EDITORIAL HIGHLIGHTS

26-11-2026

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GS 2: INDIAN POLITY & CONSTITUTION
THE HINDU PAGE: 08

On Constitution Day, November 26, a reflection on the many challenges confronting India's democracy

Take constitutional patriotism to the people



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Every November 26, on Constitution Day in India, a striking visual emerges on the political landscape. Opposition leaders, civil rights activists, and citizens step into the public space clutching pocket-sized editions of the Constitution of India – often bound in bright red. Waving these slender volumes is a powerful symbolic gesture that signals a collective resolve to defend the Republic against majoritarian consolidation and the erosion of democratic norms.

While the Opposition and civil society have successfully turned the Constitution into a tactical symbol, they have largely failed to conceive, articulate, and propagate the spirit of constitutional patriotism (*Verfassungspatriotismus* in German). In treating the Constitution as a legalistic artifact, critics of the ruling regime have left behind a dangerous ideological vacuum. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and the broader Hindutva movement have stepped into this space – this is a shift from their historical rejection of the text to a strategic use of constitutional language to advance their ideology.

Defining constitutional patriotism

At its core, constitutional patriotism means that a citizen's primary loyalty should be based not on religion, ethnicity, blood ties or shared history, but on the universal principles, democratic procedures, and fundamental human rights enshrined in a constitutional framework.

Though developed as a political theory in late 20th-century Europe, its intellectual roots can be traced to post-war German thinkers such as Karl Jaspers, Dolf Sternberger and Jürgen Habermas. Amid the rubble of the Second World War, German philosopher Karl Jaspers confronted the failure of volks-nationalism.

In The Question of German Guilt (1946), he argued that a nation could no longer rebuild its identity on ethnic purity or national pride. Instead, Germans had to undergo a profound moral awakening, anchoring their political survival in individual conscience, reason, and the rule of law. Political scientist Dolf Sternberger formally coined *Verfassungspatriotismus* to mark the 30th anniversary of West Germany's Basic Law. He sought to rescue the concept of patriotism from fascism, arguing that citizens could – and should – feel a deep, civilised affection for the rules of freedom and democratic institutions rather than an abstract, mystical fatherland.

Philosopher Jürgen Habermas, who systematically expanded Sternberger's idea during the 1980s, argued that in complex, pluralistic modern societies, social integration cannot rely on pre-political cultural homogeneity. Instead, citizens bond through a procedural consensus, committing themselves to the universalistic principles of human rights, popular sovereignty, and the public sphere.

Waving pocket editions of the Constitutions is an empty ritual if the Opposition and civil society fail to champion constitutional patriotism

The scale of the challenge in India

To understand why India desperately needs this framework today, one must recognise the scale of the ideological challenge. Architects of Hindutva have been deeply sceptical of a secular, liberal democratic republic. In their view, a secular republic is seen as a western imitation that has suppressed the true civilisational ethos of the Hindu *Rashtra*.



Instead of openly denouncing the Constitution, they have sought to re-read it through a civilisational lens, framing majoritarian cultural dominance as the implicit "will of the people". By weaponising procedural democracy – winning elections through majoritarian mobilisation – they claim a democratic legitimacy; but supersedes the values of the Constitution.

During the Constituent Assembly debates in the late 1940s, the framers of India's Constitution referred to the experience of the Weimar Republic, particularly while discussing the safeguards needed to protect democracy. The structural tragedy of the Weimar Republic was that its defenders believed that laws alone could protect a republic devoid of a republican citizenry. Weimar's elites remained legally neutral, allowing groups that wanted to tear down the Constitution to operate freely.

In India today, the current majoritarian project engages in autocratic legalism, utilising parliamentary majorities, legal amendments, and administrative coercion to transform a secular, pluralistic republic into a de facto ethnic democracy from within. When the Opposition responds with mere procedural complaints or token court petitions, they are playing a Weimar-style game of rules against an opponent rewriting the rulebook. The Hindutva juggernaut is ethno-nationalism attempting to hollow out a universalist, rights-based legal order from within.

Where constitutional patriotism demands that a citizen's primary loyalty is to the universal protections of the law, Hindutva asserts that the true core of belonging is cultural-religious assimilation. It defines the nation through blood, sacred geography, and a civilisational heritage, inherently reducing minorities to conditional citizens.

Move to the field

A dangerous misconception in discussions about constitutional patriotism is the assumption that it is a cold, overly academic, or "professorial" idea meant only for European philosophers, constitutional courts, and high-altitude seminars. Critics argue that laws and procedures cannot match the strong emotional appeal of nationalism based on religion, ethnicity or ancestry.

This critique misses the entire point. Constitutional patriotism is only "professorial" if we allow it to remain trapped in elite legal jargon. In reality, if constitutional patriotism is to defeat ethno-religious majoritarianism, it must be translated into a passionate, mass-mobilising grassroots culture. While the RSS and the Sangh Parivar have spent decades building deep, ideological infrastructure at the *shakha* and village levels – inculcating a sense of belonging through community service, cultural indoctrination, and everyday socialisation – secular and democratic forces have largely restricted their constitutional defence to upper-middle-class litigation, parliamentary speeches, and episodic protests.

Constitutional patriotism must be brought out of the courtroom and into the fields, factories, and neighbourhood assemblies. It must be taught not as a dry set of articles, but as a lived daily struggle for dignity, workers' rights, gender equality, and social justice. When a Dalit family is protected from caste violence, or when a worker claims dignity against exploitation under the law, they are experiencing constitutional patriotism in its most authentic form.

As political theorist Jan-Werner Müller notes in *Constitutional Patriotism* (2007), anchoring this ethos in the public square is essential.

As the pocket Constitutions disappear into pockets and handbags after November 26, the real work remains undone. If the defenders of India's republic wish to halt the march of ethno-religious nationalism and prevent a Weimar-style implosion, they must take constitutional values beyond academic discussions and bring them to ordinary people. They must articulate and promote a passionate, inclusive, and socially radical constitutionalism, which convinces every citizen that their dignity, freedom and future depend not on the whims of the majority, but on the unyielding, shared promise of the Republic's supreme law.

GS 2: INDIAN POLITY & GOVERNANCE

THE HINDU PAGE: 08

The systematic erosion of political equality in India



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On November 26, 2026, India marks 77 years since the Constituent Assembly adopted the Constitution in 1949. That founding charter made a bold promise for a poor, deeply stratified country emerging from colonial rule. Every adult citizen, regardless of property, caste, gender, or creed, would stand equal at the ballot box. Today, that core principle of political democracy, which B.R. Ambedkar placed at the heart of the Republic, is being systematically erased in practice.

B.R. Ambedkar's warning

In the Constituent Assembly on November 25, 1949, a day before adoption, Ambedkar warned of the peril ahead. "On the 26th of January 1950, we are going to enter into a life of contradictions," he declared. "In politics we will have equality and in social and economic life we will have inequality. In politics we will be recognising the principle of one man one vote and one vote one value. In our social and economic life, we shall, by reason of our social and economic structure, continue to deny the principle of one man one value." Those suffering from inequality, he added, would blow up the structure of political democracy so laboriously built by the Assembly, if we fail to eradicate this grave injustice.

Ambedkar was addressing two distinct questions – who holds the vote and what that vote is worth. When he urged reliance on constitutional methods, he attached a vital condition – that constitutional methods must remain genuinely open. Friedrich Engels had noted that universal suffrage serves as the gauge of the maturity of the working class. By tampering with the voter roll itself, the state undercuts the very terrain on which working masses organise in an electoral democracy.

Over the past year, the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls has become an engine of mass exclusion. After Bihar, phase two began on November 4, 2025, across 12 States and Union Territories covering about 51 crore electors, while in phase three in 17 States and Union Territories, roughly 6.15 crore names, or 17%, were chopped from draft rolls. Bihar's electorate fell from 7.89 crore to about 7.42 crore, and West Bengal saw around 90.8 lakh deletions, roughly 11.9% of its voters, prior to tribunal appeals. Meanwhile, reports of internal dissent within the Election Commission of India (ECI) revealed that the Election Commissioners, Vivek Joshi and Sukhbir Singh Sandhu, raised 14 objections in 10 months to decisions issued without their consent. Amidst surging street protests, 240 Opposition Members of Parliament marched to the ECI on October 6, demanding an immediate halt to SIR, resignation of the Chief Election Commissioner of India. On November 1, thousands of people rallied at the Ramlila Maidan to reiterate these demands.

The erosion of voting rights is undermining the democratic foundations of India

The dark shadow of conditional citizenship

The SIR was an unprecedented revision (rather removal) with an inversion of the burden of proof. The logic of the National Register of Citizens was brought into action when enrolled voters were forced to prove their citizenship, overturning the rule that people on the roll are presumed citizens. While the Supreme Court of India upheld the revision, its direction that names deleted over doubtful citizenship be forwarded to the Union government built a pipeline from voter rolls to citizenship screening.



Paired with the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, which creates a religious filter, Union Home Minister Amit Shah's remark in April 2019, "*Aap chronology samajhiye* (First, understand the chronology of events") clarifies the sequence. In the short term, the aim is electoral. In the long term, it advances the Hindutva project of graded citizenship, echoing Ambedkar's graded inequality. Even the official "infiltrator" claim fails its own numbers, as reports from Bihar citing sources in the Chief Electoral Officer's office found nearly 99% of the 68.6 lakh deletions were attributed to death, migration, or duplication.

History is evident to what conditional citizenship can lead to. Under the 1935 Reich Citizenship Law in Nazi Germany, the state split residents into Reich citizens with political rights and mere state subjects without them, turning rights from a birthright into a status conferred by power. What followed was witnessed by the world.

Disenfranchisement has also built a second wall that is blocking survival. After the Bharatiya Janata Party formed governments in Bihar, the Bihar Chief Minister declared deleted voters ineligible for rations and welfare schemes, removing roughly five lakh people from ration lists. The West Bengal government adopted a similar stance. Although the Court held that deletion does not automatically end citizenship and expressed concern over denied Public Distribution System rations, Annapurna benefits, and caste certificates amid over 37 lakh pending appeals, exclusion continues. These actions in effect turn the voter roll into a ledger of who deserves to eat.

Documents are a form of property, scarce among migrant workers, women who moved at marriage, Dalits, Adivasis, and informal labourers. A public-interest analysis in West Bengal found that women accounted for 61.8% of voters deleted or placed under adjudication, with a disproportionate impact in Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe and Matua areas, while Karnataka saw two women deleted for every man. In Bengal, 63% of those deleted were Hindu and 34% Muslim, though 65% of those under adjudication were Muslim.

The dangers ahead

Seventy-seven years on, Ambedkar's warning against reducing Indians to "beasts of burden..." and building political democracy without social and economic democracy goes unheeded. The World Inequality Report 2026 shows that the top 10% receive 57.7% of India's income, while the bottom half receives 15%; the top 1% holds 40.1% of the country's wealth. Separate research on caste and wealth concentration has also highlighted the overwhelming representation of upper castes among India's wealthiest groups. Ambedkar's November 1949 speech left three more warnings for today. A good Constitution turns bad in bad hands, since its working depends on people and parties. Bhakti and hero-worship in politics are "a sure road to degradation and to eventual dictatorship." And placing creed above country jeopardises India's independence a second time.

We demand an immediate halt to the revision, presumed citizenship for enrolled voters, delinking welfare from voter rolls, transparent Commission dissents, and independent appointment of Commissioners. The fight for the vote and livelihood is one, and Ambedkar's question still haunts us. How long will we live this life of contradictions?

GS 1/GS 2: INDIAN SOCIETY & POLITY

THE HINDU PAGE: 10

How should the Census count caste?

The 2027 Census will enumerate caste through an open-entry question, risking a repeat of the 2011 Socio-Economic and Caste Census, which returned about 46.7 lakh caste names; recording the administrative category alongside the caste name would give India reliable caste-wise information on education, occupation and assets

EXPLAINER

Anand Mehra
Vignesh Karthik K.R.

The 2027 Census will ask every household in India about caste for the first time since 1931, through an open-entry question with no pre-coded list for communities outside the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe categories. The choice risks repeating the failure of 2011 and reviving an argument over categories that B.R. Ambedkar addressed in 1932.

The population enumeration begins across most of the country in February 2027. Question 10 of the schedule reads "SC/ST/Caste". SCs and STs are recorded against notified lists, as in every Census exercise since 1951. Everyone else names a caste, and the enumerator enters it as spoken. There is no drop-down menu and no State-wise schedule. Officials say that a code directory and validation checks will reconcile spellings, sub-castes and regional names once the count is done. On October 28, 2026, the Supreme Court declined to hear a plea for an OBC drop-down menu, calling it a matter of policy.

Earlier data collection methods

India has tried open entry before. The Socio-Economic and Caste Census of 2011 returned about 46.7 lakh distinct caste names, against the 4,147 castes recorded in 1931. Yadav, Yadava, and Yaduvanshi became separate entries; so did Verma and Varma, and so did a jati name and a surname, both offered by members of the same community. The caste tables were never released. A better code directory may manage what the 2011 exercise could not. Even so, it will be sorting the data after the count.

Three States have used the other method. Bihar, Karnataka and Telangana conducted surveys using pre-coded caste lists and found backward classes at 63%, about 70% and 56.33% of their populations, respectively. The Congress, which oversaw the 2011 exercise, now cites them to ask why the Centre cannot do the same.



A Census enumerator during a door-to-door survey in Delhi. FILE PHOTO

The Centre's rationale

The government's reason is that the central and State OBC lists, covering nearly 3,000 communities between them, are, in the official phrase, "a list of classes and not a list of castes". They include entries such as "local borns" in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and tea garden workers in Assam. Loaded onto an enumerator's tablet as a caste menu, they would not work.

The distinction goes back to the Constituent Assembly. On August 23, 1949, M. Ananthasayanam Ayyangar explained that "the term 'backward classes' has been introduced instead of the word 'community'", arguing that backwardness did not depend on caste or community membership alone. Asked to define backward classes, Ambedkar preferred to leave their identification to a commission that would examine prevailing social conditions. By 1980, the Mandal Commission had identified 3,743 castes and communities as backward classes. The same caste can appear on one State's list and not on another's, or on a State list but not the Central one. Thus, a caste name alone cannot tell the Census which category a respondent falls in.

The Ambedkar precedent

Ambedkar met a version of this argument, and his essay *From Millions to Fractions* records how it was made. The 1911 Census identified untouchables through ten tests, among them the denial of Brahmin supremacy, exclusion from ordinary temples and pollution by touch. Ambedkar put their population at about five crore, and the Censuses of 1921 and 1931 returned similar figures. For twenty years, he notes, no Hindu challenged them.

In 1932, the Indian Franchise Committee, chaired by Lord Lothian, began working out how seats would be distributed, and separate representation for untouchables was under consideration. The numbers then began to shrink. The United Provinces committee counted only Bhangis, Doms and Dhanuks, some 5.8 lakh people. Bengal's committee named a single caste. Ambedkar explained why: "The less the population of the Untouchables the greater the share of the political representation" left for touchable Hindus.

The numbers were reduced without falsifying the returns, through an argument over categories. The Census, it was said, had counted "Depressed Classes", which was not the same thing as untouchables, and untouchability should be judged by one test applied uniformly across India. Ambedkar rejected both claims. The two terms had been used as synonyms, and a uniform test would leave out communities whose exclusion took a local form, such as those who could not be seen, could not approach, or could not touch water or food. The practice varied by region, so the test had to vary as well.

The government is right that the OBC lists are lists of classes. In 1932, a point of definition of this kind decided the count, and Ambedkar's reply, then and again in 1949, was to work region by region. Both the Central and State lists are already organised State by State, and the 2027 schedule can use them in that form. SCs and STs are recorded against notified lists. OBCs can be recorded against theirs, with the enumerator entering the administrative category next to the caste name as spoken. The caste name retains the detail needed for sub-categorisation, while the category fixes, at the time of the count, which list each respondent falls under.

The larger stakes

The objection from the Hindutva side is that counting will harden caste and weaken a consolidated Hindu society. Caste already shapes who owns land, who graduates and enters top offices, whether or not the Census records it. If the aim is *samajik samrasta* and a Viksit Bharat by 2047, the state needs to know where the gaps lie. The policy questions that depend on this data are already on the table: the creamy layer, the sub-categorisation of OBCs examined by the Rohini Commission, and the sub-classification of SCs that the Supreme Court permitted in *State of Punjab v. Davinder Singh* (2024). Each needs caste-wise information on education, occupation and assets, tied to the administrative category each community falls under. Only a national Census that records both can supply it.

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THE GIST

- The 2027 Census will use an open-entry caste question, without a pre-coded list for communities other than SCs and STs. Officials say a code directory and validation checks will reconcile spelling variations, sub-castes and regional names post enumeration
- The Central and State OBC lists are already organised State-wise and can be used for the Census. Enumerators can record OBCs against their notified lists by entering the administrative category alongside the caste name as reported by respondents

GS 1/GS 2: SOCIAL JUSTICE & ECONOMY

THE HINDU PAGE: 10

The economic impact of inequitable toilet access

Inclusive public infrastructure is crucial for the socio-economic participation of all genders and social groups

Md Zakaria Siddiqui
Sabir Ahamed

Access to adequate quality toilets for people of all genders and social groups is critical to their productive participation in the social and economic arena. Despite being part of the fundamental rights through Article 21 of the Constitution, public toilets in metropolitan cities remain inadequate in both quality and quantity. The impact of the Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM), launched in 2014 to eliminate open defecation and improve sanitation across India, also merits evaluation.

One can only imagine the situation in the remaining cities and towns. As with other public infrastructure, such as schools and public hospitals, access to quality public toilets is also influenced by the socio-economic status of neighbourhoods.

Safety and privacy concerns

A recent survey-based study of public toilets for women and queer people in Kolkata, jointly conducted by the Sabar Institute and Azad Foundation, reveals that eating up about 10% of the earnings of people who make their livelihood through street vending. Most respondents complained about poor quality of public toilets, citing a lack of cleanliness and lighting, broken bolts on toilet doors that violated privacy, including incidents of sexual harassment by male guards or locals.

In the Western world, a household or individual is considered poor in a particular dimension when a significant portion of their income goes towards accessing a basic service. For instance, in the United Kingdom, households spending 10% or more of their income on energy (gas and electricity) are considered energy-poor. In that vein, most women working as street vendors or driving on the roads of Kolkata are toilet-poor. Without such basic social services, tapping into the demographic dividend to achieve the goal of Viksit Bharat would be impossible.

India faces a huge challenge in mobilising women's economic and social participation, which remains low by global standards. For instance, female labour force participation (FLFP) in sub-Saharan Africa is above 60%, compared with 23-25% in urban India in most years. However, the 2023-24 survey recorded a sudden jump in FLFP, mainly due to increased participation of rural women, which may have been distress-driven.

Women face several barriers to economic participation, including social and cultural norms that put the responsibility for household chores like cooking, cleaning and caregiving responsibilities, exclusively on them. Consequently, many women are left with little time to participate in the labour market. Those who do, despite these barriers, often face penalties in the form of inadequate gender-friendly public infrastructure, including unsafe and insufficient toilets, unsafe commuting conditions, unfriendly workplaces and lower wages than men doing similar jobs. These barriers, combined with social and cultural norms, create a socio-psychological complexity for women considering joining the workforce.

Capitalising on the female workforce

Given that the earnings of casual/self-employed workers are already at subsistence levels and have remained stagnant over the past decade, such penalties can strongly discourage women from participating in the labour market. The study also finds that public toilets are relatively inadequate in both quality and quantity in poor neighbourhoods within the Kolkata Municipal Corporation area. This spatial disparity suggests that poor women face greater infrastructure-related penalties than others.

India will have to capitalise on underutilised resources such as women's labour to make Viksit Bharat a reality. This depends critically on building inclusive public infrastructure. Social policies play a key role in bridging the gender-friendly infrastructure deficit and promoting women's labour force participation. However, policymakers rarely view social policies as instruments for leveraging economic outcomes. The reality is quite the opposite.

Historical evidence suggests that most developed countries were able to increase women's labour force participation, and thereby expand their economies, only after they significantly increased fiscal resources spent on social policies. For instance, subsidised childcare and elderly care free facilities up women's time to participate in the labour market. High-income OECD countries spent about 22% of their GDP on social policies in 2021.

Such spending makes fiscal sense: as more women enter the labour market, the economy grows, while their increased consumption sets in motion a virtuous cycle of growth. Higher incomes and spending also boost government tax revenues, making social spending self-sustaining.

It is high time we reframed our approach to spending on gender-sensitive social policies and ensuring dignity for people of all genders and social groups.

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GS 2: HEALTH & SOCIAL SECTOR
INDIAN EXPRESS PAGE: 10

Despite gains, India's anaemia challenge

THE FINDINGS of the ICMR-National Institute of Nutrition's SAMPADA survey are significant for several reasons: The NFHS-6 data released earlier in the year did not include anaemia estimates. The government conducted a separate survey afterwards covering over two lakh people, using a gold-standard clinical method rather than the traditional field-prick tests. The results show both positive and worrying trends. Despite a lower overall incidence of anaemia in comparison to previous surveys across all age groups, 55.9 per cent of non-pregnant and non-lactating women aged 15 to 49 years suffer from anaemia. Anaemia also affects 46.3 per cent of adolescent girls (10-19 years), 43.6 per cent of pregnant women and 58.1 per cent of lactating mothers.

A medical condition in which the body lacks enough healthy red blood cells or hemoglobin to carry sufficient oxygen to tissues and organs, anaemia can affect strength, concentration, productivity and the overall quality of life. For women, the risks become greater during pregnancy and childbirth. India already carries a double burden of childhood obesity and malnutrition; anaemia among adolescents can further undermine growth and development. Even though severe cases sit below 2 per cent across most age groups, what makes the findings significant is that iron deficiency drives only about half of anaemia in vulnerable groups. This indicates a more complex health challenge involving deficiencies of several essential nutrients, alongside infections, inflammations or blood disorders, including thalassaemia, sickle cell disease, as well as chronic kidney disorders.

Nutritional imbalance is not just a matter of availability of food but also of dietary diversity, awareness and healthcare access. Across both low-income households and urban, affluent homes, diets often lean towards ultra-processed food rich in fat, sugar, and salt. Efforts must focus on moving beyond a one-size-fits-all approach towards strengthening screening, nutritional counselling and dietary diversification. The survey also exposes deep regional inequalities, with Andaman and Nicobar Islands recording an alarming 81.2 per cent anaemia prevalence among women of reproductive age, Ladakh at 77.1 per cent and West Bengal at 72.4 per cent. India has made considerable progress through initiatives such as Anaemia Mukt Bharat, Poshan 2.0, and other programmes targeting maternal and child health. The latest findings must serve as a catalyst for a more responsive nutritional strategy, one that builds on existing gains and addresses persistent gaps.

GS 3: INDIAN ECONOMY & TECH

INDIAN EXPRESS PAGE: 10

Mind the data centre trap — big investments, little domestic value



SAJJID Z CHINOY



SIDDHARTH JAMAD

DATA CENTRES are all the rage at the moment. Their proliferation in the US has invoked a backlash in many local communities, with 40 of the 41 proposals opposing data centre buildout upheld in the recent midterms. With the Democrats taking control of 30 governorships and 24 state legislatures, expect growing restrictions at the state and local level against data centre buildout, which could induce the latter to migrate from "blue" to "red" states and even consider relocating overseas. President Donald Trump has threatened a large tax for those that do, but that's easier said than done and could easily change if the presidency turns blue in two years.

Data centres may therefore be looking for new hosts to export "compute" (the raw computational power needed to train and run AI models). Argentina has already put its hand up, seeking to make Patagonia a data centre hub underpinned by tax breaks and regulatory forbearance. More countries are likely to follow suit.

India should not fall into the data centre trap. The pressures on land, power and water are well documented. What's less appreciated is how capital- and import-intensive data centres are and how little "exporting compute" does for domestic value-add and the balance of payments.

As Stijn Van Nieuwerburgh of Columbia Business School notes, a 200 MW AI data centre costs about $8 billion. It creates temporary construction jobs but, in the steady state, employs only 50-100 people. What is the opportunity cost of that capital for job creation? In the US, Paul Krugman observes that a typical US worker is equipped with $700,000 of fixed assets, such that an equivalent $8 billion investment outside the AI sector would create about 10,000 permanent US jobs. Data centres are therefore 100 times more capital-intensive than the non-AI sector in the US.

The multiple is much higher in developing economies, where the capital stock per worker is lower. In Malaysia — Asia's hottest data centre hub — a similar $8 billion investment is associated with 150,000 jobs outside the AI sector. In India, the capital stock per worker is about $20,000 on average. An $8 billion investment in the economy is typically associated with 400,000 jobs instead of the 100 permanent jobs that a data centre would create post-construction. AI data centres would therefore be 4,000 times more capital-intensive than the rest of India's economy. Do we want FDI and domestic savings to be directed to such a capital-intensive sector when the need of the hour is to create jobs? Over the last 25 years, growth has been much too capital-intensive in India, with capital's contribution to annual growth (at 4 percentage points) more than double that of labour (1.7 percentage points) despite India's demographic dividend. We need to reverse these ratios if we are to fulfil the imperative of creating good quality jobs. Proliferation of AI data centres will do the opposite.

But won't data centres boost the balance of payments by attracting FDI and exporting compute? This argument overlooks both their import intensity and ownership structure. Imported high-end chips and servers — sourced from the US, Taiwan, Korea, Malaysia and Singapore — account for more than 70 per cent of a typical AI data centre's capital expenditure, and their rapid depreciation raises the import share of recurring investment to 90 per cent. FDI inflows are therefore largely directed to finance the tech imports that go into data centres. Furthermore, data centre profits are prone to repatriation, given substantial foreign ownership. Any meaningful improvement to the balance of payments is illusory.

> There is certainly no case for India to be setting up data centres where the compute is exported to hyperscalers abroad. The case for government intervention is even weaker

Malaysia's experience is instructive: Despite benefiting simultaneously from the AI-tech manufacturing boom and a torrent of data centre FDI, the Southeast Asian economy's balance of payments has improved little, because of the surge of tech imports and profit repatriation.

So if data centre equipment is imported, very few jobs are created, and profits are repatriated, what value accrues domestically? Recall, "compute" — like other services — can both be exported or imported. The theory of comparative advantage would argue for India to import capital-intensive compute in exchange for labour-intensive exports.

The immediate pushback will be that there are strategic reasons for that compute to physically reside within data centres in India. This is certainly understandable if that compute is being used to develop and train India's sovereign AI models. But even in that case, that compute largely consists of imported AI chips that can be shut off on a dime, as the rest of Asia found out last week when the US announced restrictions on the import of high-end chips by non-US-headquartered companies in Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Indonesia and Brazil.

There is certainly no case for India to be setting up data centres where the compute is exported to hyperscalers abroad, as seems embedded in the raft of recent announcements. The case for government intervention is even weaker. A slew of Indian states have offered subsidised land and power and tax exemptions to attract AI data centres. What is the market failure or positive externality that warrants government intervention, especially if the compute will be exported? Why divert scarce fiscal and natural resources towards such capital-intensive investments? Shouldn't scarce fiscal resources be directed towards education, skilling and health to make our labour force more ready for an AI world?

A final justification is that as India's AI usage increases, servicing that token demand through domestic data centres will save on foreign exchange by reducing the import bill. First, the market for compute is global, and even if local token demand is satisfied locally, domestic data centres will be substantially foreign-owned such that profits will likely be repatriated. The pressures on the BoP will be much the same, just manifested in a different line item.

Stepping back, India needs to ascertain its strategic role in the AI stack. Should India be investing heavily in indigenous frontier models and creating the necessary domestic ecosystem? Should India try to become a market leader at the application layer instead? These are crucial questions that need to be debated. But none of this will necessarily be enabled by becoming a large data centre hub that exports capital-intensive AI compute to the rest of the world.

AI promises to be game-changing but will also generate a lot of FOMO. It's therefore important not to get seduced by all things AI. Instead, given the urgent imperative to create millions of jobs amidst constrained natural and fiscal resources, India will need to be clear-eyed and hard-nosed about the role it should play in the development and diffusion of this transformational technology.

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GS 2: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
INDIAN EXPRESS PAGE: 11

West Asia needs coherent diplomacy, not more episodic pauses



THAROORTHINK

BY SHASHI THAROOR

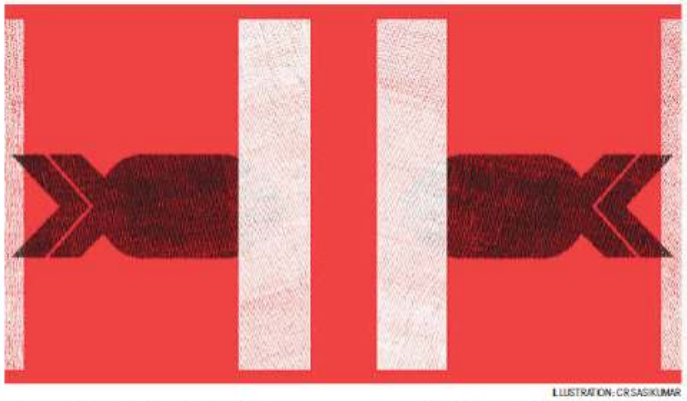

ILLUSTRATION: CR SASIKUMAR

THE WARS in West Asia that have dominated our newspaper headlines this year all seem to have entered a "no-war-no-peace" stalemate. The Iran conflict is a case in point. Despite recent US strikes on Qeshm Island, Iranian drones striking targets in Kuwait and Bahrain, and two tankers burning after striking mines in the Strait of Hormuz, indications are that President Donald Trump will hold off on resuming full-scale war, even as Israeli officials lobby hard for renewed military action. Some ships seem to be getting through the Strait of Hormuz, some oil is flowing, crude prices are not soaring through the roof, and a recent visit to the Gulf confirms that people have learned to live with a certain level of tension and uncertainty in their lives. The baseline for what "business as usual" means has been redrawn, but life still goes on without a sense of pervasive crisis.

In other words, the direct conflict between the US, Israel, and Iran has entered a heavily militarised limbo. While Washington manages its standoff with Tehran, the prospects for resolving the wars in Gaza and Lebanon depend heavily on political developments inside Israel. Following an inconclusive election that cost Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's right-wing bloc its Knesset majority, Israeli President Isaac Herzog tapped opposition leader and former military chief Gadi Eisenkot to form a new government. This is a protracted process, but should Eisenkot succeed in assembling a centrist coalition (likely involving external backing from Arab parties), the diplomatic landscape could shift dramatically.

In Palestine, we can only hope that a new Israeli government would reopen the humanitarian space in Gaza currently strangled by the occupation, and that the "settler terrorism" blighting the West Bank will stop. In Lebanon, where Beirut has indicated willingness to curb Hezbollah's military dominance in exchange for Israeli withdrawal and international reconstruction aid, a pragmatic Israeli cabinet could seize the opening to formalise a border demarcation and security arrangement. Still, even a moderate Israeli government would refuse to compromise on core security demands regarding Hezbollah's disarmament and Hamas's exclusion from power.

Meanwhile, the seemingly endless Yemen civil war erupts sporadically, with Houthi missiles striking Aramco headquarters in Saudi Arabia and allegedly being intercepted before landing in Mecca and Medina. Reports claim the Houthis are bargaining with the Saudis to hold off on their attacks in exchange for a substantial payment, an option that may well be worth considering given the damage the Houthis have done to Saudi interests and the security of the region. The US appears to have resisted Saudi requests to intervene, though the "Mecca Pact" could yet permit the entry of external forces (Pakistan and Turkey) into the conflict if Saudi territory is directly threatened.

Rather than operating in isolation, these conflicts form a web of proxy warfare, shared supply chains, and common geopolitical interests. At the centre sits a deepening partnership between Moscow and Tehran. After relying heavily on Iranian drones and ballistic missiles to sustain its invasion of Ukraine, Russia has reciprocated during the US-Israeli campaign against Iran by supplying Tehran with air-defence systems, upgraded drone technology, Caspian Sea sanctions-evasion routes, and satellite-targeting intelligence, which has also been shared with Houthi militants. Iran, in turn, acts as the regional hub connecting the Middle Eastern fronts, funnelling weapons, funding, and strategic direction to Hezbollah in Lebanon, Hamas in Gaza, and the Houthis in Yemen. This "Axis of Resistance" coordinates multi-front pressure designed to encircle and exhaust Israel, as well as to disrupt global maritime traffic in the Red Sea and Strait of Hormuz. For Russian President Vladimir Putin, this continuing Middle Eastern instability is a strategic windfall: It drives up global oil prices to fund Russia's war machine while stretching American and European military stockpiles, air-defence interceptors, and diplomatic bandwidth thin across two major theatres.

> Any successful mediation requires a mutually-hurting stalemate — a moment when all parties recognise that unilateral escalation cannot succeed and that the cost of continuing to fight exceeds the pain of compromise

Overlaying all the arenas is a distinctly personal geopolitical driver: Donald Trump's well-documented desire to win the Nobel Peace Prize. Having framed himself as the ultimate dealmaker capable of ending "endless wars," Trump might view these overlapping crises — particularly a grand bargain linking Middle East normalisation with a cessation of hostilities in Ukraine — as his final, historic opportunity to secure the global accolade.

Are any of these conflicts actually "ripe" for a durable settlement, or are the belligerents merely playing for time? Any successful mediation requires a mutually-hurting stalemate — a moment when all parties recognise that unilateral escalation cannot succeed and that the cost of continuing to fight exceeds the pain of compromise. By that measure, none of these conflicts is truly "ripe" for a comprehensive peace settlement. Gaza and Lebanon offer the closest approximation of diplomatic ripeness, particularly if an Israeli political realignment displaces the most belligerent domestic players. Yet even there, deep-seated trauma, fragile Lebanese state institutions, and the unresolved question of Palestinian statehood make a lasting peace elusive.

A more fundamental word of caution is due. The notion that "no-war-no-peace" can last indefinitely is questionable. Trump has asserted that the US does not even need a formal deal with Iran, boasting that Washington holds hundreds of billions of dollars in frozen Iranian assets and controls the Strait of Hormuz, while the Pentagon maintains a two-carrier deployment in the region. Declaring victory while maintaining a suffocating economic and naval stranglehold seems to be the preferred American option. But Tehran's leadership rejects the premise that it has been defeated and refuses to capitulate under duress. Without a structured diplomatic track to address Iran's nuclear and ballistic missile capabilities, this "status quo" containment risks miscalculation, covert escalation, or a sudden flare-up triggered by proxy attacks.

One thing I learned from my long service at the United Nations is that while temporary truces or short-term transactional arrangements remain achievable, and could momentarily forestall war, forging durable peace requires sustained, coherent diplomacy rather than episodic pauses. If the "usual suspects" cannot make headway, is there room for a new actor to try? Might New Delhi, which enjoys good relations with all the belligerents, raise its hand?

The writer is a fourth-term Member of Parliament (Lok Sabha) for Thiruvananthapuram and Chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs

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Two pulses, a production shortfall and a paradox

SHWETA SAINI AND VANSH OBEROI

AFTER 15 consecutive months of deflation, India's wholesale pulses inflation turned positive in May 2026, reaching 12.7 per cent by October. Mandi prices show greater pressure. By November 17, *gram* (*chana*) was trading at Rs 73/kg, nearly 32 per cent above last year, and *tur* (*arhar*) at Rs 97/kg, up 51 per cent (Agmarknet). A low base, with both crops below MSP last year, explains part of this. Consumers are paying about Rs 96/kg for *gram dal* and Rs 137/kg for *tur dal* (Department of Consumer Affairs). This is an early test for the 2025-launched Mission for Aatmanirbharta in Pulses, which aims to raise production from 27.4 MMT to 35 MMT by 2030-31, an ambitious target when pulses area has been falling since 2021-22. But *tur* and *gram* prices are rising for different reasons, and need different responses.

Tur faces the prospect of a production shortfall. Although acreage rose 3.2 per cent this kharif, drought has hit Maharashtra and Karnataka, which produce nearly 54 per cent of the crop. In Karnataka, drought affected about two-thirds of its *tur* area (Crop Weather Watch Group). Early market assessments put 2026-27 production at 2.5-2.8 MMT, against 3.59 MMT last year. Expecting a smaller crop, stockholders are holding back sales. Imports, equal to 40 per cent of domestic production last year, offer some relief, but exporters in Myanmar and Africa are delaying shipments in anticipation of higher Indian demand.

> Estimates place 2025-26 gram production well above estimated annual consumption. Yet prices are rising

Gram presents a paradox. Official estimates place 2025-26 production at 12.51 MMT, well above estimated annual consumption of 9.5-10 MMT. Government agencies hold sizeable inventories. Yet prices are rising, raising questions about production estimates, actual stock availability and expectations of the next harvest. Either the crop was smaller than estimated, stocks are being held back, or demand is shifting from costlier *tur*. The government doesn't yet know which. Markets are worried about tomorrow's supplies. *Gram* sowing reached only 31.1 L Ha by November 13, nearly 22 per cent below last year. Delayed sowing, uneven soil moisture and the risk of above-normal temperatures (IRI) later in rabi add uncertainty. Imports offer less cushion: ABARES expects Australia's chickpea crop to halve.

For *tur*, the priority is securing supplies. Government stocks, provisionally 0.7 MMT, must be verified and released judiciously. Extending the duty-free import window beyond March 2027 would assure exporters that Indian demand will be met. District-level crop assessments in Maharashtra and Karnataka should establish losses before the harvest arrives. For *gram*, the first task is to establish how much is actually available. Verified NAFED and NCCF inventories, disclosure of private stocks and a predictable release plan could calm expectations. The 30 per cent duty on yellow peas should stay until the next *gram* crop is secured; cheaper imports now could undermine sowing.

Stock management must also differ. *Tur*'s new crop arrives within weeks; stock limits now would cap how much traders can buy and store at harvest, leaving less for the lean months. *Gram*'s harvest is four months away; markets must bridge that gap with existing stocks. Targeted stock limits may be justified if there is evidence of withholding, but government releases must be paced so enough remains for February and March.

Beyond immediate measures, the Mission must fix crop economics. With prices well above MSP, government stockbuilding is unlikely this year. *Tur* occupies land for eight-nine months, in which farmers could grow two shorter crops. Shorter-duration, climate-resilient *tur* varieties are essential, as is *gram* that resists pod borers and heat. Finally, government must move from reacting to prices to anticipating shortages. Data on acreage, weather, crop conditions, stocks, prices and trade are rarely brought together in time. A pulses monitoring cell, pooling these every fortnight, would let decisions be made before prices force them.

The writers are with Arcus Policy Research

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• AGRICULTURE

Whose Hapus is it? Inside GI tag battle between Konkan and Valsad growers

Vallabh Ozarkar
Mumbai, November 25

A DISPUTE over the name Hapus has pitted mango growers in Maharashtra's Konkan region against those from Gujarat's Valsad. While Konkan's Alphonso mangoes received a Geographical Indication (GI) tag in 2018, an application seeking recognition for Valsad Hapus has been opposed by Konkan growers. They fear that letting another region use the name Hapus could weaken the identity and market value they have built over years. The Geographical Indications Registry had suggested that the two sides explore a settlement, but Konkan's GI tag holders have rejected a compromise. The final hearing has now concluded, with the decision reserved.

What does the existing GI tag cover?

Alphonso, popularly known as Hapus, is among the best-known mango varieties grown in the Konkan region. In October 2018, after a nearly decade-long effort by growers and the Dr Balasaheb Sawant Konkan Krishi Vidyapeeth, Alphonso mangoes from Ratnagiri, Sindhudurg, Raigad, Thane and Palghar received a GI tag.

A GI tag identifies a product with a particular geographical origin and recognises that its qualities or reputation are linked to that place. It protects the name from being used for products from elsewhere and allows registered growers from the recognised region to market their produce under that identity.

CRORES AT STAKE

- Konkan Hapus earns around Rs 200 cr in the domestic market and Rs 80 cr in exports.
- Growers fear that a second GI using the same name could weaken the premium associated with their produce.

What is Gujarat's argument?

The application for Valsad Hapus was filed on February 13, 2023, by Bharatiya Kisan Sangh, Gandhinagar, and Navsari Agricultural University. They argue that Valsad and the surrounding region have their own tradition of growing Alphonso mangoes, that the produce has distinctive qualities, and that it should be allowed to use the name Hapus.

In March 2025, the BJP MP from Valsad, Dhaval Patel, wrote to Union Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal seeking support for the application under the Centre's One District One Product initiative. He described Valsadi Hapus/Hafus as having "exceptional taste, fragrance, shape, and colour". He pointed to the difference in harvest periods: the Ratnagiri Alphonso season generally ends by the third week of May, when the peak season for Valsadi Hafus/Hapus begins.

Why are Konkan growers opposing the plea?

Growers say Valsad can seek recognition for its mangoes, but under a different name. They fear that allowing the same name for produce from two regions will confuse consumers and dilute the reputation of Konkan Alphonso.

The stakes are economic as well as cultural. According to estimates, Konkan Hapus earns around Rs 200 crore in the domestic market and Rs 80 crore in exports. Growers fear that a second GI using the same name could weaken the premium associated with their produce.

What have political leaders said?

Maharashtra Industries Minister Uday Samant has said that nobody can replace Konkan Hapus, while Cabinet Minister Nitesh Rane has expressed support for the growers and offered help. Farmers, however, say political assurances must be backed by action before the GI Registry.

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• CLIMATE CHANGE

The COP compromise meets its end



Activists hold up banners reading 'shame' and 'failure' at the COP 31 Climate Summit in Turkey's Antalya. AP

Antalya has exposed the limits of what countries are willing to act on collectively. Future climate meetings may need to temper their expectations



AMITABH SINHA

AT THE annual climate meetings, whenever faced with a choice between no deal and a weak deal, countries have always opted for the second option. It kept the process moving forward, even though the progress was slow. At the just concluded COP30 meeting in Antalya, Turkey, this changed.

The European Union (EU) and several other countries chose not to agree to a deal that did not fully address their demand.

This marked a significant departure from the way countries have conducted climate negotiations so far. It is also a reflection of the substantially changed realities of the last few years and a shift in the power dynamics inside the climate negotiations. It seems to put a limit on what these conferences can be expected to deliver in future.

Disagreements are not new at climate conferences. They are the norm. At almost every COP, countries have come to the brink of a breakdown, but then retreated and settled for a compromise. The most serious of these in recent years happened at COP29 in Baku in 2024, when the final outcome on climate finance had angered many developing countries. The conference was marred by repeated walkouts and stalemates, but eventually the finance agreement was allowed to be adopted by consensus.

A similar situation played out last year at COP30 in Brazil as well. The EU, backed by 80 other countries, wanted the inclusion of a fossil fuel phase-out roadmap in the final agreement but had to back down amid resistance from oil producers like Saudi Arabia.

The EU tried again this year, gaining the support of as many as 130 countries, but was still unable to push its proposal through. This time, however, it decided to go for broke, and reject the agreement, which is required to be adopted only by consensus.

The incident demonstrates the stark differences in the attitudes of developed and developing country blocs towards multilateral engagements. For years, developing countries have seen their core demands ignored or watered down, and each time, they have reluctantly conceded ground. It is not that developed countries have got everything they wanted. They have had to make compromises, too, though relatively minor ones. The one time the EU faced the ignominy of its principal demand getting sidelined by a powerful group of large developing countries for the second successive year, it decided to burn the house down.

Leadership vacuum

The outcome in Antalya has to be seen in view of the institutional and geopolitical changes that have happened in the last few years. There is a clear leadership vacuum at the COPs following the exit of the US from this process. The developed country bloc, led by the US, used to set the agenda, drive the negotiations and, to a very large extent, determine its outcomes. This used to be possible mainly due to the leverage that the US had with nearly every important player in the negotiations in multiple domains — economic, diplomatic, political.

In the case of COP31, though, it is doubtful that the US administration under President Donald Trump would have played any useful role, particularly on the issue of fossil fuel phaseout. Even before Trump, the US, which continues to heavily depend on fossil fuels, has never been vocal on this issue.

But, in general, it is true that the US could have handled a crisis like the one in Antalya much more effectively, or never allowed such a situation to develop.

At almost every COP, countries have come to the brink of a breakdown, but then retreated and settled for a compromise. This changed at COP31.

In the absence of the US, the EU has become the face of the developed country bloc but is finding itself unable to guide the direction of these negotiations on its own. It doesn't have the same leverage over countries as the US, and there is little that it can offer to strike bargains. The fact that it had to choose the "no-deal" option over a less favourable deal severely exposed the limits of its negotiating heft.

Chinese reluctance

This inability of the developed country bloc to influence, and determine, the outcome of climate meetings the way it was previously able to do probably makes the process more democratic but also more chaotic and less predictable. Large developing countries like China and India have become increasingly assertive, but cannot fill the void created by the exit of the US. In the case of China at least, it has decided not to.

It was widely believed that China would take a leadership role at the climate talks. But so far it has shown no inclination to take up the job. China has been the biggest beneficiary of the present climate regime, continuing to be classified as a developing country despite being the world's largest emitter of greenhouse gases for over two decades now. Its meteoric rise as an economic powerhouse could not have been possible without the freedom from any major climate obligations. China would want to continue to keep it that way. A leadership role might come with the expectation to take greater responsibilities, make financial contributions and champion the causes of others.

Low appetite for compromise

For different reasons, this is true for many other countries as well. There is very little appetite now to stretch their positions to accommodate the concerns of others. Both the incentives as well as the deterrents that pushed the countries towards compromise solutions have been weakening.

The climate negotiations have already delivered an international treaty (Paris Agreement) and a rulebook. During the creation of these, countries routinely struck deals and made compromises on crucial issues in exchange for some gains elsewhere. This institutional incentive structure has severely weakened now, and countries have little to trade-off with each other. Developing countries, for example, wanted a commitment at Antalya that at least $120 billion from the existing flows of climate finance would be directed to adaptation projects. But even this was too much for the developed countries to agree to.

The risk of reputational damage and other repercussions, which can deter countries from holding up an agreement, has also evaporated. Following the US withdrawal from the Paris Agreement and UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, The EU and other countries that rejected the pact at Antalya are not being painted as villains.

Limits on ambition

The Antalya outcome has thrown a new challenge to global climate action. As it becomes more and more difficult to achieve the Paris Agreement's temperature targets — the 1.5 degrees Celsius target both nearly out of reach — science, NGOs and some developed countries want the world to do more to reduce emissions.

Developing countries, on whom part of this additional burden would inevitably fall, blame the situation on the inaction of developed countries, and seek financial resources due to them to be able to do more. The developed countries have already put up their handsas far as mobilising more financial resources are concerned. This is the deadlock that has been produced.

Antalya has exposed the limits on the ambition that countries collectively can show on climate action. Future climate meetings would probably need to severely temper their expectations on this front.

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After deadlock at COP31, a roadmap for climate talks



EXPERT EXPLAINS

SAMEER KWATRA

SENIOR DIRECTOR, INDIA, AT THE NATURAL RESOURCES DEFENSE COUNCIL, A U.S.-BASED ENVIRONMENTAL NON-PROFIT

THIS YEAR has brought floods in Nepal that left thousands dead or missing, drought pushing 6.5 million people into acute hunger in Somalia, extreme heat across South Asia, a heat dome over North America and a European summer where extreme heat claimed more than 50,000 lives.

Climate change is powerful and persistent; no country is immune, and the cost is not borne equally. And yet, even as the planet is smoldering, 31st Conference of the Parties (COP31) in Antalya, Turkey, demonstrated that the negotiations remain frozen in time. Despite being the longest COP to date, the process could not yield any agreement on either fossil fuels or finance.

To be fair, the multilateral COP framework has helped bend the curve on carbon emissions. Three decades ago, the world was hurtling toward 4 degrees Celsius of warming by the end of this century; today, projections point to roughly 2.8 degrees. Global diplomacy has also dragged climate change from the footnotes of national agendas into the spotlight.

Yet from COP1 in Berlin to COP31 in Antalya, the same fundamental questions remain unanswered: who pays and how much, who acts and how much?

Modest expectations

Expectations heading into Antalya were modest from the start. Framed as a technical summit focused on implementation rather than historic breakthroughs, COP31 took place in a world riven by geopolitical tensions, and the final COP31 decision mirrors that reality. The shortfalls are clearest on three fronts: fossil fuels, electrification and adaptation finance.

Even as the text admits for the first time that the world will likely overshoot the 1.5°C warming limit, (until the last push) it refused to name fossil fuels, the primary culprit. Earlier versions echoed the hard-won COP28 pledge to move away from fossil fuels and floated transition roadmaps; the failed final version retreated into vague language about shifting toward low-emissions, paired with contested references to carbon capture and removal.

Add to that, the Turkish presidency's flagship push for 35% electrification by 2035 raised many questions about what would power the electrification, whether it would lead to electrifying existing energy use or be subsumed in large growth of data centres, and who would pay for the immense investment.

The missing ingredient is political will, not money. Wealthy nations cite constrained public budgets to justify stalling on climate finance, yet governments continue to direct hundreds of billions of dollars into fossil fuel subsidies, and risk expanding them in 2026 to cushion energy price spikes. Meanwhile, seven of the world's largest oil and gas companies pocketed $150 billion in profits during the first nine months of the year.

A new playbook

Climate diplomacy needs a new playbook. Two practical shifts can get negotiations moving again. The first is an integrated bargain. Rather than negotiating emissions cuts, finance for mitigation and adaptation, and technology in separate rooms, negotiators should move action, payment, and technology together. That comes down to four straightforward steps:

1. Each country defines what needs to be done and what it actually costs;
2. Wealthy nations agree on realistic contributions;
3. Predictable funding and technology access are linked directly to measurable actions by developing nations;
4. And timelines are staggered based on what each country can reasonably handle.

The second shift is climate "minilateralism", an approach discussed in various forms for the last several years. Think of this as "climate breakout rooms" where participants hash out thorny issues outside of the COP arena but report back to the full gathering. This would require smaller groupings such as the G20, BRICS and the Quad putting climate on their permanent agendas.

By hammering out practical deals on clean technology, resilient infrastructure, and early warning systems in smaller rooms, these coalitions can bring ready-made solutions back to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, so that COP shifts from an arena for endless positional posturing into a place where deals are actually finalised. Crucially, the COP process must stay inclusive to ensure that the most at-risk blocs, such as the Least Developed Countries and the Alliance of Small Island States, have a direct voice in shaping the outcomes. Neither idea replaces the UN framework but gives it the engine it has been missing.