EDITORIAL HIGHLIGHTS

05-11-2026

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GS 2: SOCIAL JUSTICE (HEALTH)
THE HINDU PAGE: 08

Anaemia burden — iron alone is no solution

India's anaemia burden is not in doubt. The fifth National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5) found that more than half of women and about two-thirds of young children are anaemic. In this context, double-fortified salt (DFS) – fortified with iodine and iron – is often proposed as a potentially transformative solution. However, the case for DFS rests on convenience: everyone consumes salt, so why not add iron to it? But convenience is not efficacy, and a policy that asks the country to continue consuming salt to deliver iron deserves closer scrutiny.

Iron fortification of salt is a vehicle that cuts against public health. Indians consume, by most estimates, roughly twice the five grams of salt a day recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO). About one in three adults has hypertension, and India's own non-communicable disease (NCD) action plan commits to a 30% relative reduction in salt intake.

DFS pulls in the opposite direction: its logic depends on steady, generous salt consumption. Households that reduce salt also reduce their iron intake, while the label 'double fortified' invites the belief that more is fine. Calling DFS compatible with sodium reduction is a gesture, not a design.

The claim that salt is consumed in predictable quantities regardless of income also needs qualification. Intake varies by age, sex and region. Adult men typically consume the most, while young children and women consume the least. The groups with the greatest need for iron may therefore receive the smallest doses, while those least likely to be anaemic get the most.

Iron is not a harmless nutrient

The body has no regulated way to excrete iron. Iron can accumulate, promote oxidative stress and has been linked to metabolic disease. In the landmark 2006 Pemba trial in Tanzania, Africa, iron and folic acid supplementation in children in a malaria-endemic setting was associated with increased hospitalisations and deaths. A Kenyan trial published in 2015 found that iron-fortified foods shifted infants' gut flora toward pathogenic bacteria and increased diarrhoea. India has large malaria-endemic and poorly sanitised areas.

Haemoglobinopathies are a further concern. Millions of Indians carry beta-thalassaemia, while sickle cell disease is concentrated in tribal belts. People with thalassaemia, especially those who receive blood transfusions, are prone to iron overload. In this population and settings such as India, screening is not a very good safeguard, nor is it practical. The Public Distribution System (PDS), for example, reaches about 800 million people; screening that many people before they consume salt is simply unrealistic.

There is also the problem of stacking. Fortified rice is already distributed through multiple platforms, including the Public Distribution System (PDS), the Pradhan Mantri Poshan Shakti Nirman (PM POSHAN) scheme and the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) scheme. Iron-folic acid tablets are also distributed to several groups. Adding DFS could mean that a child or adolescent receives iron through three or four government programmes at once. There does not seem to be any published analysis of cumulative iron intake across these programmes. Without one, a 'central flagship' rollout would be premature.



Chandrakant Lahariya

A practising physician and author of the recent book, 'Pill-Free: You Don't Need Everything You Have Been Prescribed'

India must tackle its anaemia burden through targeted nutrition, better diagnostics and comprehensive public health measures, not salt fortification alone

There is another dimension to consider: what happens when iron interacts with food. The iron in DFS is non-haem iron, whose absorption depends heavily on the rest of the meal. The typical Indian meal of cereals, millets and pulses is rich in phytates, which bind iron. Polyphenols in tea and coffee, as well as calcium in milk, further reduce absorption. Non-haem iron absorption from such meals is often low, compared with the much higher absorption of haem iron or iron consumed with vitamin C on an empty stomach.

Salt is added during cooking and at the table, so DFS is by definition taken with food. Much of the iron fortificant remains unabsorbed and reaches the colon, where it can feed the wrong microbes. Efficacy trials with supervised delivery and validated specifications do not show what happens with household cooking losses, uneven dosing and variable diets. Absorption is also blunted in people with infection or inflammation, because the hormone hepcidin blocks iron uptake. Fortification therefore works least well where infection burdens are highest.

Iron deficiency only in half of anaemia cases

Anaemia is not the same thing as iron deficiency. Globally, roughly half of anaemia cases are attributed to iron deficiency. India's Comprehensive National Nutrition Survey (2016-18) measured biomarkers and found that iron deficiency explained only part of the anaemia in children and adolescents.

The rest comes from many causes: folate and vitamin B12 deficiency, which are common in vegetarian populations; chronic inflammation and recurrent infections; hookworm; malaria; poor sanitation; haemoglobinopathies; and overall undernutrition, including low protein and vitamin A. Early marriage and pregnancy, adolescent undernutrition and menstrual losses add to the picture. Measurement matters too, since capillary haemoglobin readings and the cut-offs used affect the prevalence figures, and these are debated.

The Indian diet is certainly monotonous and low in haem iron, but diet is only one pathway. A single-nutrient fix applied to a multi-causal condition will under-deliver, and may distract from the diagnostics and sanitation investments that matter. While a single nutrient solution is unlikely to work, India's revised strategy for tackling anaemia – 7x7x7 approach – deserves credit for inclusion of additional measures, to the ongoing strategies.

But gaps remain. The programme still leans on iron-folic acid tablets, despite well-documented compliance challenges and gastrointestinal side effects. Haemoglobin testing alone cannot establish the cause of anaemia, while routine testing for ferritin, vitamin B12 and inflammation markers remains largely absent. "Eating Right" risks becoming an awareness slogan unless it addresses the affordability of foods for households such as eggs, dairy, greens and millets. Digital tracking tends to count tests and tablets rather than health outcomes. Deworming, malaria control, and water, sanitation and hygiene remain at the margins. Making DFS a flagship scheme would reintroduce the one-solution thinking that the 7x7x7 framework is meant to move beyond.

A better pathway

Peru reduced child anaemia by double digits in the early 2010s. It made anaemia a political priority, tracked children by name through health contacts, combined iron supplements and micronutrient powders with cash transfers, and held regions accountable. Progress reversed when the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted service delivery, a reminder that outcomes depend on sustained service delivery rather than a product.

Vietnam is often cited for sharp declines in anaemia among women through weekly iron-folic acid supplementation, deworming and fish sauce fortified with sodium iron ethylenediaminetetraacetate (NaFeEDTA), a form of iron that is better absorbed in phytate-rich diets. These measures were accompanied by rising incomes and greater dietary diversity. Even Vietnam's fortification strategy was carefully matched to local diets and paired with other measures. Neither case shows that a one fortified food can tackle anaemia on its own.

India should not scale up DFS nationally without more groundwork. It should first conduct monitored district-level pilots that measure ferritin, haemoglobin and inflammation, assess cumulative iron exposure across programmes, and monitor potential harm in malaria-endemic and haemoglobinopathy-prone areas.

Fortification should be targeted rather than universal and use better-absorbed iron forms. Meanwhile, greater investment should go towards diagnostics to identify the causes of anaemia, deworming, sanitation and affordable access to diverse foods. Anaemia has multiple causes and cannot be solved by an additive in the salt bottle.

GS 2: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
THE HINDU PAGE: 08

What the BRICS carbon market partnership needs



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On September 12, at the 18th BRICS Summit in New Delhi, the New Delhi Declaration confirmed that BRICS members look forward to implementing the Memorandum of Understanding on the BRICS Carbon Markets Partnership. The commitment remains modest: on capacity-building and experience-sharing, with no trading framework, targets or timeline. The Rio summit acknowledged the memorandum in 2025, and New Delhi has reiterated it. With India's BRICS presidency entering its final quarter, operationalising the partnership requires not so much a common trading platform as a common rulebook.

Eight BRICS members reportedly operate voluntary markets, and Brazil, China, India and Indonesia host over a third of the carbon credit projects registered worldwide. Compliance systems are maturing, too. China's emissions trading system (ETS) – added steel, cement and aluminium through its 2024-25 allocation plan. India's Carbon Credit Trading Scheme (CCTS) has notified emission-intensity targets for 490 entities across nine sectors and opened an offset mechanism. Brazil's Law of 2024 establishes the Brazilian Greenhouse Gas Emissions Trading System (SBCE), a cap-and-trade system. However, none of these markets is linked to another.

Divergence and a common framework

China and India allocate to output-based emissions-intensity benchmarks, while Brazil is establishing an absolute emissions cap. The offset-credit rules of these carbon markets look inward; China's compliance market admits only China Certified Emission Reduction credits; India admits only projects begun after January 1, 2025, and requires them to be exclusive; and Brazil will accept credits only under methodologies accredited by a yet-to-be-constituted body. The legal status of carbon units varies too. In Brazil, the securities regulator oversees the market, while in India, carbon credit certificates are traded on power exchanges under regulations issued by the Central Electricity Regulatory Commission (CERC). Thus, the same tonne of abatement is a different legal instrument in each jurisdiction.

BRICS can turn fragmented carbon markets into a coordinated trading framework

A common framework for measurement, reporting and verification (MRV) should therefore be the partnership's first deliverable. BRICS's own 2025 Principles for Fair, Inclusive and Transparent Carbon Accounting already call for comparing producers with peers under similar conditions, using granular default values, and interoperable systems that yield comparable outcomes. The Delhi Declaration does not carry these forward, though it commits members to interoperable standards for low-emission hydrogen and welcomes progress on cooperation among national standards bodies.

The urgency comes from outside. The European Union's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) entered its definitive phase in January 2026; the United Kingdom follows in January 2027. Both charge for carbon embedded in imports of steel, aluminium, cement, fertilizer and hydrogen, crediting a carbon price paid at origin only when supported by verified evidence.

The U.K.'s recognition of India's CCTS in August 2026 shows how this works: London decided unilaterally, and relief depends on a form completed by an ISO 14065-accredited verifier. Each exporting country negotiates alone, and exporters without verified data face punitive default values.

Linking domestic carbon projects

A BRICS rulebook would do three things: set common monitoring rules, consistent with ISO 14064, for sectors exposed to border adjustment; mutually recognise verifiers accredited by members' national accreditation bodies, as BRICS customs authorities are pursuing for authorised economic operators; and harmonise registry data fields. Members would gain a collective reference point in dealings with foreign regulators, while exporters would benefit from a single compliance pathway.

The Declaration calls the CBAM unilateral, punitive and discriminatory, but opposition carries greater weight when backed by a credible, verifiable accounting standard.

The second test is a small pilot exchange project that credits domestic markets. Article 6.2 of the Paris Agreement provides the legal basis for bilateral transfers of mitigation outcomes with corresponding adjustments. India has a Joint Crediting Mechanism with Japan Two or three members could mutually recognise methodologies where each already has approved methods, and count a capped volume of authorised units from a partner registry within the domestic offset limit.

Such a pilot would expose friction. Corresponding adjustments mean that the host country cannot count the mitigation towards its own nationally determined contribution. Cross-border settlement would involve capital account regulations and the legal classification of the carbon unit, issues for the BRICS Payment Task Force to address. Registries would need to exchange serial numbers and retirement data to prevent double issuance. The pilot's value would lie less in the volume of credits traded than in turning each friction into a defined drafting question with an institutional owner.

Using existing institutions

The New Development Bank could host a shared registry data facility or a purchasing facility for pilot units. The new dialogue on aligning carbon markets with adaptation could direct a share of intra-BRICS transfer proceeds to adaptation, as the Article 6.4 mechanism does, giving members with limited mitigation potential a stake.

Members' interests diverge where China's scale would make it the price-setter, sanctions complicate settlement, and several members compete in steel and aluminium exports. Full linkage of compliance markets is neither likely nor desirable for now. Common MRV rules and a methodology-level pilot differ: both are low-cost, preserve regulatory autonomy, and strengthen domestic compliance markets. A memorandum confined to capacity building is a reasonable beginning, but a common rulebook would turn the partnership into a functioning market.

GS 2: COMPARATIVE POLITICS
THE HINDU PAGE: 09

A blue tsunami: historic sweep by Democrats in U.S. mid-terms

Across Senate, House and Governorships, Democrats make significant gains in a sharp rebuke of the Trump administration

DATA POINT

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In what has been described as a "blue tsunami", the Democratic Party ended unified Republican control of Washington, D.C., recapturing both the House of Representatives and the Senate in the mid-term elections. Riding a wave of discontent with the Donald Trump presidency, Democratic candidates outperformed expectations in both Houses of Congress.

The Democrats flipped Senate seats in seven of the States held by the Republicans – Texas, Ohio, South Carolina, Iowa, Maine, North Carolina and Kansas (**Table 1**). The nationwide surge carried Democrats to Senate wins in Republican strongholds such as Texas, Kansas and South Carolina, while races in Alaska and Mississippi remained too close to call. As **Chart 3** shows, no Democrat has been elected from most of these States in decades, especially in what is considered a period of sharp polarisation in American politics.

Many of these States, along with others in **Table 1** were those that Mr. Trump carried in the 2024 elections with more than a 10 percentage point lead. If results in Alaska and Mississippi where Democrats are leading marginally, turn out in their favour, the party will control 56 seats in the Senate to the Republicans' 44. The 56 includes two independents who caucus with the Democrats.

As mentioned in our previous Data Point on Monday, the economy, future of democracy, healthcare and education were the key issues for American voters and the record of the Trump administration had driven its approval ratings to historic lows.

Even as Mr. Trump tried to mobilise Republican voters despite not being on the ballot, the Democrats managed to convert anti-incumbency against the President to strong support across the country.

Unprecedented gains

The scale of the upsets is clearer in historical terms. In Texas, where analysts also pointed to the weakness of the Republican nominee, Ken Paxton, the Democrat James Talarico, a former schoolteacher and State legislator, won by more than 12 percentage points to become the first Democrat elected to the Senate from the State since 1988. Adam Hamilton's win in Kansas is the party's first there since 1932, and Annie Andrews is the first Democrat South Carolina has sent to the Senate since 1998. In Mississippi, Scott Colom led by just 43 votes with nearly 97% of ballots counted. If he holds on, he will be the State's first Democratic senator elected since 1982.

In the House, the Democrats have won 228 seats to the Republicans' 139. With several races yet to be called, particularly in Democratic-leaning California, outlets like *The New York Times* project that the tally could exceed 250 seats, a commanding majority.

Control of both chambers, once the new Congress is sworn in January 2027, gives Democrats a firm check on Mr. Trump for the last two years of his term. He retains his veto, but Democrats can block his legislative agenda and use their control of government funding to constrain his administration, including by refusing to fund the war in Iran. A Democratic Senate can also reject or stall his nominees to the judiciary and the Cabinet.

The party's resurgence extended to the governorships too: Democrats will hold at least 28 of the 50 gubernatorial posts, up from 24. These gains will matter in future election cycles. In Texas, newly elected Gina Hinojosa will be the first Democratic Governor since 1995. In most States, governors can veto redistricting maps drawn by legislatures, giving Democrats a means to resist gerrymandering.

Historic turnaround

The data for the charts were sourced from Associated Press, Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Election Data lab, South Carolina Election Commission and Texas Secretary of State. In Chart 3C. 1990 elections were ignored because the Republicans won without a contest



TABLE 1: Margins in Senate races in few battleground States, compared with Donald Trump's margins in 2024. Margins are in percentage points

State	2026 Senate Winner	2026 Margin	Trump's Margin in 2024
Texas	James Talarico	12.07	13.7
Minnesota	Peggy Flanagan	10.16	-4.2
Michigan	Abdul El-Sayed	7.04	1.4
Maine	Troy D. Jackson	7.72	-6.9
Kansas	Adam Hamilton	4.87	16.1
South Carolina	Annie Andrews	4.48	17.9
Ohio	Sherrod Brown	4.86	11.2
Iowa	Josh Turek	4.11	13.2
Alaska*	Mary Peltola	0.3	13.1
Mississippi*	Scott Colom	0.01	22.9
Louisiana	Julia Letlow	1.76	22
Florida	Ashley Moody	2.88	13.1
Nebraska	Pete Ricketts	6.7	20.6
Alabama	Barry Moore	9.42	30.5
North Carolina	Roy Cooper	19.63	3.2

*Results not called. Democrats (●), Republicans (●)

CHART 2: Democrats won control of the House of Representatives with their largest majority in nearly two decades

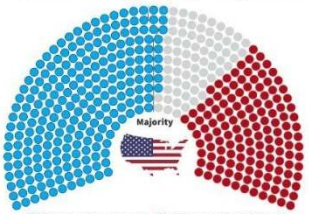


CHART 3A: A Democrat has been elected as Senator from South Carolina for the first time since 1998

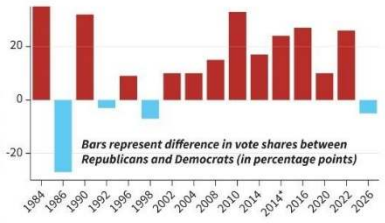


CHART 3B: A Democrat has been elected as Senator from Texas for the first time since 1988

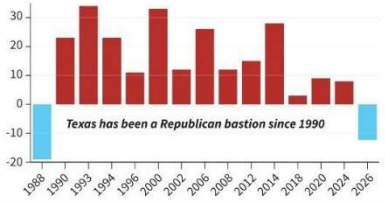
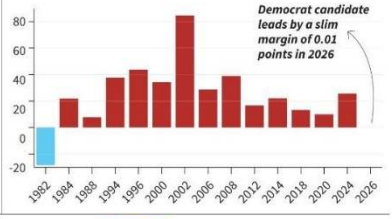


CHART 3C: A Democrat has been elected as Senator from Mississippi for the first time since 1982



GS 3: SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
THE HINDU PAGE: 09

Science should move past 'top 2%' label



Mamidala Jagadesh Kumar

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Indian scientists, like scientists everywhere, deserve recognition for the work they do in advancing knowledge. International visibility is one such form of recognition. Recent media reports stated that India's presence in the "top 2% scientists' database" is on the rise. Irrespective of whether Indian scientists are included in these lists or not, many of them make important research contributions. Their work must be recognised on its own merits. However, it becomes a concern when inclusion in a database becomes a target or when exclusion is mistaken for lack of worth.

John Loannidis and his collaborators, the creators of the "top 2% scientists' database", have cautioned against treating inclusion in the database as conclusive evidence of research excellence. First, the database relies on publication and citation records from Scopus without checking for their originality. Second, the accuracy of author profiles and classification of disciplines affect the results. Third, it does not consider contributions published in regional languages.

There are problems with how the database's main impact scores (which have become the measure of research quality) are calculated. For multi-author papers, one of the factors that contributes to the score is an author's position in the list of authors. The order of authors can have different meanings across disciplines. Moreover, the database provides scores both including and excluding self-citations. But the citation counts alone do not tell us whether a paper is being appreciated, challenged or merely mentioned. In an analysis shared online in 2023, John Philip examined the list based on scientists' work up to 2022 and reported that 12 of 71 physics Nobel laureates and two of 66 chemistry laureates from 1998-2022 were missing. These examples show how scientists whose work may be of significant scientific merit can also be excluded from the database.

India needs both fundamental research and practical solutions without making inclusion in the 'top 2% scientists' database' the primary goal

Implications for research

Science journalists play an important role in explaining scientific advances to the general public. A 2026 study in *Scientometrics* found science journalists, such as Clare Dyer and Jacqui Wise, included in the 2025 'top 2% scientists' database'. While the work of both scientists and science journalists deserves respect for different reasons, inclusion in the database does not, by itself, distinguish original research from science reporting. The same study also identified an author in the list with 217 retracted papers. This shows that the database has limitations that cannot be ignored.

What implications could this have for Indian science if inclusion in the database begins to influence research choices? In some areas, the researcher may be required to work for several years before research outcomes reach a conclusive shape. Also, years of sustained effort is required in both basic research and research aimed at solving practical problems. A young scientist may feel pressure to choose a popular research topic because of its likely potential to attract more citations rather than focusing on their own interests. India needs both fundamental research and practical solutions without making inclusion in the "top 2% scientists' database" the primary goal.

International research assessment initiatives are evolving in how they assess scientific contributions. For example, applicants to the Swiss National Science Foundation are asked not to include citation counts, journal and institutional rankings in their CVs. The objective is to assess their research contributions for its quality rather than these parameters. Indian scientific contributions also need to be recognised in a similar comprehensive manner.

Consider Chandrayaan-3's landing in the Moon's south polar region. It was a team effort combining advanced instruments, engineering and scientific insight. Similar contributions include IIT Madras's SHAKTI microprocessors, NexCAR19 cancer therapy developed by IIT Bombay, Tata Memorial Centre and ImmunoACT, India's indigenous 4G technology stack and Serum Institute's CERVAVAC vaccine. The scientists involved in these contributions may or may not be part of the "top 2% scientists' database", but their work has clearly advanced knowledge, led to practical applications and improved the lives of people. It is this evidence that matters. To strengthen science, it is necessary to recognise those who discover, build, explain or enable others to do so. Recognising scientific contributions in all their forms can support Indian scientists to pursue meaningful research.

GS 1: Poverty and developmental issues

THE HINDU PAGE: 10

From poverty alleviation to prosperity

India has reduced extreme poverty, but its high prosperity gap shows that millions remain far from a comfortable standard of living; informal work, stagnant wages and limited employment opportunities continue to constrain upward mobility

ECONOMIC NOTES

Deepanshu Mohan
Sonakshi Garg

From the poverty income ruler line provided by the recent World Bank estimates, India has recorded one of the fastest extreme income-poverty declines in the world, as per its latest Poverty and Equity brief, which highlights that between 2011 and 2023, an estimated 496 million people moved out of poverty, with extreme income-based poverty ($3/per day) declining to 2.6%.

For the same period, the share of the population living below the lower middle-income country line ($4.20/day, 2021 PPP) fell from 57.7% to 16.1%. Non-monetary poverty indicators, as per OPHI's Multi-dimensional Poverty Index, also recorded a sharp reduction in overall poverty numbers, i.e., from 53.8% in 2005-06 to 16.4% in 2019-21.

The figures undoubtedly reflect that India has managed to reduce extreme poverty at a faster pace, even though one has to keep in mind the current (vs aspirational) stage of development position with respect to its measurement calculus, as determined by the poverty-measure line used, i.e., as a least developed country ($3/per day) or low- and middle-income developing countries (LMIDC) ($4.2/per day).

If we take the upper middle-income (UMIDC) poverty-measurement line, which is where India would like to be positioned for becoming more Viksit than now, this line would be defined as $8.30 per person per day as of current estimates. As per this measure, 80% of India's population would currently be below this poverty line of $8.30, applicable for an aspiring upper-middle-income country.

The conversion for $8.30/day may come to roughly ₹800 a day per person, with a monthly pay working out to about ₹24,000, which, even by current living standards across cities in India, is not much to speak of. And so, in that context, 80% of Indians still earn less than ₹24,000 per month (as per the $8.30/per day measure).

Irrespective of which line or measurement space one examines India's income-poverty position, one has to intersectionally relate this to assessing whether Indians, despite moving out of extreme poverty (3$/per day), are actually becoming more prosperous or not. Lifting millions above the extreme poverty line represents basic progress; however, it does not, in isolation, establish that the population has acquired better occupational status, socio-economic opportunities, or a better standard of living over time. Understanding the distance between escaping poverty and attaining prosperity is therefore critical to holistically evaluate whether India's economic growth is inclusive.



GETTY IMAGES

Measuring the prosperity gap

The prosperity gap is an indicator adopted by the World Bank that measures how far a society is from the baseline standard of prosperity. Introduced to promote the goal of prosperity, the criteria aim to increase sensitivity to distributional issues, shifting the conventional understanding of economic development away from average per capita income, and emphasising that good growth should benefit the least advantaged in society.

As per the recent brief, India's prosperity gap is 4.9, measured against the global benchmark of $28 per person per day (in 2021 purchasing power parity terms). Hence, the average consumption levels across India's population will need to increase by a factor of 4.9 to reach the desired standard of prosperity.

Since improvements in the earnings of poorer persons contribute more significantly to reducing the prosperity gap, India's score of 4.9 leads to the implication that despite substantial reduction in poverty, the nation must still strive for prosperity. A closer inquiry into the World Bank's poverty estimates reveals this marked unevenness in development.

In 2023, an estimated 2.6% of the population lived below $3.00 a day (the extreme poverty line), 16.1% below $4.20 (the lower-middle-income line) and 80.0% below $8.30 (the upper-middle-income line). Calculating the difference between successive thresholds, about 64% of the population lay between $4.20 and $8.30.

These percentages assist in inferring a segmentation of the prosperity gap, which is the average, across all people, of $28 divided by each person's daily income. The resulting gap is the factor by which that person's income must rise to reach the benchmark. For instance, a person earning $8.30 needs a factor of 3.4 to be considered prosperous.

Hence, it can be estimated that the 63.9% between $4.20 and $8.30 constitute the largest share of 4.9, leading to the inference that India's prosperity gap remains high because many Indians who have left poverty require their incomes to rise three to sevenfold to reach prosperity (Table 1).

This estimate indicates that this aspirational upward hike is difficult, and the factors that have helped escape poverty are not necessarily the same as those needed to achieve prosperity.

Mobility and human capital markets

While escaping poverty is a statistical phenomenon, building a secure socio-economic life is a labour-market-driven occurrence, and evidence suggests that India's labour market is still not seamlessly transforming the first event into the second. The World Bank brief itself flags this issue by stating that real earnings are broadly flat, employment growth is concentrated in low-productivity work, and youth unemployment rose from 14.6% to 15.9% (Q1 FY2026 to Q1 FY2027).

The data suggest that individuals exiting poverty are being met with weak jobs and uncertain routes to middle-income subgroups. Consequently, the underlying factors explaining the friction in a shift to a prosperous life imply that while employment is expanding, the quality of available jobs is concerning.

For instance, the ILO India Employment Report 2024 found that approximately 90% of India's workers were informally employed, with self-employment accounting for 55.8% of employment in 2022. The 2025 PLFS annual report provided only a modest relief, with regular wage work noted to have risen from 22.4% in 2024 to only 23.6% in 2025.

Informality is reinforced by research that unveils that an increase in employment can be the result of distress, rather than opportunity. Using PLFS data, it has been recorded that the share of unpaid family helpers among all workers increased from 12.41% in 2017-18 to 17.10% in 2023-24. This leads to an unfortunate deduction that increased employment does not necessarily translate to an expansion of well-paying, tertiary sector jobs.

One of the strongest indicators that the market is not functioning at its best is the fact that young entrants face the harshest undercurrents when entering the workforce. NCAER's analysis of the Time Use Survey 2024 found that only 46.7% of 20-29-year-olds were employed, with occupational opportunities varying across States.

The most startling figures pertain to the educated youth, as according to The India Employment Report 2024, educated young people accounted for approximately 65.7% of India's unemployed youth in 2022. This phenomenon highlights a mismatch between the qualifications young people are acquiring and the employment opportunities available to them.

Interestingly, households striving to enter the middle class through improved education and healthcare find themselves buying services they may not be able to easily evaluate when selecting.

Das and Dobbin describe 'human capital markets' as riddled with a plethora of fee-charging private providers of education and health, in which quality is difficult to determine, and services are a consumption and an investment. Paid schooling and care do not always guarantee the intended human capital formation, materialising in graduates being unable to convert their investments into employment opportunities.

A paradox that minimises the gains sought to follow increased employment is that even when people are employed, their earnings may not be sufficient to nudge them into a more comfortable economic position. This can occur because real wages have remained broadly flat, as observed by the World Bank brief, and substantiated by the ILO's India Employment Report 2024, which pegged real wages for regular, salaried workers as having remained stagnant or having declined between 2012 and 2022.

The report highlights that being able to consume has very little to do with one's job security, if earnings are not adjusted to the inflationary currents of the market. India has proven that it can combat poverty; however, it is yet to prove that it can foster prosperity. Even though many have breached the poverty line, the prosperity gap remains a caution that for an average Indian, a stable, comfortable life is still out of reach.

For Indians, the journey from escaping poverty to attaining prosperity will require tackling structural and institutional barriers that dictate who can progress and who only survive. The country has already achieved the first basic feat in extreme income poverty. Now, the focus for an aspiring country to become developed would require a transformational shift in supporting more prosperity-enhancing growth that secures and promises better livelihoods, effective human capital-building services, and genuine economic and social opportunities across the socio-economic pyramid. The road to doing that seems far ahead at this point.

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Beyond the poverty line

India's gains in poverty reduction have yet to translate into secure livelihoods and a better standard of living

Graph 1: Decline in poverty rates across three income thresholds between 2011 and 2023

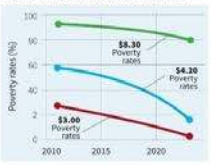


Table 1: The $4.20-$8.30 income group accounts for the largest share of India's prosperity gap

Band (2023)	Share of people	Factor needed	Contribution to 4.9
Below $3.00	2.6%	at least 9.3	at least 0.24
$3.00 to $4.20	13.5%	6.7 to 9.3	0.90 to 1.26
$4.20 to $8.30	63.9%	3.4 to 6.7	about 2.2 to 4.3
Above $8.30	20.0%	below 3.4	at most 0.67

THE GIST

- The World Bank's prosperity gap measures how far incomes are from the global benchmark of $28 per person per day; India's score of 4.9 points to the scale of the income increase required
- Nearly 64% of Indians fall in the $4.20-$8.30 daily income band, highlighting the concentration of the population just above the lower-middle-income poverty threshold
- Poor-quality human capital services, the prevalence of informal work, and the mismatch between educational qualifications and available jobs impede socio-economic mobility

Sanskriti IAS

GS 3: ENVIRONMENT
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Look beyond old climate fault lines

UNION ENVIRONMENT Minister Bhupender Yadav's statement ahead of the 31st climate COP in Antalya, Turkey, is significant. "India is yet to decide on pledging support for a proposed global '35 by 2035' electrification target, and every country has to take into account its sovereignty and poverty-eradication programmes," he said. The "35 by 35" target is a global energy initiative proposed by the COP's co-presidencies, Turkey and Australia. It envisages scaling up electricity's share in global energy use, from 23 per cent in 2023 to 35 per cent by 2035. Several developed countries also support electrification as a low-hanging fruit in the transition away from fossil fuels. India, in contrast, has prioritised renewables. As underlined by Yadav, Delhi hasn't committed to allocating a fixed share of electricity in its energy mix. Its emphasis on national circumstances is reasonable, given that developing countries face weaker grids, financially stressed utilities and limited capacity to invest in new technologies. At the same time, India should heed the changing contours of climate diplomacy.

India is among a small group of countries that have made steady progress in meeting their Paris commitments. However, its record of early delivery, particularly on energy-related targets, has invited criticism that India's targets themselves are not sufficiently ambitious. This critique is unfair. Not only does it underplay the bottlenecks in developed countries on renewables, but it also pays short shrift to the Global North's persistent failure to honour its financial and technology commitments.

Yet, confronting the climate crisis with greater urgency is in India's own developmental and strategic interests. Climate action also offers Delhi an opportunity to seek leadership of the Global South. It stewards institutions like the International Solar Alliance and the Coalition for Disaster-Resilient Infrastructure. At COP31 and beyond, it needs to find ways to leverage their full potential.

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Three steps COP should take for tangible outcomes

SUMIT PRASAD

EVERY CONFERENCE of Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) now arrives with a slogan. Turkey has branded COP31 the "COP of the Future: The COP of Implementation". Egypt promised an "implementation COP" at COP27, as did Brazil with COP30. A label claimed three times in five summits risks meaning nothing. Antalya should give it verifiable meaning: Report progress, show finance, and track voluntary targets.

Turkey and Australia had bid to host and preside over COP31, and settled on a division: Turkey hosts, holds the presidency and leads the non-negotiated Action Agenda, while Australia steers the negotiations.

But what does an "implementation" COP mean? Climate COPs remain negotiating forums on issues like mitigation, adaptation, and finance but the questions have changed since the Paris Agreement's rules were adopted at COP24 and finalised at COP26. Negotiators once asked what needs to be done and who will do it; they now ask how it will be done and where we stand.

Presidencies increasingly lean on the action agenda to make the COP an implementation platform. Voluntary and consensus-free, it rallies non-state actors to climate pledges and gains traction faster than negotiated outcomes. The COP31 action agenda sets voluntary 2035 targets: Raising electricity to 35 per cent of final energy demand, halving global waste growth, and cutting energy-use intensity in buildings by at least 25 per cent. Traction, however, is not delivery: Analysis by the Council on Energy, Environment and Water finds that of 203 cooperative climate initiatives launched since 2015, only around 5 per cent have met their goals.

> Analysis by the Council on Energy, Environment and Water finds that of 203 cooperative climate initiatives launched since 2015, around 5 per cent have met their goals

Under the UNFCCC, implementation means countries meeting the Paris Agreement's obligations. The 2035 Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) were due in February 2025, yet COP31's president is still urging countries to submit. The second biennial transparency reports are due by December 31. By late October, only Colombia and Turkey had filed. The summit meant to showcase implementation might close before much of the evidence arrives.

At its core, however, implementation means sharing progress against commitments. For developing countries, climate finance from developed countries matters most. They need money to both absorb unavoidable impacts and to cut preventable emissions. Without it, one may be paid for at the expense of the other. For small island developing states, least developed countries, and other vulnerable states, NDC implementation is the barometer for 1.5°C. Because this leads to the goal of mitigation, the Global North uses it to hold the Global South accountable for progress on their NDCs, which the latter reads as the former shifting scrutiny from their own NDCs.

COP31 will weigh the questions using UNFCCC secretariat reports, including on NDC Synthesis, BTR Synthesis, and the national adaptation plans progress. These feed forums such as the ministerial dialogue on climate finance and the Facilitative, Multilateral Consideration of Progress, where parties share progress, lessons and concerns. None enforces delivery.

Three steps could give the label substance. First, Turkey, having filed its BTR early, could press every party to submit on time and anchor Antalya's discussions in the synthesis findings. Second, developed countries should file their biennial communications on climate finance, with figures on delivered and promised finance. Third, the presidency could commit to an annual public report on progress against its 2035 targets, giving voluntary pledges a scorecard. Its Climate Implementation Bridge, meant to turn national climate and adaptation priorities into investable projects, should meet the same yardstick. The success of a COP has to be measured by what the crisis demands. Showcasing implementation has become a signal of commitment and trust-building.

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of democratic socialists signalled a grassroots rebellion against corporate power and a demand to rethink the Democratic Party's economic agenda.

The election was ultimately about restoring constitutional checks and balances. Voters appear to have concluded that Congress had become too deferential to an assertive presidency. Democratic control of both chambers could re-establish an important measure of institutional accountability.

For Trump, the consequences could be considerable. Congressional investigations, hearings on Iran, scrutiny of tariffs, tougher confirmation battles and the prospect of impeachment could make it harder for the White House to govern by fiat and conduct diplomacy by impulse. Republicans looking to their own political futures may also begin distancing themselves from a weakened lame-duck President.

The Democrats cannot afford complacency. Their victory was driven far more by an anti-Trump backlash than a ringing endorsement of their own platform. They must offer credible answers on the economy, immigration, healthcare and America's place in the world.

For the rest of the world, the results carry a message beyond American domestic politics. Allies unsettled by Trump's transactional approach may find some reassurance in stronger institutional checks, while adversaries may see an opportunity to test an administration facing greater domestic resistance.

Trump and his MAGA faithful had become the lodestar for right-wing populist movements worldwide, providing ideological inspiration and political legitimacy. This reversal could reverberate internationally. Recent setbacks in Hungary and Serbia, and Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva's victory over Flávio Bolsonaro in Brazil, point to wider challenges for this brand of politics.

The central message is clear: American democracy has demonstrated its capacity for correction. The President now has a choice. He can moderate his approach, respect institutional independence, abandon the politics of perpetual confrontation and exercise greater restraint in foreign policy. Or he could double down, blame disloyal Republicans, attack his political opponents and seek to govern through an even more aggressive assertion of presidential authority.

Peak Trump is over. Whether the President recognises this reality or spends his remaining two years fighting it will shape not only the final chapter of his presidency but also the legacy he leaves behind.

The writer is a former high commissioner to Canada

GS 2: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
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Why a Democrat-controlled House won't mean smooth sailing on trade deal



RAVI DUTTA MISHRA

THE DEMOCRATIC Party has pulled of a sweeping victory in the 2026 US midterm elections, taking firm control of both legislative bodies that comprise the US Congress — the House of Representatives, which is the Lower House, and the Senate, the Upper House. The decisive results — driven by a cost-of-living crisis worsened by President Donald Trump's tariffs and war on Iran — have now fuelled hopes of a more predictable trade policy in the US.

This will also come as some relief to India, which among the handful of countries that faced steep tariffs but managed to avoid getting entangled in a one-sided trade agreement that would have imposed several one-sided demands on digital trade and pushed for access into politically sensitive sectors such as agriculture. The increased scrutiny from a Democrat-controlled US Congress, experts said, could result in more practical asks from American negotiators.

However, Trump's second term has been marked by an unusually frequent use of executive orders, which could continue to spell trouble for trade partners across the globe. In fact, soon after the results, Trump posted a photograph of a red cap emblazoned with the word "VETO" on his Truth Social platform. Indeed, he told *Fax News* that he would work with Democrats on issues such as immigration, but threatened to veto any "insane" bills they passed.

Results could embolden Trump

With the elections out of the way, the US Trade Representative (USTR) is expected to release the findings of its investigation into "overcapacity" — a situation when a sector or a country's production capacity exceeds the demand in the market. Increased supply can push down prices and affect manufacturers in other countries.

This investigation is being carried our under Section 301 of the US Trade Act of 1974 — the Trump administration's latest route to resurrecting its tariff architecture.

Currently, tariffs on most countries except China remain in the 10 to 12.5% range. But the new tariffs will determine the final rates and form the basis on which trade deals with global partners, including India, will be renewed.

So, after the midterm setback, will Trump tamp down such actions?

Unlikely. Mohan Kumar, a former Indian ambassador, said that a domestically constrained President in the last term feels, if anything, more free to do things abroad. So, the President's scope to do good and inflict harm abroad either remains the same as before or may even increase. "We will have to wait and see how this affects the relatively unpredictable occupant of the White House," he said.

"Congressional imprimatur has not been sought by successive Presidents for several policy initiatives. Obama issued 35 executive orders, George Bush issued 42, Biden issued 162 executive orders in just one term. President Trump has already issued a whopping 166 executive orders in just two years. So expect rule by executive decree, whether the Congress likes it or not," said Kumar, who is the Director General of the Motwani Jadeja Institute for American Studies, OP Jindal Global University. *(Kumar was speaking in his personal capacity).*

The former ambassador also said that there is no such thing as a "lame duck" American President when it comes to foreign, security or even trade policy.

"President Trump will likely continue to do things he did before. For example, in June of this year, both the House and the Senate passed a 'War Powers Resolution' directing President Trump to end hostilities with Iran. In September, Congress passed sanctions on Russia with veto-proof majorities. President Trump used a national interest 'waiver' to nullify the sanctions. So, expect President Trump to resort to more of this for the remaining two years of his mandate," he said.



Democrat-controlled Congress

One of the main factors behind the election results is the anger among Americans over the cost of living and high diesel prices. Behind these high prices are Trump's tariffs — whose burden, as research has shown, was mostly passed on to US consumers — and his war on Iran, which resulted in the effective closure of the vital energy passage of the Strait of Hormuz.

Several US polls also showed that public opinion in the US has shifted when it comes to tariffs. An *ABC News* poll found 64% of respondents said the use of tariffs had gone too far. A Council on Foreign Relations poll showed 83% blamed high tariffs for at least partially driving inflation.

US-based think tank Hudson Institute said Democrats have signalled an intent to undermine Trump's dominance of trade policy while reclaiming the prerogatives of the legislative. In preparation for their post-election position, Democratic leaders have already surfaced ideas for reclaiming control over trade policy, the think tank said.

"The likely new chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, which has jurisdiction over trade, Ron Wyden, and the presumed Majority Leader, Charles Schumer, have introduced bills to invalidate Trump policies. Schumer's bill would repeal several of the laws invoked by Trump, as well as the widely used Section 301 authority on 'unfair trade practices', to justify his trade actions," the report said.

Bipartisan policy on trade

Trade experts, however, pointed out that both Republicans and Democrats have often been on the same page when it comes to trade policy and on dealing with China.

While Trump is believed to have abandoned multilateral organisations, including the World Trade Organization (WTO), it was under the Obama administration that the appointment of judges to the trade body began to blocked. This eventually resulted in the WTO becoming dysfunctional — thus paving the way for the erratic unilateral measures under the Trump administration.

"The adverse midterm results won't change President Donald Trump's trade direction because both Democrats and Republicans now favour economic nationalism, domestic manufacturing, and strong supply chains," said Ajay Srivastava, former trade officer and founder of the think tank Global Trade Research Initiative. Since Democratic lawmakers also support protective tariffs for local union workers, America's overall trade posture will remain intact, he said.

To bypass Congress, Trump will likely continue to rely on existing powers — Section 232 of the Trade Expansion Act of 1962 and Section 301 — using executive orders, Treasury sanctions and USTR rules to apply trade pressure. "With foreign policy leverage falling against Russia, China, and Iran, Trump needs a quick win. Expect heightened pressure on India for a trade deal to prove American clout," said Srivastava.