional amendment. Article 81(2)(a), retained unchanged, mandates that the ratio between seats and population shall be the same for all States "so far as practicable" which is a population-proportionality requirement and does not preserve existing proportions.

Based on 2011 Census data, a purely population-proportional allocation to an 850-seat House would produce sharply unequal increases across regions. The Hindi-heartland States (Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Haryana, Chhattisgarh, Uttarakhand, and Delhi), which currently hold 207 of 543 seats, would secure 366 — a 77% increase, with their share rising from 38.1% to 43.1%. The southern States (Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Kerala, and Puducherry), with 132 seats now, would receive only 176, a 33% increase, while their share would drop from 24.3% to 20.7%. The eastern States would slip from 14.4% to 13.7%; the North-East from 4.4% to 3.8%. The west and the northern non-Hindi States would remain roughly unchanged. States that spent decades building their health infrastructure, educational access, and women's agency that brought fertility down now face a reduction in their share of democratic power, while States that lagged on these indicators stand to gain the most seats. The already weakened fiscal federalism would now be compounded by diminished political representation for socio-economically advanced States.

That this legislation is being rushed through, with barely any time for public debate, just days before voters in two crucial States go to the polls, makes the timing even more suspect. There is no reason why women's reservation cannot be implemented within the existing 543-seat Lok Sabha by designating constituencies for women on a rotational basis, an approach the Opposition had pressed for after the passage of the 106th Amendment. MPs from States that stand to lose proportional representation in the Lok Sabha must resist the bulldozing of legislation on an issue that strikes at the federal foundations of the Indian Union. The consequences of letting this amendment pass are too grave to contemplate.

The Legal Reality: Article 81(2)(a) (which remains unchanged) mandates that seats must be proportional to population. The editorial argues that without a specific clause in the Amendment to protect current ratios, the "Population Proportionality" rule will legally override any oral promises.

The "Demographic Penalty" (Impact Analysis)

The editorial provides stark numbers on how an 850-seat House based on 2011 data would look:

Region	Current Share	Proposed Share	Political Impact
Hindi Heartland	38.1% (207 seats)	43.1% (366 seats)	+77% increase; Consolidation of power.
Southern States	24.3% (132 seats)	20.7% (176 seats)	-3.6% drop in share; Dilution of voice.
Eastern/NE States	18.8%	17.5%	Marginal decrease in influence.

Ethical & Federal Dilemmas for UPSC

Reward vs. Penalty: Is it ethical to reduce the democratic power of states that succeeded in national goals (health, education, population control)?

Facadism in Policy: Using "Women's Reservation" (a consensus issue) to push "Delimitation" (a divisive issue) raises questions about **Legislative Integrity**.

Alternative Approaches: The author suggests women's reservation could be implemented within the existing 543 seats via **rotational reservation**, proving that an immediate expansion of the House is a political choice, not a technical necessity.

Conclusion

The editorial concludes that the consequences of this Bill are "too grave to contemplate." It warns that diminishing the political representation of socio-economically advanced states while weakening fiscal federalism could lead to a deep-seated crisis of legitimacy for the Indian Union.

UPSC Prelims Exam Practice Question

Ques : Consider the following statements regarding the Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill, 2026:

1. It proposes to use the 2011 Census for delimitation.
2. It removes the freeze on inter-state seat allocation.
3. It makes the choice of Census year subject to parliamentary law.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

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

Ans: c)

UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question

Ques: The linkage between women's reservation and delimitation has been termed as 'political cover'. Discuss the validity of this argument. **(150 Words)**



Traditional economic narratives often prioritize urban centers as the primary engines of demand. However, this analysis of the Household Consumption Expenditure Survey (HCES) data (2011-12 to 2023-24) reveals a "reversal of roles." In several largely rural states, Rural Monthly Per Capita Consumption Expenditure (MPCE) growth is now outpacing urban growth, signaling a structural shift in India's consumption landscape.

Consumption growth uneven among largely rural States

Differences across States indicate that growth is becoming increasingly State-specific, shaped by local economic conditions and structural factors

DATA POINT

Chandrasekar K.

In India, consumption is primarily being driven by cities, where higher incomes, better job opportunities and faster economic activity lead to stronger spending growth (Chart 1). However, this narrative does not fully capture the reality in States such as Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh, where more than 70% of the population resides in rural areas, except North East States and Union Territories. In these States, rural households play a crucial role in the economy, making it more meaningful to compare these States with each other rather than with more urbanised States.

A State with low initial consumption may show higher growth simply because it is in a catching-up phase. A simple example shows why such comparisons need care. A student improving from 25 marks to 30 marks shows a higher percentage increase than one moving from 95 to 97, yet the latter clearly performs better. By focusing exclusively on States with predominantly rural populations, the analysis allows for a more equitable comparison and offers a clearer picture of their relative performance in consumption growth.

This analysis uses Monthly Per Capita Consumption Expenditure (MPCE) data from the Household Consumption Expenditure Survey (HCES) reports for 2011-12 and 2023-24 to examine how consumption patterns have evolved in rural-dominated States. The growth rates discussed are presented in real terms, meaning they have been adjusted for inflation. This adjustment is achieved using Consumer Price Index data, which removes the effects of rising prices over time. Without this adjustment, increases in consumption could reflect higher prices rather

than actual improvements in spending power. By converting nominal expenditure into real terms, this analysis provides a clearer understanding of how consumption levels have genuinely changed between 2011-12 and 2023-24.

The differences across States become clearer when we look at individual performance (Chart 2).

Bihar emerges as the leading performer among rural-dominated States. Rural consumption rose from ₹1,127 in 2011-12 to ₹3,670 in 2023-24, demonstrating significant nominal growth. After adjusting for inflation, it has expanded at a real rate of 4.7% annually, considerably higher than the all-India rural average of 3.4%. Urban consumption has also gone up swiftly at 4.6%, well above the national average of 2.9%. This shows that Bihar is not merely catching up from a low starting point but is also experiencing widespread growth in both rural and urban sectors.

In Odisha, Rural MPCE has grown at 4.5% while urban consumption has grown at 4.0%, both comfortably above the national averages. This suggests that Odisha is experiencing balanced and robust consumption growth, with urban areas showing a slight edge.

In Himachal Pradesh, rural consumption has grown at 4.0%, both above the national average in real terms. This reflects a stable and well-distributed growth pattern without sharp divergence between rural and urban areas.

In Jharkhand and Madhya Pradesh, rural consumption has grown at 3.8%, above the national rural average. However, urban consumption growth is 2.9%, same as the all-India average. This suggests moderate and stable growth, with rural areas performing slightly better than urban areas.

Uttar Pradesh shows a mixed pattern. In real terms, the rural consumption has grown at 3.8%, above the national average. However, urban consumption growth is 2.8%, slightly below the all-India

urban average. This suggests that while rural areas are contributing to the growth, urban areas are limiting the overall momentum.

Rajasthan's rural consumption growth stands at 3.4%, equal to the national average, while urban growth at 3.0% is slightly above the all-India average. This indicates balanced, non-leading performance.

In Chhattisgarh, rural consumption growth is 3.1%, below the national average, while urban growth is 3.2%, above it. This suggests that urban areas are pulling ahead while rural consumption lags.

A useful way to interpret these trends is through a quadrant framework based on the all-India averages. States such as Bihar and Odisha fall in the high-growth quadrant, indicating strong and balanced performance across both rural and urban areas. Himachal Pradesh also shows steady progress above national averages. In contrast, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, and Uttar Pradesh show stronger rural growth than urban areas, suggesting that rural demand is driving overall consumption. Chhattisgarh shows the opposite pattern, where urban growth exceeds rural growth. Meanwhile, Rajasthan lies close to national averages, reflecting steady but not leading performance.

A notable aspect of the data is that rural consumption growth now matches or even exceeds urban growth in several States, reversing the traditional pattern in which cities led demand. This suggests that the constraint on overall consumption growth may lie more in rural moderation than in rural weakness. Still, differences across States indicate that growth is becoming increasingly State-specific, shaped by local economic conditions and structural factors. These trends collectively indicate a changing consumption landscape in which rural India is not only catching up but also playing a central role in driving demand.

(The writer is an Indian Statistical Service Officer. Views are personal.)

Uneven gains

The data for the charts were sourced from the HCES Reports for 2011-12 & 2023-24 from Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation



CHART 1: Average Monthly Per Capita Consumer Expenditure (MPCE) (in ₹) at nominal price in urban and rural areas over the years

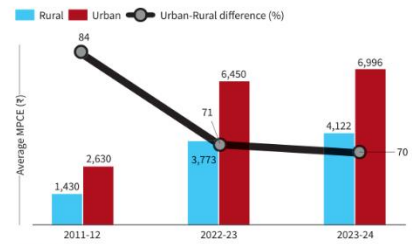
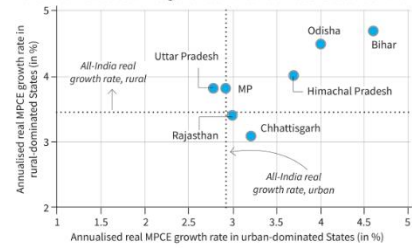


CHART 2: Annualised real MPCE growth rate in rural-dominated States (in %) on the X-axis and annualised real MPCE growth rate in urban-dominated States on the Y-axis



Methodology: Ensuring an Equitable Comparison

Real vs. Nominal: The study uses **Real Growth Rates**, adjusted for inflation using the Consumer Price Index (CPI). This ensures that "growth" reflects actual purchasing power rather than just rising prices.

Peer-to-Peer Focus: The author compares "rural-dominated" states (where >70% live in villages) against each other rather than comparing them to highly urbanized states like Maharashtra or Tamil Nadu. This avoids the "base effect" fallacy (where low-income states appear to grow faster simply because they started from a smaller number).

State-Specific Performance (2011-2024)

Daily News Analysis

The study categorizes states into a **Quadrant Framework** based on the National Rural Average (3.4%) and Urban Average (2.9%):

Performance Category	States	Key Observation
High Growth (Double Win)	Bihar & Odisha	Leading performers. Both rural and urban growth significantly exceed national averages. Bihar's rural growth is at 4.7% .
Rural-Led Growth	UP, MP, Jharkhand	Rural consumption is the primary engine. In UP, rural growth (3.8%) is above average, but urban growth (2.8%) lags behind.
Urban-Led Growth	Chhattisgarh	Urban growth (3.2%) is pulling ahead, while rural consumption (3.1%) is underperforming.
Balanced/Steady	Himachal & Rajasthan	Stable growth. Himachal is above average; Rajasthan is performing exactly at or slightly above national benchmarks.

Key Takeaways

A. The Myth of Rural Weakness

The data challenges the notion that rural India is in distress. In states like Bihar, Odisha, and UP, the rural consumer is "catching up" and, in some cases, outperforming their urban counterparts. This suggests that **Direct Benefit Transfers (DBT)**, rural infrastructure (roads/electrification), and improved agricultural realizations may be yielding results.

B. Urban Moderation

The "constraint" on India's aggregate consumption growth is increasingly coming from **urban moderation** rather than rural weakness. Urban growth in states like UP and Jharkhand is stagnant or below the national average, which could be due to higher urban inflation, rising housing costs, or job market saturation in smaller cities.

C. State-Specific Economic Paths

Growth is no longer "one-size-fits-all." The divergence between Chhattisgarh (urban-led) and UP (rural-led) indicates that local governance, state-specific schemes, and regional structural factors (mining vs. agriculture vs. services) are now the primary drivers of the economy.

Conclusion

The "changing consumption landscape" highlights that rural India is no longer just a passive recipient of economic trickledown but a central driver of demand. For policymakers, this necessitates a State-specific approach to economic planning. To sustain

this momentum, the focus must shift toward strengthening urban hubs in rural states to complement the robust growth already being witnessed in the hinterlands.

UPSC Prelims Exam Practice Question

Ques: The term “Real Growth Rate” refers to:

- (a) Growth adjusted for population increase
- (b) Growth adjusted for inflation
- (c) Growth including subsidies
- (d) Growth excluding taxes

Ans: b)

UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question

Ques: Discuss the changing dynamics of rural and urban consumption in India. What are the implications for economic policy? (150 Words)



The leak of the high-profile film *Jana Nayagan* highlights a critical vulnerability in India's creative economy. The legal framework has recently been strengthened to move beyond "anemic" enforcement toward a more deterrent regime.

What are the legal consequences of piracy?

The leak of Tamil movie *Jana Nayagan* before it could get a theatrical release could attract harsh penalties for the leakers if they are caught and chargesheeted, especially due to new amendments to the Cinematograph Act, 1952

EXPLAINER

Aroon Deep

The story so far:

In a blow to the movie's producers, Vijay-starrer *Jana Nayagan*, directed by H. Vinoth, was recently leaked online in its entirety in high quality while its theatrical release has been stuck in a limbo following issues with censor certificate.

The leak indicates that someone with legitimate access to the movie mishandled or intentionally spread it further. Six people have been held by authorities in connection with the leak. Film piracy through illegal downloads is rampant, but it is less common for content to become available in the first place in such high quality.

What are the laws on piracy? How well are they enforced?

The Copyright Act, 1957, deals extensively with infringement of intellectual property such as movies, TV shows, books, articles, and other creative work. Section 63 and Section 63A of the Copyright Act provide for fines of up to ₹2 lakh and three years of imprisonment. Repeat offenders can receive those same penalties again for each subsequent violation.

The Cinematograph Act, 1952, since its amendment in 2023, provides for a much larger fine: 5% of the audited gross budget of a film. While the minimum fine is decidedly smaller, judges may not look too kindly on the *Jana Nayagan* case in particular.

This is because unlike practically every other film, the Vijay starrer was leaked before it had a chance to release in theatres, denting both its theatrical value



India is seen as a 'notorious market' owing to its anemic response to piracy cases. FILE PHOTO

and home video rights valuation.

It is uncommon for film piracy cases to be investigated and pursued with vigour. India is consistently listed as a "notorious market" by U.S. authorities, for instance, for anemic responses to piracy.

However, considering the vast spectrum of voices within the film industry and political circles that has come out in support of KVN Productions, which bankrolled *Jana Nayagan*, this case may be the subject of a more serious investigation.

Judges have tended to focus more on distributors of piracy and intellectual rights cases than on individual infringers. But depending on an individual infringer's behaviour, punishments can end up hitting not just the original leaker of the film, but anyone who shares a link forward.

To boot, Tamil Nadu Police's State Cyber Crime Wing said in a press release

that those among the six arrested were sharing cloud storage links to the film.

How did this movie get leaked? How do studios protect against leaks?

Ordinarily, movies are only leaked to pirates in high quality when they appear on OTT streaming platforms. This is because once this happens, in spite of copy-resistant technologies employed by these platforms, pirates have found ways to defeat Digital Rights Management (DRM) protections on such content, and extract a video file that is close to the original stream in quality and fidelity.

As such, withholding content access from audiences at large altogether is the current gold standard. If only theatre projectionists have the movie – and that too only in an encrypted hard drive – it is much harder to copy. Invisible and barely visible watermarking enables studios to instantly identify the perpetrator if a copy

is made from a legitimate theatrical print. That makes leaking an incredibly unattractive prospect to people with access to a movie.

It is common for full videos in a film's supply chain to be visibly watermarked for the intended recipient, or to indicate a versioning. There is such a watermark for *Jana Nayagan*, but it is not yet clear if the version circulating online has enough forensic clues for investigators to zero in on a specific individual. If carelessness was involved, the harshest punishments may go to the first few people who received and distributed the film.

What happens if a movie has already been leaked?

It is incredibly challenging for a leaked film to be completely wiped from the Internet. For one, there are several sites, constantly changing their domain names to evade judicial website blocking orders. For another, private groups on messaging apps like Telegram and protocols like torrents, make the distribution of pirated content harder to stem.

However, there still remains an industry of so-called "anti-piracy" firms like AiPlex who work with filmmakers, sports broadcasters, and so on, to quickly send copyright takedown notices to social media platforms (who generally act quickly on such alerts), and torrent sites (some of whom accept and act on it).

It is also common for filmmakers to approach courts for so-called "dynamic injunctions" that allow them to constantly provide High Courts with links to non-compliant sites' URLs, after which they are blocked online. Some "John Doe" orders can be passed even before a film is leaked, in anticipation of a film becoming available on such platforms were a leak to happen.

THE GIST

It is incredibly challenging for a leaked movie to be completely wiped from the Internet

Section 63 and Section 63A of the Copyright Act, 1957, provide for fines of up to ₹2 lakh and three years of imprisonment for infringement of intellectual property

The Cinematograph Act, 1952, since its amendment in 2023, provides for a much larger fine: 5% of the audited gross budget of a film

In the *Jana Nayagan* case, the leak coming before its theatrical release has dented both its theatrical value and home video rights valuation

1. The Legal Framework: Key Statutes

The legal consequences of piracy in India are governed primarily by two major acts, each carrying distinct penalties.

A. The Cinematograph (Amendment) Act, 2023

This is the most recent and stringent tool against film piracy. It introduced specific sections to tackle "unauthorized recording" and "exhibition."

Section 6AA: Prohibits the use of an audio-visual recording device to make a copy of a film at a licensed exhibition (theatre).

Section 6AB: Prohibits the distribution of an infringing copy of a film.

Penalties:

Imprisonment: 3 months to 3 years.

Fine: A minimum of ₹3 lakh, which can extend up to **5% of the audited gross budget of the film.**

UPSC Note: In the case of Jana Nayagan, since the leak occurred before release, the 5% budget penalty could amount to several crores, making it a massive financial deterrent.

B. The Copyright Act, 1957

This remains the foundational law for all Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) violations.

Sections 63 & 63A: Deal with the infringement of copyright.

Penalties:

First Offense: Imprisonment (6 months to 3 years) and a fine (₹50,000 to ₹2 lakh).

Repeat Offenders: Enhanced penalties with mandatory minimum imprisonment and higher fines for every subsequent violation.

2. Judicial Mechanisms for Protection

Since digital content spreads instantly, the judiciary uses specific "orders" to stem the tide:

John Doe Orders: These are "injunctions against unknown defendants." They allow filmmakers to get a court order against anonymous pirates/websites even before their identity is known.

Dynamic Injunctions: As pirates constantly change website URLs (e.g., from .com to .org), a dynamic injunction allows the copyright holder to keep adding new URLs to the original blocking order without filing a fresh case every time.

3. Technological Protections vs. Piracy

The Jana Nayagan leak is unique because it was a "high-quality" leak from within the supply chain, rather than a "theatre print" (camcorded).

Technology	Purpose	Effectiveness
Digital Rights Management (DRM)	Encrypts digital content to prevent copying from OTT platforms.	Pirates often "crack" these once a movie hits streaming.
Forensic Watermarking	Invisible marks in the video file that identify the specific person/system it was sent to.	High. It allows investigators to "zero in" on the specific leaker in the supply chain.
Encrypted Hard Drives	Used for theatrical distribution.	Very High. Only authorized projectionists can unlock the content.

4. Strategic Analysis: India as a "Notorious Market"

Global Standing: The U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) often places India on its "Priority Watch List" or "Notorious Markets" list. This is due to perceived weak enforcement and the slow pace of the judicial system in resolving IPR cases.

Economic Impact: Piracy costs the Indian film industry billions in revenue, affecting not just producers but also GST collections and the livelihoods of daily wage workers in the industry.

Cyber Crime Wing Action: The recent arrest of six individuals by the Tamil Nadu Police indicates a shift toward treating digital piracy as a serious **cybercrime** rather than just a civil copyright dispute.

Conclusion

The Jana Nayagan case serves as a landmark because it tests the 2023 Amendments to the Cinematograph Act. For a "Viksit Bharat," protecting the "Orange Economy" (creative industries) is vital. Legal consequences are now shifting from simple fines to massive financial penalties tied to production budgets, aiming to transform India from a "notorious market" into a global leader in IPR protection.

UPSC Prelims Exam Practice Question

Ques: What are "John Doe Orders" in the context of Intellectual Property Rights?

- (a) Orders against identified offenders only
- (b) Orders issued by police without court approval
- (c) Injunctions against unknown or unidentified defendants
- (d) Orders related to tax evasion

Ans: c)

UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question

Ques: Discuss the role of recent legislative reforms in strengthening India's framework against film piracy. (250 Words)

The alarming rise of medicalisation in India

The recent announcement by Air India, hinting at possible pay cuts or even de-rostering for crew members with a higher Body Mass Index (BMI), may, at first glance, appear to be a prudent and well-intentioned step toward ensuring fitness and operational safety. Aviation, after all, is a profession where physical readiness is essential. Yet, the timing of this decision – coinciding with the week an anti-obesity drug, semaglutide, went off patent and nearly 40 products entered the Indian market – signals something deeper.

India today faces a mounting burden of obesity and associated metabolic conditions such as diabetes, hypertension, fatty liver disease, and dyslipidaemia. Nearly a quarter of Indians are overweight or obese. One in 10 adults live with diabetes, one in three with hypertension, and a substantial proportion has fatty liver disease. Even more concerning is the rapid rise of obesity among children. The causes, which are neither obscure nor debated, include the proliferation of ultra-processed or high fat, salt and sugar-content foods, and increasingly sedentary lifestyles shaped by urban work patterns, shrinking open spaces, chronic stress, alcohol consumption, and inadequate sleep. Compounding this is a genetic predisposition among Indians and South Asians toward excess body fat despite a seemingly lean appearance – the so-called “thin-fat” phenotype.

Historically, in a society long shaped by undernutrition and micronutrient deficiencies, excess weight was once perceived as a marker of prosperity. Consequently, as overweight and obesity began rising over the past two decades, public discourse remained muted, almost reluctant to confront this emerging reality.

Then came the pharmaceutical response. Around this time last year, another anti-obesity drug, tirzepatide, entered the Indian market and rapidly became one of its highest-selling medications. Its commercial success revealed not just clinical demand but also the emergence of a vast and lucrative therapeutic marketplace. With semaglutide now available at a remarkably lower cost, the market potential has expanded further.

Sustained marketing campaign

Over the past year, however, a more troubling pattern has emerged. Prescription medicines cannot be directly advertised to the public, yet pharmaceutical companies have grown adept at navigating these constraints. Surrogate advertising – often framed as public awareness campaigns – has become increasingly sophisticated. In the past year, the country witnessed full page newspaper campaigns, and billboards at major urban areas regarding obesity;



Dr. Chandrakant Lahariya

is a practising cardiometabolic physician, an internationally certified metabolic health coach, and a health policy expert

One of the most fundamental drivers of the obesity epidemic – the expansion of ultra-processed foods – receives comparatively limited attention

influencer endorsements for medical products; and sponsored features that resemble independent journalism, subtly shape public perception without explicitly naming the drugs.

Regulatory responses lagged behind. The restraint from the government on newspaper ads and billboards came only a year later.

The messaging on drugs from pharmaceuticals is rarely overt; instead, it is nuanced, persistent, and highly effective, gradually reshaping both public expectations and clinical practice. In such an environment, the boundary between genuine scientific advancement and commercial enthusiasm begins to blur. New drugs are presented as transformative breakthroughs, while their uncertainties receive far less attention.

The less talked about side effects

Anti-obesity medications, particularly those acting on GLP-1 pathways, are associated not only with fat loss but also with a reduction in lean muscle mass – a condition known as sarcopenia. As there is loss of fat from the body, nearly 25% to 40% is contributed by the loss of muscle mass – an unintended but serious consequence. By suppressing appetite and reducing caloric intake, these drugs can inadvertently lead to muscle loss unless accompanied by adequate protein intake and structured physical activity, especially resistance training. Sarcopenia in this context is no longer a theoretical concern. It has been documented in clinical trials and is supported by emerging real-world evidence. Yet, amid the celebration of weight loss outcomes, such risks are often understated. Individuals may achieve a lower BMI while compromising strength, metabolic resilience, and long-term health.

The trajectory does not end there. Sarcopenia itself is now emerging as a new therapeutic target. Pharmaceutical pipelines already include drugs aimed at preventing or reversing muscle loss, many in advanced stages of development. It requires little imagination to foresee the next phase – a population using anti-obesity medicines, along with additional therapies to manage the very consequences these drugs produce. What we are witnessing here is a cascading logic: one intervention begets another, each addressing the unintended consequences of the previous one. It is a self-reinforcing cycle sustained by scientific innovation, commercial incentives, and a growing societal preference for quick pharmacological solutions over sustained behavioural change.

Perhaps what is most disquieting is the evolving role of professional medical bodies within this ecosystem both globally, and increasingly in India. Clinical guidelines are being

updated with growing frequency, sometimes annually, often generating anticipation around new therapies. The interval between a drug's introduction and its inclusion in standard treatment protocols appears to be shrinking. Inclusion in such guidelines almost guarantees widespread adoption and commercial success. While scientific progress must be embraced, the pace of endorsement raises important questions: are these recommendations grounded in robust, long-term evidence, or are they shaped by the forces influencing markets and public discourse?

Meanwhile, one of the most fundamental drivers of the obesity epidemic – the rapid expansion of ultra-processed foods – receives comparatively limited attention. In India, this sector has grown at an annual rate of around 13% between 2011 and 2021. These products, aggressively marketed and widely accessible, shape dietary habits from an early age, fuelling the very conditions the pharmaceutical industry seeks to treat. Yet policy responses remain hesitant. Front-of-package warning labels, for instance, continue to face delays.

Thus, we inhabit a deeply paradoxical ecosystem. One industry promotes consumption patterns that drive metabolic disease. Another offers pharmaceutical remedies. A third emerges to treat the side effects of those remedies. From a market perspective, this system is efficient, profitable, and self-sustaining. From a public health perspective, it is profoundly misaligned with the goal of durable well-being.

Shift in perspective

Reclaiming the narrative of health demands a shift in perspective. Medicines must be recognised as adjuncts, and not substitutes, for foundational interventions such as a nourishing diet, increased physical activity, sufficient and restorative sleep, and stress management. Greater transparency about the risks of newer therapies is not just desirable but absolutely essential. At the same time, there must be stronger, evidence-based advocacy to restore lifestyle modification to the centre of clinical care. The medical profession must, above all, reaffirm its ethical compass.

Encouraging fitness among airline crew is not misguided. But if such measures become yet another entry point into a cycle of measurement, medication, and market-driven dependence, we risk losing sight of what health truly means. Anti-obesity drugs are not the destination; they are a signal revealing how deeply medicalisation is embedding itself into everyday life. This is a moment to pause, recalibrate, and reclaim health before medicine begins to define it.

GS Paper II: Governance and Social Justice

UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question: Critically examine the role of pharmaceutical companies in shaping health outcomes in India. Is there a conflict between public health goals and commercial interests? (150 Words)

Context : This thought-provoking op-ed by Dr. Chandrakant Lahariya highlights the "Medicalisation of Health" in India—a process where non-medical problems (like lifestyle-induced weight gain) are increasingly defined and treated as medical conditions requiring pharmaceutical intervention.

The Core Paradox: The "Self-Sustaining Loop"

Dr. Lahariya identifies a "cascading logic" where three industries profit from a single health crisis:

The Food Industry: Promotes ultra-processed foods (high in salt, sugar, and fat), driving obesity.

The Pharmaceutical Industry (Phase 1): Offers blockbuster drugs like Semaglutide and Tirzepatide to treat obesity.

The Pharmaceutical Industry (Phase 2): Develops new drugs to treat the side effects of Phase 1 drugs (e.g., treating Sarcopenia or muscle loss caused by weight-loss meds).

Analysis: From a market perspective, this is highly efficient; from a public health perspective, it is a failure of preventive care.

Key Concerns for India's Health Landscape

A. The Rise of "Thin-Fat" Phenotype

Indians have a genetic predisposition toward excess body fat despite a lean appearance. This makes the mounting burden of obesity (affecting nearly 25% of the population) a "metabolic time bomb" for diabetes and hypertension.

B. Surrogate Advertising & Policy Lags

The Issue: Pharma companies cannot advertise prescription drugs directly to the public. However, they use "surrogate advertising" (full-page "awareness" campaigns and influencer endorsements) to create demand.

The Regulatory Gap: The government took over a year to restrain these sophisticated marketing tactics, showing that regulation often lags behind market innovation.

C. The Sarcopenia Risk

Weight loss via GLP-1 drugs isn't just fat loss; 25% to 40% of the weight lost can be lean muscle mass.

The Consequence: This leads to reduced metabolic resilience and physical strength, requiring even more medical intervention (resistance training or new muscle-building drugs).

Ethical & Professional Dilemmas

Shrinking Evidence Windows: The interval between a drug's market entry and its inclusion in "Standard Treatment Protocols" by medical bodies is shrinking. This raises questions about whether guidelines are driven by robust long-term evidence or commercial enthusiasm.

Workplace Medicalisation: The mention of Air India's BMI-based de-rostering policy suggests that fitness is being reduced to a "measurement," which could inadvertently push employees toward quick-fix pharmacological solutions rather than sustainable lifestyle changes.

Policy Recommendations

Challenge	Proposed Policy Response
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Daily News Analysis

Challenge	Proposed Policy Response
Dietary Habits	Implement mandatory Front-of-Package (FoP) Warning Labels for ultra-processed foods.
Regulatory Oversight	Stricter monitoring of Surrogate Advertising by Pharma companies and influencers.
Clinical Practice	Re-center Lifestyle Modification (diet, sleep, stress mgmt) as the primary treatment, with drugs only as "adjuncts."
Infrastructure	Urban planning must prioritize open spaces and active transport to counter sedentary lifestyles.

Conclusion

The article warns that India is at a crossroads. We can either pursue a Market-Driven Model (a cycle of pill-dependence) or a Wellness-Driven Model (preventive and lifestyle-centric). For a developing nation like India, the medicalisation of everyday life is an expensive and unsustainable path. Health must be reclaimed as a product of living well, not just medicating well.

