

EDITORIAL HIGHLIGHTS

22-07-2026

GS Paper: GS-3

Syllabus Topics: Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment; Industrial policy.

THE HINDU PAGE: 10

India's ICI gets an updated series: what has changed?

The Centre has released a revised series of the ICI, updating the base year, sectoral coverage and weights. Here is what has changed and what it means for industrial growth

T.C.A. Sharad Raghavan

The story so far:

The Union Government has released an updated series of its Index of Core Industries (ICI), which is a key measure of how the main industrial sectors in India's economy are doing. This update now brings the ICI on a par with other recently updated metrics such as the national accounts (Gross Domestic Product and Gross Value Added), inflation, and the Index of Industrial Production (IIP).

What are the key changes in the new ICI series?

The previous ICI had a base year of 2011-12, which was significantly outdated. So, the first major update of the new series of the index was to bring forward

the base year to 2022-23. This makes the data more reflective of current reality, and thus makes it a more useful gauge of industrial activity.

The second major change was to increase the number of sectors covered to nine from the previous eight. The eight sectors earlier covered were coal, crude oil, natural gas, refinery products, steel, cement, electricity, and fertilizers.

Now, the government has said that owing to the intensive use of iron ore in industrial production, it has been added to the list of core industries.

Other sectoral changes include calculating steel production on a gross output basis rather than a net output basis so as to bring this in line with the IIP, which is the other major industrial production metric.

In the coal sector, the updated series

will only measure raw coal, and has excluded middling and washed coal. This change was made to eliminate the double counting that occurred in the previous series, as both middling and washed coal are made using raw coal.

Which sectors have gained or lost weight in the new ICI?

The inclusion of the iron ore sector and the resultant increase in the total number of sectors to nine would naturally lead to a redistribution of the weights among the sectors. Further, according to the government, it has revised the weights in the new series of the ICI to reflect the weights of the same sectors in the IIP.

Both of these factors have led to a significant redistribution of weights among the sectors of the ICI. The newly added iron ore sector has been assigned a

weight of 4.905% in the index, leaving that much less of the total share to be distributed among the other sectors.

The coal sector has seen a big downward revision in its significance, with its weight coming down from 10.33% to 5.596%. The natural gas sector, too, saw a major downward revision from 6.88% to 3.84%. Refinery products saw its weightage reduced from 28.04% to 22.572%.

Some sectors increased in significance. The electricity sector, for example, now makes up 30.932% of the entire index, up from the earlier 19.85%. The fertilizers sector saw its weightage increase marginally to 2.731% from 2.63%.

Have these revisions changed the final growth picture?

There is certainly a difference in the data output generated from the old series and the new series for the same periods of time. However, these variations become smaller when scaled up over time and as you move further back. That is, while the May 2026 growth of the ICI has been revised from 0.5% as per the old series to 3.2% in the new series, the full-year growth for 2025-26 was only revised from 1.1% to 1%.

Hence, just because the series has been updated, it does not mean the industrial growth picture has radically changed.

THE GIST

▼ The Union Government has released an updated series of its Index of Core Industries (ICI), which is a key measure of how the main industrial sectors in India's economy are doing

▼ This update now brings the ICI on a par with other recently updated metrics such as the national accounts. Changes include bringing forward the base year and increasing the number of sectors covered

GS Paper: GS-2

Syllabus Topics: Structure, organization and functioning of the Judiciary; Constitutional posts, powers, functions and responsibilities; Separation of powers.

THE HINDU PAGE: 10

Is Yashwant Varma still a judge?

The power to resign at will protects judicial independence; when misused, it helps evade accountability; the report by the committee tasked with investigating charges of misbehaviour against former judge Varma is set to come up in Parliament; what will become of Varma now that he has resigned?

EXPLAINER

G. Mohan Gopal
V. Venkatesan

Parliament is set to take up in the coming Monsoon Session the report of the committee appointed by the Speaker of the Lok Sabha under the Judges (Inquiry) Act, 1968, to investigate charges of misbehaviour against former judge of the Allahabad and Delhi High Courts, Yashwant Varma, who has since resigned. The allegations against him arise from the discovery in March 2025 of partially burnt currency notes in an outhouse at his official residence. Mystery surrounds his current status and the future course of the pending proceedings in Parliament.

On one hand, three months after his resignation, Mr. Varma continues to be listed by the Allahabad High Court and by the Department of Justice of the Union government as a sitting judge. This has given rise to misgivings about whether his resignation has taken effect or remains subject to acceptance by the President.

On the other, it has been reported that following Mr. Varma's resignation on April 9, 2026, his status at the Bar was changed to "active" on resumption of practice. Some of his dues and benefits as a sitting judge have reportedly been stopped since the resignation.

Four questions follow.

(1) Is Mr. Varma's resignation subject to acceptance by the President?

Our Constitution vests 13 constitutional functionaries with the "power to resign at will", without their resignation being subject to acceptance by any authority. They may resign merely by writing under their hand addressed to an authority specified in the Constitution. Needing no acceptance, the power to resign at will is an essential safeguard for the independence of these offices. It protects incumbents from being forced to work under coercion.

The offices vesting incumbents with this power are: the President; the



Publicly available data suggests that past resignations of judges have been handled in compliance with the law. S. SUBRAMANIAM

Vice-President; the Deputy Chairman of the Rajya Sabha; the Speaker and Deputy Speaker of the Lok Sabha; a judge of the Supreme Court; a judge of High Courts; the Governor; the Speaker and Deputy Speaker of a State Assembly; the Chairman and Deputy Chairman of a State Legislative Council; and a member of Public Service Commissions.

In contrast, Article 101 (3)(b) of the Constitution expressly says that the resignation of Members of Parliament is subject to acceptance by the Speaker of the Lok Sabha or the Chairman of the Rajya Sabha. Under Article 190(3)(b), the resignations of members of State Legislative Assemblies and Legislative Councils are subject to acceptance by the Speaker or the Chairman.

A five-judge Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court in *Union of India vs Gopal Chandra Misra* (1978) unanimously reaffirmed the power of Supreme Court and High Court judges to resign at will.

Justice S. Murtaza Fazal Ali dissented from majority judges who held that a resigning judge could choose a future date and withdraw the resignation before that date. But Justice Ali reflected the unanimous view of the Bench that no acceptance was needed for resignation of judges. He wrote categorically that "the effectiveness of the resignation does not depend upon the acceptance of the resignation by the President...the

resignation acts *ex proprio vigore*" (automatically without requiring any external action). At least 12 High Court judges have resigned since 2017. One Supreme Court judge, Justice Dalveer Bhandari, resigned in 2012 to join the International Court of Justice. Publicly available data suggests that these resignations have been handled in compliance with the law described above.

(2) Can Mr. Varma still be held out as a sitting judge?

Since Mr. Varma ceased to be a judge on April 9, describing him after that date as a sitting judge of the Allahabad High Court in the Department of Justice's list or on the website of the Allahabad High Court is clearly wrong.

There is no justification for retaining the name of a person who is not a judge in lists of sitting judges for over three months. It would only be proper for the Union Department of Justice and the Allahabad High Court to correct the error and delete his name. It would, needless to say, be illegal for him to receive any salary or benefit as a sitting High Court judge.

(3) Do the proceedings survive the resignation, now that removal from office is moot?

The Committee's report pertains to Mr. Varma's conduct prior to his resignation. The resignation, therefore, does not affect the laying of the report before both Houses and its being made public.

Indeed, there is a statutory duty to do so. The public also has a legitimate right to know whether the Committee found any proved misbehaviour on the part of a sitting judge of a constitutional court.

If the report finds Mr. Varma not guilty of the charges, the matter ends there. Even if the report finds him guilty, the motion for his removal can no longer be moved. Having resigned, Mr. Varma does not hold the office of a judge and cannot be removed from it. Under Section 6, the report is to be discussed by Parliament along with the motion. As the motion lapses and cannot be discussed, the report too cannot be discussed by Parliament under the Act.

(4) Should the Constitution be amended so that judges facing removal cannot evade accountability by resigning?

There is a genuine concern that the framework for judicial accountability through removal proceedings under the Judges (Inquiry) Act, 1968 suffers from a loophole. Judges may resign at will before Parliament takes up the motion for their removal, halting the entire process.

This loophole is best addressed by amending the Constitution, rather than by executive or judicial interpretation of the Constitution or of the 1968 Act. The amendment may provide that the resignation of a judge facing removal proceedings is subject to acceptance during their pendency. To safeguard judicial independence, the power to accept the resignation of a judge should vest in the Chief Justice of India rather than in the President. Should Parliament want to discuss the report submitted by the Inquiry Committee set up under the Act despite the judge's resignation, it should be amended to enable it for the purpose. Interpreting inadvertent silences in the Constitution or the Act to suit the concerns of Parliament or the Executive would be against the rule of law.

(G. Mohan Gopal is former Director of the National Judicial Academy and former Vice-Chancellor of National Law School of India University, Bengaluru. V. Venkatesan is Contributing Editor at Supreme Court Observer. The views are their own)

THE GIST

Three months after his resignation, Mr. Varma continues to be listed by the Allahabad High Court and by the Department of Justice of the Union government as a sitting judge

Mr. Varma's resignation subject to acceptance by the President? Will the 'power to resign at will' continue to apply in his case?

Do the proceedings survive the resignation, now that removal from office is moot? What happens if he is found guilty of the charges?

GS Paper: GS-2 & GS-3

Syllabus Topics: Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India; Effects of liberalization on the economy; Foreign trade

THE HINDU PAGE: 9

New trade pact a win-win for India and U.K.

The India-U.K. Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA), which came into force on July 15, marks a pivotal moment in the evolution of bilateral ties. More than a conventional tariff-reduction pact, the agreement reflects a strategic alignment between two major democracies seeking to recalibrate their economic engagement in a rapidly shifting global order.

The India-U.K. CETA represents one of the most wide-ranging trade agreements concluded by India in recent years. Aligned with the broader India-U.K. Vision 2035, the CETA seeks to deepen cooperation across trade, technology, climate, and innovation. The agreement reflects the growing maturity of the India-U.K. economic partnership and provides a strong institutional framework for expanding trade and investment.

Both countries have further set a target of doubling bilateral trade to over \$100 billion by 2030, an objective that now appears more achievable with the new institutional framework in place.

Gains for both sides

The headline gain for India is the zero-duty access secured for 99% of Indian exports to the U.K. This is expected to boost labour-intensive sectors such as textiles, leather, footwear, marine products, and gems and jewellery, which are sensitive to pricing. It will also benefit high-value sectors such as engineering goods and chemicals, where margins depend on consistent market access.

Tariffs ranging from 70% on processed foods to 12% on textiles will now come down to zero.

The Indian government has also addressed concerns relating to steel exports. Recognising the U.K.'s new steel measures that came into effect on July 1, both sides have agreed on arrangements that protect commercial interests, minimise market disruptions, and provide



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The CETA can reshape trade and investment flows, create quality jobs and growth, and transition India to a more competitive and innovation-driven economy

greater certainty for Indian exporters. Moreover, the import of electric vehicles will be subject to tariff-rate quotas, with tariffs being reduced in a phased manner. This reflects India's calibrated approach to balancing consumer access with continued support for domestic manufacturing. India has also retained appropriate safeguards in sensitive sectors such as agriculture and dairy.

The deal also opens access to government procurement markets, enabling Indian firms to bid for a wider range of public contracts in the U.K., especially in sectors such as infrastructure services and consulting.

Equally important is the agreement's emphasis on services and professional mobility. Expanded access for Indian IT, education, healthcare, financial and professional service providers strengthens India's position as a global services hub. The agreement also strengthens cooperation in education and skills by enabling U.K. institutions to establish campuses in India.

Modern provisions on digital trade, labour, gender, intellectual property, and innovation, make the agreement future-ready, enabling Indian firms to integrate into the U.K. and global value chains, while attracting investments for emerging sectors such as fintech and green technologies. These provisions will also create new opportunities for startups and Global Capability Centres to further advance collaboration in emerging technologies such as AI.

The U.K. is already India's sixth-largest investor, contributing around 5% of cumulative FDI (Foreign Direct Investment) equity inflows into India since April 2000. The agreement is expected to further strengthen bilateral investment flows.

To maximise benefits from the CETA, the Indian industry must invest in quality upgradation, standards compliance, and sustainability. Indian companies should leverage mobility

provisions to deepen their presence in the U.K. services market, build partnerships, and invest in long-term capabilities.

Again, with opportunities in sectors such as processed foods, textiles, handicrafts, and IT-enabled services and business services, industry bodies have a critical role to play in enabling Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) to benefit from the agreement. This requires guidance on compliance and regulatory requirements, as well as procurement opportunities.

Template for the future

At a time of rising regulatory barriers across the world, the India-U.K. CETA reaffirms the value of open, rules-based trade. It supports India's Atmanirbhar Bharat vision by enhancing competitiveness and complements the Make in India and Digital India schemes through greater market access, services exports, and mobility. For the U.K., the agreement strengthens its strategic economic partnership with one of the world's fastest-growing major economies.

Upon implementation, the CETA can reshape trade and investment flows, create quality jobs and growth, and transition India to a more competitive and innovation-driven economy thereby serving as a benchmark for trade agreements.

Furthermore, the India-U.K. CETA can also serve as a foundation for trilateral economic partnerships by combining India's manufacturing strength and skilled workforce with the U.K.'s financial, technological, and global commercial networks. The U.K.'s membership in the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, together with the proposed India-EU trade agreement, can further create complementary opportunities for Indian businesses to integrate into wider regional value chains, diversify exports, and strengthen supply chain resilience.

GS Paper: GS-2

Syllabus Topics: Government policies and interventions; Important aspects of governance; Citizen participation and civil society movements.

THE HINDU PAGE: 10

I was part of the protest march in Delhi, saw democratic politics take a new turn



DESH KAAL

BY YOGENDRA YADAV

THE REGIME — and the silence — often made me wonder whether I'm completely crazy for coming back... But today — to see this democratic spirit which has been silenced for so long come back alive again — I feel whole again. Even if temporarily.

I read these lines well past 3 am, still trying to process all that I had witnessed on the streets of Delhi this Monday. These lines, posted on X by Vanya Vaidehi Bhargav, herself a fine political theorist, captured why July 20 may be remembered in the history of Indian democracy.

This column has argued that as we slip from competitive authoritarianism to electoral autocracy, the focus of the Opposition must switch from electoral politics to a politics of resistance. Here are six reasons why the Jantar Mantar protest was a perfect illustration of what the politics of resistance may look like.

Firstly, the numbers. No one has a good estimate. But it was undoubtedly many times more than the 15,000-20,000 the organisers had hoped and planned for. Drone images suggest that well over a lakh joined this protest. Originally planned as a march, it turned into a rally, then a *ralla* — a mass flow. By the afternoon, every road leading to

Parliament and much of Lutyens' Delhi was packed with the protesters. It was India's "Occupy" moment.

What made the numbers stand out even more is that this was an organic mobilisation. Far from the culture of rent-a-crowd political rallies or spectacles of organisational prowess, the Jantar Mantar protest comprised almost entirely self-mobilised youth responding to a social media call, arranging for their travel and walking long distances. The last time I witnessed this spontaneous synchronisation was the famous Republic Day tractor march organised by the farmers' movement in 2021.

Third, notice their "utterly absurd diversity", as a friend called it. I met a person who travelled from Arunachal Pradesh, a group of adults from Dharamshala in Himachal Pradesh, a wheel-chair bound student of Spanish, a group of girls from Dehradun, scores of boys and girls from all over UP, Bihar and MP, students from elite private universities, national public universities as well as time-pass colleges, and of course a large chunk of "aspirants" from Mukherjee Nagar and similar hotspots. The proportion of women was striking and exhilarating. These were not your usual suspects. An overwhelming majority were first-time participants in any protest. Their families mostly supported the BJP. So did they, till yesterday. That must worry the regime.

Fourth, the issue that brought them together was much larger and more enduring than just the recent paper leaks. There were, of course, students who suffered the NEET cancellation and the CBSE scam, parents who lost their children due to this fiasco, aspirants waiting in-

More than direct sufferers, the protesters were primarily potential sufferers, those who know that it could be their turn tomorrow, those who realise that the education-employment system has broken down

definitely for jobs, and victims of recruitment scams. But more than direct sufferers, the protesters were primarily potential sufferers, those who know that it could be their turn tomorrow, those who realise that the education-employment system has broken down.

Anger against Minister Dharmendra Pradhan is only the tip of the iceberg. The underlying urge is for an equitable, meaningful and quality education and for a universal right to employment. It is after half a century — since the JP movement in Bihar in 1974 — that a youth protest has placed education and employment at the centre of the national agenda.

Fifth, the spirit of resistance goes beyond names and labels. Sonam Wangchuk is clearly their hero, but the hero-worship quotient is much more muted than during the Anna movement. The youth related to the GJP and its leadership, but were not shy to offer healthy criticism. They heard and cheered political leaders and activists from the podium, but were not swayed by any one personality. This democratic spirit augurs well for the future.

Sixth, the repeated chants of "Godi media, go back" were a reminder that the youth have found a way past the narratives of mainstream media. For the last one month, the Noida channels and the national press more or less erased the protest at Jantar Mantar, when not mocking or demonising it. Yet every calculation of the regime and every narrative of its spin doctors was defied. Just as in the farmers' movement, media black-outs actually spurred the participants into developing their parallel information channels through social media, word of mouth and Whats-

App. Their posters were punchy: "The true test of a democracy isn't the protest. It's how the state responds to it". Their slogans were innovative. I heard this one for the first time: "Jab jab Modi darta hai, Hindu-Muslim karta hai". The authoritarian narrative is being punctured.

Seventh, and above all, July 20 shows a fracturing of the spell of fear. Today's youth understand the risks of surveillance and profiling under the present regime, something absent during the Ramila Maidan mobilisation of the anti-corruption movement. That deterred many of them from coming to Jantar Mantar for the first two weeks. But somehow, something shattered it on Monday. Perhaps the safety of the crowd. Perhaps the adrenaline of hopelessness. Or maybe a faint hope. But these young people were not afraid of being heard, photographed or even tear-gassed.

Finally, in a way almost unnoticed, the movement could mark a new phase in the politics of social justice. The youth of India have come together in a movement led by a Dalit, Abhijeet Dipke, and inspired by an Adivasi, Sonam Wangchuk, one not limited to the stereotypical "SC/ST issues". Instead of demanding its share in the nation, bahujan politics can now define what the nation is.

For many months now, I have been repeating a dialogue to anyone who asks me about the future of India: "Sawal ye nahin hai ki janata tanashahi ke khilaaf khar hogi ya nahin. Sawal sirf itna hai ki jab janata khar hogi tab tak kahin ham toh nahin baithi jayenge". Yesterday, I saw it unfold before my eyes. Janata was standing. And so was I.

The writer is member, Swaraj India, and national convenor, Bharat Jodo Abhiyaan. Views are personal

GS Paper: GS-2

Syllabus Topics: Important aspects of governance, transparency and accountability; Development processes; Role of civil society and institutions.

THE HINDU PAGE: 10

Students need to guard against undermining institutions



ADITI
NARAYANI
PASWAN

TO UNDERSTAND the chaos gripping our educational spaces — as seen in the recent protests in Delhi and elsewhere — it is necessary to revisit Jean-Jacques Rousseau's concept of the Social Contract. Rousseau has noted, "True political liberty is never found in a state of chaos or unbridled individual impulse."

But real freedom is built when citizens willingly enter a community, agreeing and binding themselves to shared rules and institutional structures." He had also warned that when individuals choose disruption over collective agreement, it leads to the fracturing of the civic bond that underpins democratic existence.

Public institutions and administration are a microcosm of the social contract. Participating in them calls for mutual agreement to listen, follow the process, and respect the forum.

As teachers, when we allow students to treat these structures as permanently broken or as enemies, we are misinforming and mis-educating them. It leads to alienation from the tools of civic governance that students need to master.

We need to establish a dialogue between government bodies and their citizens; we need to demand institutional accountability rather than disrupt governance and create an environment of political polarisation.

Democracy is kept alive through the day-to-day, exhausting work of policy implementation and institutional negotiation. It does not function through continuous agitation.

Our real job as educators is to anchor students and their energies in constitutional boundaries and civic responsibility. Classrooms need to be the spaces where these evolving state reforms are understood, where we promote curiosity and scepticism and encourage critical thinking.

But there is a fine line between questioning a system and trying to dismantle its legitimacy in public. When students are misled and continuously pushed to-

ward confrontation, it leads to a shrinking of the faith citizens have in their public institutions, with the focus shifting to physical clashes.

Therefore, any genuine progress in administrative reforms is sidelined by political polarisation. The debate is now not about improving education or public institutions. They are now consumed by binary shouting matches with zero outcomes.

When, as a teacher, I see impatience among India's youth, I feel that it is a healthy sign of an aspirational democracy. It means these ignited minds aspire for rapid development.

But this passion must go hand in hand with maintaining the stability of our foundational institutions, which form the cornerstone of democracy. There are multiple democratic tools to effect changes. The state has built robust, highly responsive institutional tools — from transparent online RTI portals to localised grievance cells and elected academic councils.

These handle student anxieties. Our public institutions must be spaces where youth and students learn to navigate institutional realities, and master the art of constructive civil discourse in the larger spirit of democracy.

Ultimately, we must remember Mahatma Gandhi, who built our independence struggle on the principle of peaceful *satyagraha*. For Gandhi, the means were as pure as the end itself.

The raw disruption and aggression we witnessed in Delhi this week from all stakeholders violated the true Gandhian spirit. It replaced moral persuasion with force.

The true task before our youth today is to look past structural anger. True democratic empowerment is born when we partner with and reform the public institutions through engagement from within, rather than letting raw friction bring them to a halt.

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Our public institutions must be spaces where youth and students learn to navigate institutional realities, and master the art of constructive civil discourse in the larger spirit of democracy

GS Paper: GS-2

Syllabus Topics: Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests; Indian foreign policy evolution.
THE HINDU PAGE: 11

From 1991, three foreign policy lessons for managing disruption of certainties



RAJA MANDALA
BY C RAJA MOHAN

HISTORICAL ANALOGIES must be approached with caution. Yet there is a striking symmetry between the foreign policy challenges that confronted India in 1990-91 and those now posed by the wars in Iran and Ukraine. Simultaneous upheavals in the Middle East and Europe in 1991 shattered India's economic and strategic assumptions. Today, the two regions are again compelling Delhi to reconsider the foundations of its national strategy.

Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in August 1990, and the US-led war to reverse Saddam Hussein's annexation, sent oil prices soaring, disrupted remittances and aggravated India's balance-of-payments crisis. Within months, the Soviet Union — the principal anchor of Indian foreign policy during the Cold War — collapsed. The twin shocks forced India to reform its economy, diversify its international partnerships and rethink its place in the world.

The circumstances today are different, but the underlying challenge is familiar. The war that began with the killing of Iran's Supreme Leader on February 28 has raised energy costs, disrupted navigation through the Strait of Hormuz and exposed India's dependence on the Middle East.

The relief in Delhi after Washington and Tehran signed a memorandum of understanding in June has proved premature as the conflict escalates again. In Europe, meanwhile, the Ukraine war has entered its fifth year without a clear path to settlement. Russia is not about to disintegrate as the Soviet Union did in 1991. But the prolonged war, with its mounting costs, is generating new questions about Russia's future at home and abroad.

India is much better placed to manage these shocks than it was in 1991. It has a larger economy, greater diplomatic weight, and wider international partnerships. Yet its ex-

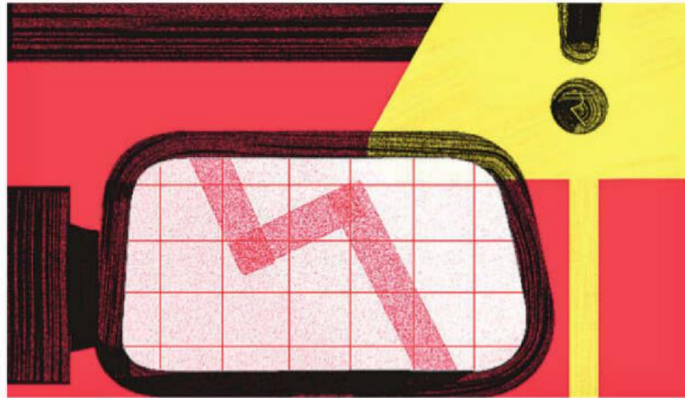


ILLUSTRATION: C R SANKHUMAR

posure to the world and the resulting vulnerabilities are greater.

American policies are intensifying this vulnerability. The sanctions legislation associated with the late Senator Lindsey Graham is proposing massive punitive tariffs against China, India and others importing Russian oil. President Donald Trump has also called for the legislation to be expanded to cover Iran. Whether or not Congress accepts that proposal, India's energy diplomacy will come under increasing stress.

The Indian government has shown considerable flexibility in navigating these pressures so far, but it could get trickier in the days ahead. As in 1991, however, the government appears more flexible than the foreign policy debate surrounding it might suggest. When Saddam invaded Kuwait, India's official position was caught between competing imperatives. It had to evacuate a large Indian expatriate population, preserve relations with Iraq and the Arab world, respond to the violation of Kuwaiti sovereignty, and accommodate the overwhelming military power assembled by the United States. The government's contradictory manoeuvres — including Foreign Minister I K Gujral's embrace of Saddam and

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the provision of refuelling facilities to American military aircraft — reflected these multiple pressures.

But the domestic strategic consensus in 1991 was hardly realistic. Large sections of the political and foreign policy establishment sympathised instinctively with Saddam, long viewed as a friend of India and a representative of secular Arab nationalism. His annexation of an independent country was viewed as less important than his confrontation with the United States.

The same rigidity shaped Indian reactions to the Soviet crisis. By the late 1980s, Mikhail Gorbachev's internal reforms and retrenchment abroad had made clear that the old Soviet order was unsustainable. Yet a large section of Delhi's foreign policy community denounced him for seeking accommodation with the West. When communist hardliners attempted a coup in August 1991, there was barely concealed political glee in parts of Delhi. The coup collapsed within three days; the Soviet Union disappeared in December.

The protagonists have changed, but the first instinct survives. Sympathy for Tehran often rests less on the character or conduct of the Islamic Republic than on its resistance to

America. Saddam's secular autocracy and Iran's Islamic theocracy are as different as chalk and cheese. Yet, the Indian foreign policy community embraced them both as symbols of anti-American defiance.

The debate on Russia is similarly personalised around Putin and sentimentalised through the memory of Soviet support for India. This obscures the need to examine Russia's internal strains, its changing relationship with China and its imperatives for reconciling with Europe and America. India's interests require an empathetic understanding of the domestic politics of Russia and Iran — not reflexive signalling of solidarity to the governments of the moment.

The first lesson from 1991, therefore, is that no balance of power is permanent. The certainties of the 1980s — a stable Soviet Union, a bipolar order and dependable partnerships — vanished with astonishing speed in 1991. Unpredictability is not an interruption of normal international politics; it is one of its permanent features. Indian strategy must devote as much attention to discontinuity as to continuity.

The second is that debate itself is a strategic asset. A foreign policy community organised around a rigid consensus will repeatedly miss inconvenient possibilities. India needs stronger expertise on Russia, Iran, Central Asia and the internal politics of the Middle East. India needs sustained investment, more than ever, in languages, history and regional specialisation. It also needs institutions willing to reflect on competing scenarios and encourage contrarian judgments.

The third and most important lesson is that external shocks and systemic changes cannot be managed by diplomacy alone. What rescued India after 1991 were the internal reforms. The answer must be the same today — sweeping domestic reform to cope with a changing world. Diplomacy's role then and now is to support internal transformation.

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GS Paper: GS-2

Syllabus Topics: Structure, organization and functioning of the Judiciary; E-governance- applications, models, successes, limitations, and potential.

THE HINDU PAGE: 11



SUPRIYA SANKARAN
AND PAVITHRA MANIVANNAN

A checklist for a new-age courtroom

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE is coming to India's courts, not as a distant possibility but as an active policy question. This June, the Supreme Court published draft regulations for the use of AI in courts for public comments. They govern how AI may be used across the entire judiciary, create institutions to oversee their adoption and prescribe approval processes for AI systems.

But courts are only beginning to use AI, and no one fully understands yet how it will behave in practice. These regulations will need to evolve as experience accumulates.

The more important question, then, is whether the foundations are right. Two things in particular are hard to reverse once set, and will shape the integrity of everything that follows. Both need to be answered before AI enters the courtroom.

The first is about institutions. Every wave of technology use in India's judiciary has created a new governance body. Computerisation brought computer committees. AI is now producing an apex body, five standing committees, High Court AI committees, district AI secretariats, and a new Centre of Research and Excellence.

The problem is architecture. Institutional structures must not be built around individual technologies. Computerisation, digitisation, video conferencing, and AI are

successive tools in the same transformation of court administration. For instance, an AI-assisted scheduling system is simultaneously a case management, infrastructure, digitisation and AI project. If each of these tools and functions has separate committees, it fragments accountability and slows decision-making. The judiciary needs a permanent institution capable of absorbing the functions currently held by the e-Committee alongside the new AI governance mandate, and whatever technology comes next. India has done this before: TNMSC professionalised medicine procurement in Tamil Nadu and became a model for other states; UIDAI built and maintains the Aadhaar ecosystem. Execution requires permanence, expertise and clear ownership — none of which committees with rotating members can provide.

The second is about standards. When India built its payments infrastructure, it made one decision that changed everything: It separated the standard from the market. NPCI wrote the specification for UPI and

stepped back. It didn't build PhonePe or Google Pay — the market did. The standard was shared; the innovation happened around it. India's courts are now at a similar inflection point with AI.

The Draft Regulations establish who approves AI systems for court use and how. What they do not establish is what any system must ac-

tually demonstrate to earn that approval. This is not a minor gap. Before a pharmaceutical company can sell a drug in India, its manufacturing process must meet internationally defined quality standards.

For judicial AI, the equivalent is missing. What must a system explain, and to whom? What error rate is acceptable in a bail matter versus a scheduling task? Where does training data come from? Without these answers defined in advance, each of India's 25 high courts must independently determine what constitutes an acceptable AI system. Given the wide variation in technical capacity across the judiciary, they will arrive at different answers. The result is inconsistent approvals — and inconsistent justice.

Standards cannot be set by the body that procures against them. The Draft Regulations already envision a Centre of Research and Excellence on AI (CoRE-AI). It should be set up as a neutral body with no stake in which vendor wins, no procurement budget to defend. A permanent technical institution should procure against them. A Judicial Committee should approve them. Just as NPCI stepped back and let the market build, CoRE-AI's value lies precisely in staying out of the game it is refereeing. The SC must push for foundations that will hold not just for today's AI, but for whatever comes next.

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