

Concerted Stewardship for the Intelligent Age: *India's Strategic Response to a Polycrisis World*

SYNTHESISING POLICY INSIGHTS
FROM WEF'S 55TH ANNUAL MEETING



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

06 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

08 INTRODUCTION

- An Overview of NEF's Virtual Coverage of the Sessions
- Introducing the Five Sub-Themes

18 KEY THEME SYNOPSIS

- Investing in People
- Industries in the Intelligent Age
- Safeguarding the Planet
- Reimagining Growth
- Rebuilding Trust

56 SPECIAL SESSIONS

62 GOING FORWARD: IMPLICATIONS FOR INDIA

66 CONCLUSION

68 REFERENCES

An aerial night photograph of a mountain town, likely Whistler, Canada. The town is densely packed with buildings, many of which are illuminated with warm yellow lights. In the foreground, a large, modern arena with a glass facade and a dark roof is visible. The town is nestled at the base of a large, snow-covered mountain. The sky is dark blue, and the overall scene is bathed in a cool blue light, with the town's lights providing a warm contrast.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The World Economic Forum (WEF) Annual Meeting 2025, convened in the alpine recesses of Davos-Klosters from January 20-24, unfurled under the evocative theme of *Collaboration for the Intelligent Age*. Far from being a banal invocation of digitised futures, the summit constituted a veritable crucible of global introspection, where leaders, thinkers, and innovators confronted the asymmetries and anxieties of an increasingly non-linear world. The overarching motif was dissected through five interlinked thematic sub-frameworks, namely, *Rebuilding Trust*, *Reimagining Growth*, *Investing in People*, *Safeguarding the Planet*, and *Industries in the Intelligent Age*. Each sub-theme delineated a conceptual frontier for global cooperation, touching upon the paradox of AI-fuelled inclusion versus exclusion, the reconstitution of growth in a climate-constrained economy, and the recalibration of geopolitics amidst digital proliferation.

India emerged as both subject and stakeholder across these deliberations. As AI continues to disrupt labour markets, with 40% of global jobs expected to be reshaped; India, with around 63 in every 100 Indian workers in need of reskilling and/or upskilling by 2030, stands at a demographic crossroad. Simultaneously, India's digital infrastructure, epitomised by over 18.3 billion UPI transactions in a single month (Mar, 2025), and its global leadership in Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI), was held up as a replicable model for inclusive fintech. On the sustainability front, India's ₹19,744 crore National Green Hydrogen Mission and plan to add 56 GW of renewable energy capacity annually by 2030 evinced its commitment to climate stewardship amidst Global South constraints. Meanwhile, India's commitment to semiconductor sovereignty through its ₹76,000 crore Semicon India Programme and a rising space economy valued at upwards of \$8.4 billion signalled strategic assertiveness in frontier technology domains.

NEF's virtual coverage of WEF '25 served as a bridge between Davos dialogues and India's policy making apparatus, distilling global deliberations through an Indian lens. The paper captures a range of imperatives for India: from AI-governance to equitable digitisation; from climate finance to social security architecture; from skilling and disability inclusion to green infrastructure and space policy.

India's future course of action must be navigated with agility, ambition, and accountability. Policy responses should coalesce around the five below-mentioned anchors:

1. *A National AI Reskilling Strategy* with tax incentives and a universal AI literacy mission;
2. Gender-responsive economic policies, including mandatory transparency on pay and targeted SME incentives;
3. Integration of marginalised communities, especially refugees and persons with disabilities (PwDs), into national productivity frameworks;
4. Acceleration of education reforms to embed AI, robotics, and sustainability in STEM curricula;
5. Strategic positioning in global financial and tech diplomacy, leveraging forums such as G20, BRICS, and the Global Partnership on AI.

WEF 2025 was not merely a forum for prognostication but a mirror to the emerging global disorder as well as a map for civilisational renewal. For India, it offered a call to not merely cope with the transformations of the Intelligent Age, but to co-author its contours with conviction, creativity, and compassion.

INTRODUCTION



With the curtains of the first quarter of 2025 having been drawn to a close, the World Economic Forum (WEF) Annual Meeting, held from January 20-24 in the alpine enclave of Davos-Klosters, Switzerland, emerged as a lodestar illuminating the global zeitgeist. This year's leitmotif, *Collaboration for the Intelligent Age*, resonated with an almost prophetic urgency, encapsulating the confluence of technological marvels and societal imperatives that define our epoch. In an era where artificial intelligence (AI), quantum computing, and biotechnology are not mere tools but harbingers of a transformative societal revolution, the WEF's deliberations offered a panoramic vista of humanity's aspirations juxtaposed against its apprehensions.

The theme, as articulated by WEF founder [Klaus Schwab](#), transcends the mechanistic contours of technological advancement. It heralds "an era far beyond technology alone" - a clarion call to reconceive our collective destiny at the cusp of what might be termed a civilisational inflection point. Schwab's prescient observation that this convergence "has the power to elevate humanity - or indeed to fracture it" lays great stress on the dual-edged sword of progress. The Intelligent Age, thus, is not merely a chronicle of computational prowess but a crucible wherein the mettle of global collaboration is tested against the anvil of geoeconomic shifts, cultural polarisation, and ecological exigencies.

Davos 2025 unfolded against a backdrop of palpable tension, a chiaroscuro of hope and trepidation. The echoes of 2024 reverberated through the discussions - last year's mantra, "[projections are not destiny](#)", had presaged a world grappling with a new economic "non-normality" yet buoyed by "remarkable resilience". The year 2024, marked by democratic upheavals and a record number of elections globally - over [60](#) countries representing half the world's population went

to the polls - saw incumbent parties falter, signaling the twilight of an entrenched political order. This seismic shift lent an air of exigency to Davos, where leaders sought to forge unity amidst fragmentation.

At the heart of *Collaboration for the Intelligent Age* lies a constellation of pressing interrogatives. How might humanity harness the prodigious potential of AI - projected to contribute [\\$15.7 trillion](#) to the global economy by 2030 - to bridge rather than widen the chasm of inequality? The International Monetary Fund (IMF) warned in its 2024 World Economic Outlook that while AI could boost productivity by [1.5](#) percentage points over a 10-year period in advanced economies, it risks exacerbating income disparities unless governed by equitable policies. Quantum computing, poised to revolutionise cryptography and materials science, and biotechnology, with breakthroughs like CRISPR advancing healthcare, amplify this narrative of promise tempered by peril.

The climate crisis, an omnipresent spectre, further galvanises the call for collaboration. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reported that global emissions must peak by 2025 at the latest and decline 43% by 2030 to limit warming to 1.5°C - a target slipping perilously out of reach. Davos 2025 spotlighted innovations like AI-driven climate modelling and green hydrogen as potential salvations, yet exhibited that their efficacy hinges on collective action. The WEF's own [Global Risks Report 2025](#), released just a few days before the annual meeting in January, identified climate change and technological misuse as twin threats necessitating a unified response.

Yet, the path to a smarter, more sustainable future is fraught with obstacles. Trade tensions, exemplified by the U.S.-China rivalry over semiconductor supremacy, and cultural polarisation, fuelled by disinformation turbocharged by AI, threaten to unravel the

fragility of global cooperation. The [2024 Edelman Trust Barometer](#) revealed a trust deficit, with only 42% of respondents trusting institutions to manage technological change responsibly - a statistic that loomed large over Davos.

The theme of collaboration, then, emerges as both a panacea and a paradox. It demands responsible leadership to navigate the shoals of hyper-intelligence, ensuring that innovation does not deepen existing divides but cultivates equality and resilience. The WEF's 2025 agenda highlighted initiatives like the [AI Governance Alliance](#), launched in 2023, which seeks to harmonise ethical frameworks across borders. Similarly, the push for a greener economy saw pledges to scale sustainable finance, with trillions in assets now aligned with net-zero goals, per the Glasgow Financial Alliance for Net Zero ([GFANZ](#)).

In this Intelligent Age, the stakes could not be higher. Will collective action triumph over insular impulses, steering humanity toward a renaissance of equity and sustainability? Or will the fractures - economic, social, ecological - widen, consigning us to a dystopian denouement? Davos 2025, with its clarion call for collaboration, posited that the answer lies not in the stars, nor in algorithms alone, but in the resolve of leaders to wield technology as a force for unity rather than discord. It is a moment to eschew the parochial for the planetary, to weave from the threads of innovation a fabric of shared prosperity.

AN OVERVIEW OF NEF'S VIRTUAL COVERAGE OF THE SESSIONS

NEF has once again demonstrated its commitment to intellectual rigour and global economic discourse through its comprehensive virtual coverage of the World Economic Forum (WEF) Annual Meeting 2025. Following the success of its inaugural virtual coverage in the preceding year, NEF meticulously chronicled the proceedings of this year's gathering, held in Davos-Klosters, Switzerland, from January 20 to January 24, 2025. By meticulously analysing the plethora of sessions convened over the five-day summit, NEF provided an incisive and nuanced interpretation of the deliberations, making them accessible and contextually relevant for Indian policymakers, economists, and industry leaders.

NEF's dedicated team ensured exhaustive virtual monitoring and synthesis of all key sessions, spanning a diverse range of subjects including global economic resilience, climate action, AI governance, trade negotiations, energy transitions, and the geopolitical recalibration of multilateral institutions. By distilling the essence of these high-level discussions into cogent analyses, NEF has made an attempt to bridge the informational asymmetry that often characterises global economic summits.

Each session was dissected through the lens of India's strategic interests, with particular emphasis on the implications of emerging global trade realignments on India's economic positioning; the evolving discourse on AI and its regulatory landscape vis-à-vis India's surging digital economy; climate negotiations and their resonance with India's sustainable development commitments and energy security imperatives and the recalibration of financial markets and the role of India as a key stakeholder in global economic governance.

Furthermore, NEF's coverage ensured that the intellectual dividends of Davos are not confined to elite boardrooms but percolate into India's policy and business community. By offering real-time insights and post-session analyses, NEF aided in formulating timely responses to emerging global economic paradigms. This initiative also amplifies India's voice in the international economic order by equipping policymakers, corporate leaders, and scholars with the requisite information to craft informed strategies.

INTRODUCING THE FIVE SUB-THEMES

The theme of “*Rebuilding Trust*” served as an incisive analytical framework to dissect the multifaceted challenges confronting our global society in 2025. In an era marked by geopolitical realignments, technological upheavals, and societal fissures, trust has emerged as both a casualty and a catalyst in the complex interplay of international relations, economic policies, and communal interactions.

Geopolitical Shifts and Erosion of Trust

The contemporary geopolitical landscape is characterised by a pronounced shift towards multipolarity, with emerging powers asserting their influence and established hegemonies recalibrating their strategies. This transition has engendered a climate of protectionism and competitive nationalism, undermining the foundations of international cooperation. WEF’s Annual Meeting emphasised that such dynamics have brought global collaboration to a critical juncture, impeding trade and investment flows.

Societal Divides and the Crisis of Grievance

Concurrently, societies worldwide are grappling with deepening divides as individuals endeavour to reaffirm their identities amidst rapid change. The [2025 Edelman Trust Barometer](#) reveals that 61% of the global population harbours moderate to high levels of grievance, perceiving governmental and business institutions as entities that exacerbate their hardships while serving narrow interests. This pervasive sense of disenfranchisement has precipitated a decline in institutional trust and a rise in societal polarisation.

The Ascendancy of the Digital Economy

Amidst these challenges, the digital economy has emerged as a pivotal force in revitalising

global trade. As per estimates made by the World Trade Organisation (WTO), the value of digitally delivered services reached [\\$4.3 trillion](#) in 2023, reflecting a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 8.2% since 2005. This surge not only denotes the transformative power of digital platforms but also highlights the potential for technology to bridge economic divides and enhance international collaboration.

Pathways to Rebuilding Trust

Addressing the trust deficit necessitates innovative and collaborative approaches that engage stakeholders across all sectors. At this year’s WEF Annual Meeting, leveraging the technologies of the “Intelligent Age” to tackle pressing global challenges was advocated, emphasising that effective solutions require cooperation at all levels of governance, i.e., international, national, and local. Furthermore, the Edelman Trust Barometer suggests that institutions must prioritise understanding the economic realities of their constituents, champion shared interests, and create avenues for optimism to mitigate grievances and rebuild trust.

Ergo, the theme provided a comprehensive lens through which to analyse the intricate dynamics of our current epoch. By acknowledging the interplay between geopolitical shifts, societal grievances, and the rapidly expanding digital economy, stakeholders can devise strategies that not only address the root causes of distrust but also pave the way for a more cohesive and cooperative global community.

The theme of “*Reimagining Growth*” served as an astute analytical framework to navigate the intricate economic landscape of 2025. In an era where traditional fiscal and monetary instruments exhibit diminishing efficacy, policymakers are compelled to explore avant-garde avenues to invigorate economic expansion.

The Digital Economy: A Vanguard of Growth

Central to this reimagined growth paradigm is the surging digital economy. As of 2025, it constitutes approximately 15.5% of the global Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Projections indicate that by 2028, this sector will burgeon to \$16.5 trillion, capturing 17% of the global GDP. This meteoric rise stresses the imperative for nations to cultivate digital infrastructures and competencies, thereby harnessing the transformative potential of digitalisation.

Innovation: The Linchpin of Economic Resurgence

Innovation emerges as the linchpin in this reimagined growth narrative. The rapid ascension of e-commerce, with business sales escalating nearly 60% from 2016 to 2022 to reach \$27 trillion, exemplifies the profound impact of technological advancements on economic activity. By fostering ecosystems that promote research and development, nations can catalyse the creation of novel industries and services, thereby propelling economic dynamism.

Navigating Structural Vulnerabilities

Despite these promising developments, the global economy contends with structural vulnerabilities. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) projects a tempered global growth rate of 3.3% for both 2025 and 2026, a deceleration from the historical average of 3.7%. This subdued trajectory accentuates the urgency for policymakers to implement strategies that not only stimulate growth but

also fortify economic resilience.

Strategies for Identifying New Growth Frontiers

To delineate new growth frontiers within this evolving global economy, stakeholders might consider:

- *Investing in Digital Infrastructure:* Augmenting broadband accessibility and supporting digital literacy initiatives to ensure inclusive participation in the digital economy.
- *Encouraging Research and Development:* Allocating resources towards innovation hubs and establishing collaborations between academia and industry to spur technological breakthroughs.
- *Facilitating Agile Regulatory Frameworks:* Crafting policies that balance the promotion of innovation with the safeguarding of public interests, thereby creating an environment conducive to entrepreneurial endeavours.
- *Promoting Sustainable Practices:* Integrating environmental considerations into economic planning to ensure that growth is both robust and sustainable.

Thus, the theme as a framework compels a departure from conventional economic paradigms, urging a concerted emphasis on innovation and digital transformation. By embracing these imperatives, policymakers can navigate the complexities of the current economic milieu, promoting a trajectory of sustained and inclusive prosperity.

The theme of “*Investing in People*” served as a sagacious framework for analysing the multifaceted interplay between rapid technological advancements and the imperative of human capital development in 2025. As innovations permeate various sectors, they profoundly influence employment paradigms, skill requisites, and the equitable distribution of wealth, thereby necessitating a recalibrated focus on nurturing a resilient and adept workforce.

Technological Disruption and Employment Dynamics

This year, the proliferation of AI and automation technologies has markedly transformed the employment landscape. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) estimates that approximately 40% of global jobs are susceptible to AI-driven disruption, with the majority of these roles experiencing augmentation rather than outright automation. This paradigm shift stresses on the exigency for comprehensive reskilling and upskilling initiatives to equip individuals with competencies aligned with emerging occupational demands.

Public and Private Sector Initiatives in Human Capital Development

Addressing the challenges and opportunities presented by technological evolution requires concerted efforts from both public and private sectors:

- **Educational Reform and Lifelong Learning:** Governments are revamping educational curricula to emphasise critical thinking, creativity, and digital literacy. World Bank's Human Capital Project exemplifies a global endeavour to accelerate investments in people, creating greater equity and economic growth.
- **Corporate Training and Continuous Development:** Enterprises are implementing continuous learning

programmes to ensure employees remain adept in the latest technologies. A McKinsey report titled, *Superagency in the Workplace: Empowering People to Unlock AI's Full Potential*, highlights that while AI presents a \$4.4 trillion opportunity in added productivity, realising this potential necessitates empowering individuals to harness AI's full capabilities.

- **Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs):** Collaborations between governments and businesses are producing innovation hubs and research centres, facilitating knowledge exchange and skill development. WEF's Future of Jobs Report 2025 projects the creation of approximately 170 million new jobs this decade, driven by technological development and the green transition, highlighting the importance of such partnerships in translating technological gains into net-positive employment outcomes.

Emergence of New Employment Opportunities

Despite concerns regarding job displacement, technological advancements are catalysing the creation of new roles. The Future of Jobs Report 2025 identifies the surge in demand for positions such as big data specialists, fintech engineers, and AI and machine learning specialists. These roles indicate the dynamic nature of the labour market and the potential for technology to generate employment opportunities higher up the value chain.

Strategies for Building a Resilient Workforce

To cultivate a modern and resilient society amidst technological evolution, stakeholders might consider:

- **Enhancing Digital Infrastructure:** Investing in robust digital networks to ensure equitable access to technology and online learning platforms.

- *Promoting Inclusive Policies:* Ensuring that reskilling initiatives are accessible to diverse populations, thereby mitigating socioeconomic disparities.
- *Fostering a Culture of Continuous Learning:* Encouraging adaptability and lifelong learning as core societal values to keep pace with technological change.

Therefore, the theme underlined the pivotal role of human capital development in navigating the complexities of a technologically evolving world. Through strategic investments and collaborative efforts, societies can harness the potential of technological innovation to augment the workforce, generate new employment avenues, and build a resilient, forward-looking economy.

The theme of “*Safeguarding the Planet*” served as a perspicacious framework for analysing the multifaceted strategies imperative for addressing the exigent challenges of climate change and environmental degradation in 2025. This paradigm exhibits the criticality of nurturing innovative partnerships, augmenting financial commitments, and deploying frontier technologies to achieve global climate and nature objectives.

The Energy Trilemma: Balancing Affordability, Security, and Sustainability

Central to this discourse is the 'energy trilemma', which encapsulates the intricate balance between ensuring an affordable, secure, and sustainable energy supply. The World Energy Council's Energy Trilemma Report 2024 evaluated countries' performance across these dimensions, highlighting the necessity for integrated policies that concurrently address economic growth, energy security, and environmental stewardship.

Innovative Partnerships: Catalysing Collective Action

The complexity of climate challenges necessitates collaborative approaches that transcend traditional boundaries. PPPs have emerged as pivotal mechanisms for mobilising resources, expertise, and innovation. For instance, the Resilient Nation Partnership Network exemplifies a coalition dedicated to advancing climate resilience through collective action.

Financial Mobilisation: Scaling Investments for Impact

Achieving net-zero emissions by 2050 demands a substantial escalation in clean energy investments. The International Energy Agency (IEA) projects that annual investments must surge to approximately \$4 trillion by 2030 to align with this trajectory. Innovative

financial instruments, such as blended finance and green bonds, are instrumental in de-risking projects and attracting private capital, particularly in frontier markets. WEF emphasised the role of such financial innovations in mobilising resources for climate resilience.

Deployment of Frontier Technologies: Driving Decarbonisation

Technological innovation is indispensable in reducing emissions and ensuring sustainable development. Advancements in hydrogen production, carbon capture and storage (CCS), and next-generation renewable energy technologies are pivotal. The IEA's updated Net Zero Roadmap underscored that while progress has been made, around 35% of emissions reductions by 2050 will rely on technologies currently under development, necessitating accelerated research, development, and deployment.

Nature-Positive Transitions and Circular Economy

Beyond technological solutions, investing in nature-based solutions and embracing circular economy principles are vital for ecological balance and resource efficiency. Initiatives that promote biodiversity conservation, reforestation, and sustainable agriculture contribute to carbon sequestration and enhance ecosystem resilience. Furthermore, adopting circular economy practices minimises waste and optimises resource utilisation, advancing environmental sustainability.

In summation, the theme's framework encapsulated a holistic approach to environmental stewardship, emphasising the synergy between innovative partnerships, robust financial mechanisms, and technological advancements. By adopting this multifaceted strategy, global stakeholders can tackle the energy trilemma and accelerate decarbonisation.

The theme "*Industries in the Intelligent Age*" analysed the profound transformations engendered by rapid technological advancements and shifting geo-economic landscapes in 2025. As enterprises navigate this era, they must adeptly recalibrate strategies to harness opportunities presented by innovations such as AI, quantum computing, biotechnology, robotics, and automation, while conscientiously managing concomitant challenges, including escalating energy demands and the imperative for sustainable operations.

Technological Disruption and Energy Implications

The proliferation of AI and quantum computing has precipitated an unprecedented surge in computational capabilities, revolutionising industries from healthcare to finance. However, this technological renaissance is accompanied by a substantial increase in energy consumption. Projections indicate that electricity demand from the technology sector could escalate to 1,000 terawatt hours (TWh) by 2026, a significant rise from 460 TWh in 2022. This surge in energy appetite is indicative of the urgency for industries to balance innovation with environmental stewardship.

Strategic Leadership in the Intelligent Age

In this dynamic milieu, business leaders are compelled to adopt a nuanced leadership paradigm that harmonises immediate operational objectives with long-term strategic imperatives. This entails:

- *Articulating a Clear Vision:* Establishing a compelling long-term vision that aligns with the organisation's core values and market dynamics, thereby guiding short-term decisions within a strategic framework.

- ***Building a Culture of Innovation:*** Cultivating an organisational ethos that encourages experimentation and embraces calculated risks, essential for sustaining competitive advantage amidst rapid technological evolution.
- ***Leveraging Technological Synergies:*** Integrating emerging technologies to enhance operational efficiency and develop novel business models, while remaining vigilant of their environmental and societal impacts.
- ***Balancing Financial Investments:*** Allocating resources judiciously between immediate operational needs and long-term innovation initiatives, ensuring financial sustainability and fostering enduring growth.
- ***Enhancing Collaboration:*** Engaging in strategic partnerships with external entities, including academic institutions and research organisations, to access new knowledge and markets, thereby bolstering both short-term performance and long-term vision.

Case Study: Energy Demand Management

The escalating energy requirements of AI and quantum computing necessitate proactive strategies to mitigate environmental impact. For instance, companies like xAI are investing in on-site power generation to supplement grid capacities, exemplifying an approach that balances technological advancement with energy sustainability.

The theme epitomised the intricate interplay between technological innovation and strategic adaptation. By embracing a leadership approach that balances short-term objectives with long-term goals, and by carefully managing the environmental implications of technological progress, enterprises can navigate this complex landscape effectively, ensuring both immediate success and sustainable future growth.

KEY THEME SYNOPSIS

INVESTING IN PEOPLE



Disability Inclusion and the Future of Work

As mentioned in the previous section, the theme “*Investing in People*” reiterated the fundamental role of human capital development in generating a resilient, inclusive, and future-ready workforce. A key focus was the urgent need to integrate persons with disabilities (PwDs) into the global economy, given that approximately 1.3 billion people worldwide - or 16% of the population - experience significant disability. Yet, corporate representation remains dismal, with only 3% of C-suite leaders disclosing their own disability or caregiving responsibilities. In contrast, the Indian experience presents a compelling case for inclusion. Innovations such as the “*Includeability Quotient*” and workplace accommodations have enabled 81% of individuals with disabilities supported by Enable India to contribute financially to their families, with over 56% serving as sole breadwinners. Furthermore, India’s ‘*purple economy*’ initiative has demonstrated that prioritising mobility access can unlock significant economic potential, generating an additional €500,000 in driver revenue while facilitating transport for 1,14,000 individuals.

Beyond employment, the extant severe educational deficit faced by persons with disabilities. Globally, there is an urgent need for 44 million primary and secondary teachers by 2030, with sub-Saharan Africa alone requiring 15 million new teachers. These challenges are particularly pressing as 40% of global jobs are exposed to AI, making reskilling and upskilling imperative. Rather than full automation, the digital revolution is expected to augment existing occupations, necessitating strategic investments in future-ready skills. Leading technology firms such as Google, Microsoft, and Apple have already institutionalised mandatory accessibility training, offering a model for other corporations to follow suit. However, the representation of PwDs at leadership levels remains inadequate, with only 3% of C-suite executives disclosing their own disability or

caregiving responsibilities - a figure many experts believe significantly underrepresents reality. Initiatives such as the Valuable 500, aimed at breaking CEO silence on disability, and reciprocal mentoring programmes pairing senior executives with mid-level managers with disabilities, have shown promise in forging cultural shifts within organisations.

From an Indian perspective, the demographic dividend and rapid digital transformation present a unique opportunity to embed inclusivity within the broader economic framework. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and the Skill India Mission offer pathways to bridge educational disparities through AI-driven learning tools and inclusive pedagogy. The Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission (ABDM), too, can be leveraged to integrate assistive healthcare technologies, ensuring that PwDs have equitable access to essential services. Moreover, small and medium enterprises (SMEs), which form the backbone of India's economy, remain an untapped avenue for disability inclusion. Providing tax incentives and policy support for SMEs hiring the differently abled could create widespread employment opportunities, thereby, giving a boost to economic growth while ensuring social equity.

The policy implications are clear:

- Governments must mandate disability representation metrics across both public and private sectors, ensuring that inclusion is systematically tracked and incentivised.
- Educational and vocational pathways must be strengthened through large-scale teacher training programmes, AI-powered assistive learning tools, and targeted scholarships for students with disabilities.
- Technology should be harnessed as an enabler of inclusive growth, with mandatory accessibility standards for digital platforms and R&D investments in assistive technologies.

By embedding inclusivity as a core pillar of

human capital development, India and indeed the world, can build a workforce that is not only resilient and future-proof but also reflective of the diverse talents and capabilities of all individuals.

AI, Gender Equity, and Refugee Integration in Economic Growth

The theme also did emphasise that sustainable economic growth is intrinsically linked to human capital development. As technological disruptions, demographic shifts, and socio-economic inequalities reshape global economies, it becomes imperative to focus on workforce adaptability, gender inclusivity, healthcare innovations, and the role of education in building long-term resilience. These deliberations are particularly relevant for India, where a young population, rapid digitisation, and evolving labour market demands necessitate forward-looking policy interventions.

One of the focal points of discussion was the impact of AI on the workforce. While automation raises concerns about job displacement, experts agreed that AI would primarily lead to job augmentation rather than outright replacement. According to the [Future of Jobs Report 2025](#), 40% of global jobs will be restructured due to AI, making reskilling and digital literacy imperative. In India, where a significant proportion of the workforce is engaged in traditional employment, large-scale AI-driven upskilling programmes must be integrated into the [Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana \(PMKVY\)](#) and [National Skill Development Corporation \(NSDC\)](#) initiatives to maintain workforce relevance. Moreover, the shift from task-based to skills-based hiring shows the importance of aligning education with future labour demands.

Gender equity emerged as another critical dimension of human capital investment. Global estimates indicate that closing the gender gap could boost the global GDP by nearly 20%. However, India's female labour

force participation remains low at 41.7%, reflecting the persistent structural barriers that limit women's economic contributions. Achieving gender parity in leadership could add \$700 billion to India's GDP by 2030. Addressing this gap requires progressive labour laws, equal pay policies, expansion of paid parental leave, and increased investment in women-centric entrepreneurship programmes. Gender-responsive economic planning, such as, incorporating financial literacy initiatives and microfinance access for women entrepreneurs can also create a more inclusive growth trajectory.

The role of refugee inclusion in economic development was also explored, with the [Olympic Refugee Team](#) serving as a compelling case study on how sports can drive social integration and mobility. The UNHCR estimates that India hosts over 2,00,000 refugees, yet their economic participation remains limited due to policy constraints on labour market access and skill recognition. Incorporating vocational training, digital literacy programmes, and employment-matching initiatives within India's *Skill India Mission* could transform refugees from economic dependents into contributors, promoting both humanitarian and economic benefits.

A key pillar of the discussions at the Annual Meeting was the future of education and its role in shaping workforce resilience. AI, automation, and digital transformation demand a rethink of traditional education models, necessitating a stronger emphasis on Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM), digital literacy, and AI-integrated curricula. UNESCO's [Global Education Monitoring Report 2024/5](#) found that nations investing over 5% of GDP in education witnessed a 10% increase in employment adaptability. While India's NEP-2020 provides a strong foundation, there is an urgent need to accelerate AI and machine learning adoption in school and university curricula. Industry-academia partnerships

should also be strengthened to ensure that educational institutions produce graduates equipped with job-ready skills.

Healthcare innovations, particularly in the fight against HIV/AIDS and the affordability of breakthrough treatments were also addressed at the Annual Meeting. The long-acting injectable drug Lenacapavir, which offers nearly 100% HIV prevention for six months, has the potential to revolutionise public health but remains prohibitively expensive at \$40,000 per person annually in the US. Advocacy for generic licensing and cost reductions is crucial, particularly in low- and middle-income countries. India's pharmaceutical industry, known as the '*pharmacy of the world*', can play a pivotal role in manufacturing affordable generics, ensuring that essential medicines reach underserved populations. Beyond HIV, the underfunding of women's health research was highlighted as a global concern, stressing the need for targeted R&D investments in maternal and reproductive healthcare.

For India, the insights from the annual gathering translate into several key policy priorities.

- **A National AI Reskilling Strategy** must be implemented, ensuring that AI-driven workforce changes benefit both employers and employees. Tax incentives for AI literacy programmes and an *AI-Worker Compensation Fund* could support displaced workers during this transition.
- Gender-responsive economic policies should be institutionalised, including mandatory gender pay transparency and financial incentives for women-led enterprises.
- India's refugee policies must evolve to include structured economic participation programmes, aligning with global best practices for humanitarian inclusion.
- Education reforms must emphasise AI, coding, and digital skills, ensuring that graduates are equipped for the demands

- India's leadership in public health innovation must be leveraged to make essential medicines like Lenacapavir accessible to low-income populations.

Ergo, the reality that economic transformation is only as strong as its human capital foundation was reinforced. For India, the challenge, as well as the opportunity, lies in bridging skill gaps, ensuring gender parity, integrating marginalised communities, and strengthening healthcare access. By adopting progressive policies, leveraging its demographic dividend, and aligning with global best practices, India can not only future-proof its workforce but also establish itself as a leader in equitable and inclusive development.

Reskilling, Workforce Readiness, and Social Security

Strong job creation trends in digital and service economies indicate the potential for net-positive labour market outcomes if technology-driven growth is managed effectively. It becomes of great significance that India prepares a workforce for the future. While 50% of workers will require some form of reskilling, only 19% of organisations currently have comprehensive training frameworks in place. A stark divide persists, with 10% of the workforce at high risk of automation, yet emerging job roles, particularly in AI and digital services, are expected to offset these disruptions. India's demographic dividend remains a formidable asset, but with millions of youth entering the labour market over the next decade, skilling initiatives must scale rapidly.

As discussed above, gender parity remains a crucial challenge, with women still representing less than 50% of the formal workforce, and stark disparities in leadership roles persist. Increasing female participation to 50% by 2030 could add trillions to India's GDP. However, corporate investments in employee development remain uneven, with

only a handful of firms investing in upskilling programmes. PPPs could help bridge the gap, particularly in vocational training and digital literacy. Given that 400 million Indian workers need skill upgrades by 2035, there is an urgent need to modernise vocational training programmes and integrate AI-driven learning models.

Despite India producing around 1.5 million engineering graduates annually, only 45% meet the industry's expectations in their field, signaling a mismatch between education curricula and industry needs. Policies should incentivise academia-industry collaborations to enhance job readiness. Social security remains a pressing issue, as over 90% of India's workforce is engaged in the informal sector. Ensuring social security, healthcare access, and retirement benefits remains a critical challenge, and the introduction of a universal social security framework could mitigate economic vulnerabilities.

Additionally, with only 30% of Indian women participating in the formal economy, policies that provide childcare support, workplace safety reforms, and financial incentives for female entrepreneurs could drive meaningful change.

The digital economy presents a unique opportunity, with projections estimating its value to reach \$800 billion by 2030. However, robust infrastructure investments in connectivity and digital literacy are essential to fully leverage this growth. Programmes like Prime Minister's Wi-Fi Access Network Interface (PM-WANI) should be expanded to enhance digital access in rural and semi-urban regions. India stands at a critical juncture where strategic investments in people, through reskilling, gender parity initiatives, and digital integration, can yield long-term economic resilience. A multi-stakeholder approach, blending government policies, corporate commitments, and grassroots initiatives, will be essential to capitalise on emerging opportunities and drive inclusive growth.

Migration, Inequality, and Digital Transformation

The evolving global labour market is undergoing a seismic shift due to demographic changes, migration, and technological advancements. Developed economies face workforce stagnation, with aging populations and limited native workforce growth. Notably, in the U.S., immigrants have driven 88% of labour force expansion since 2019, constituting a significant share of agricultural, hospitality, and healthcare workers. This highlights migration as an economic necessity rather than a policy dilemma, particularly in sectors resistant to automation. Meanwhile, Africa, home to over 60% of the world's population under 25, is poised to become a global talent hub, with projections indicating that by 2075, one-third of the global working-age population will reside on the continent.

Technological advancements are reshaping employment patterns, with AI-powered recruitment tools enhancing efficiency by automating tasks such as resume screening and interview scheduling. AI-driven education platforms like Coursera and Udemy have democratised learning, making upskilling more accessible. The post-pandemic normalisation of hybrid work models, now adopted by employers galore, presents new opportunities but remains skewed towards desk-based jobs. However, the digital divide persists - 32% of the global population, or 2.6 billion individuals, remain offline, limiting access to remote work and digital education.

The deepening global inequality crisis was also highlighted; according to the World Bank's Poverty, Prosperity, and Planet Report 2024: Pathways Out Of The Polycrisis, nearly 8.5% of the world's population, i.e., around 700 million people is living in extreme poverty, surviving on less than \$2.15 per day. Meanwhile, 2024 saw the rise of 204 new billionaires, averaging nearly four per week, bringing the global total to 2,769. This widening economic disparity exacerbates social unrest, necessitating

urgent policy interventions. Companies like AT&T, which prioritises equitable pay and labour rights, serve as exemplars of corporate responsibility. Furthermore, technological innovations such as DailyPay, which provides real-time wage access, enhance financial autonomy and job satisfaction.

As the digital world expands, ensuring that online spaces remain inclusive and secure is paramount. The debate on digital content moderation emphasises the delicate balance between freedom of expression and responsible content regulation. While free speech is a fundamental right, the growing threats of misinformation, hate speech, and online harassment necessitate regulatory guardrails to protect vulnerable groups. Notably, with major platforms conducting numerous instances of content moderation in 2024, the scale of this challenge was evident.

In the Indian context, where over 954 million people access the internet, this debate carries significant implications. The IT Rules 2023 require platforms to remove unlawful content, yet concerns persist over government overreach and corporate opacity in content moderation decisions. Moreover, India has witnessed a troubling rise in targeted online abuse against female journalists and politicians.

Factors influencing economic opportunity were also examined at the annual event. Economist Branko Milanović emphasised that an individual's income is largely determined by external factors, i.e., 50% by their country of birth, 25% by parental wealth, and the remaining 25% by caste, race, and luck. Public perception plays a crucial role in shaping attitudes towards inequality. Individuals often misjudge their own economic standing, with the poor overestimating and the wealthy underestimating their relative positions, impacting support for redistributive policies.

For India, these insights demand policy measures to improve social mobility, curb

monopolies, address wealth concentration, and bridge perception gaps on inequality. Strengthening antitrust laws, enhancing equitable education access, and implementing progressive taxation could counteract economic stagnation and promote long-term inclusive growth.

The transformation of global industries necessitates a forward-thinking approach to workforce development, making investing in human capital a strategic imperative. A report by IBM titled, The Value of Training, revealed that 65% of firms cite workforce shortages as their biggest obstacle. In India, the manufacturing sector competes with retail and quick commerce for talent, while workers fear technological displacement due to AI and Industry 4.0. Despite these challenges, targeted upskilling initiatives are making an impact. Tamil Nadu's Naan Mudhalvan programme has trained over 2.3 million individuals for AI-driven roles, aligning skill development with industry needs. Notably, other welfare programmes such as stipends and free transportation for female students have significantly improved gender parity in education, contributing to Tamil Nadu's Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) of 47%, far exceeding India's national average of 28.4%.

For India's economic aspirations to materialise, investing in people must remain central to policy action. Expanding PPPs and reshaping manufacturing's image as high-value and innovation-driven, akin to efforts in the U.S., can enhance workforce participation. The integration of AI, EVs, and semiconductor training into mainstream education will be crucial. Ultimately, addressing global workforce challenges requires a holistic approach that encourages equitable opportunities, harnesses technology for inclusion, and prioritises sustainable economic growth.

Housing as a Pillar of Economic and Social Stability

Housing was reiterated as a fundamental human right, essential for social justice, economic resilience, and environmental sustainability. With at least 330 million people globally homeless and over 1.1 billion residing in slums, there grows an urgent need for accessible and affordable housing. There is an evident growing affordability crisis, where stagnant household incomes fail to keep pace with skyrocketing property prices. Adding to this is the construction sector's significant contribution to global carbon emissions which necessitates a shift toward sustainable building practices. Brazil's post-2008 recovery served as a case study for housing's multiplier effect on national economies. Furthermore, public-private collaboration emerged as a crucial driver for effective urban development.

In the Indian context, the country faces an urban housing shortage of 19 million units, disproportionately affecting low-income populations. Over 35% of urban residents lack formal housing, exacerbating inequalities. While the *Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY)* has facilitated the construction of over 3 crore homes, affordability gaps persist due to speculative pricing and regulatory bottlenecks. Moreover, the construction sector contributes 22% of India's carbon emissions, reinforcing the urgency for green housing incentives and eco-friendly urban planning.

Addressing this crisis requires regulatory reform to expedite land acquisition and approvals, sustainable urban densification, and community-driven models for enhanced local engagement. Policies ensuring women's homeownership rights can enhance financial security, while green subsidies can encourage climate-resilient housing. By aligning social equity with economic incentives, India can reshape its housing landscape.

Conclusion

The deliberations that took place on the said theme reaffirmed that investing in people is the cornerstone of sustainable economic growth, social equity, and global resilience. From workforce adaptability and disability inclusion to gender parity, refugee empowerment, and digital transformation, the imperative is clear - human capital must be nurtured, skilled, and integrated into an evolving economic paradigm. India's demographic dividend, coupled with strategic policy interventions in education, healthcare, and employment, presents an opportunity to lead a global movement toward inclusive growth.

As industries evolve under the pressures of AI, automation, and climate change, nations must prioritise equitable workforce transitions, accessible housing, and sustainable development models. Governments, businesses, and civil society must collaborate to ensure that technological progress does not further widen inequalities but instead serves as a stimulant for widespread prosperity. By embedding inclusivity into policy frameworks, leveraging technology for empowerment, and strengthening social safety nets, India and the world can create a future that is not only economically robust but also socially just and environmentally sustainable.

INDUSTRIES IN THE INTELLIGENT AGE



The 4S Mantra for Forging the Future: Security, Silicon, Sustainability, and Sovereignty

In an era marked by algorithmic ascendancy and ecological exigencies, the convergence of cutting-edge technologies is redrawing the contours of industrial progress. The theme *Industries in the Intelligent Age* provided a panoramic view of the tectonic shifts underway, from cyber resilience and semiconductor sovereignty to green mobility, digital currencies, and nuclear renaissance. It ushers in a sense of urgency for strategic foresight, collaborative governance, and intelligent policymaking to shepherd India through this transformative epoch.

Cybersecurity

Cybersecurity is now a strategic imperative. With 54% of large enterprises citing supply chain vulnerabilities and many cybersecurity leaders flagging SME vulnerabilities, the digital battlefield is expanding. India, the world's third-largest digital economy, saw a 55% surge in cyberattacks in 2024, targeting the industrial, finance and healthcare sectors. The annual event advocated for a *National Cyber Resilience Framework*, mirroring the EU's NIS 2 Directive, while promoting cybersecurity-by-design, public-private threat intelligence sharing, and urgent skilling initiatives.

Semiconductors

With 1 trillion chips produced annually, semiconductors - the neutral substrate of progress, are the sinews of AI, automation, and smart infrastructure. Power demands - 140 kW per server rack - have spurred innovation in low-energy chips and edge computing. India's ₹76,000 crore *Semicon India Programme* aims to localise this critical sector, yet supply chain dependence on East Asia necessitates diversification, PPP-led skilling, and fabless design innovation.

Electric Vehicles (EVs)

EVs lead the charge, courtesy the world racing to decarbonise transport. China dominates with over 70% of global battery sales, while India imported \$2.7 billion worth of lithium-ion batteries in FY24. The PLI scheme for Advanced Chemistry Cell (ACC) battery storage must be complemented by localised supply chains, green mining, and indigenous gigafactory development.

Crypto & Digital Assets

Once hailed as decentralised salvation, crypto faces its reckoning. The market crashed from around \$3 trillion in 2021 to well below \$1 trillion by 2023, prompting regulatory crackdowns. India's 30% tax and 1% TDS on digital assets signal cautious acceptance, while global Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC) developments, like China's Digital Yuan, reshape monetary orthodoxy. Policy must now pivot toward clear taxation, cybersecurity standards, and green blockchain protocols.

Nuclear Energy

With over 30 nations pledging to triple nuclear capacity by 2050, nuclear energy is making a strategic comeback. *Small Modular Reactors (SMRs)* are touted as versatile engines for hard-to-abate sectors. An \$80 billion global nuclear investment in 2024 displays renewed investor faith. India has allocated ₹20,000 crore for SMR development, but success depends on regulatory reform, green bonds, and public trust-building.

The Intelligent Age demands more than technological adoption; it requires vision. Whether securing cyberspace, chip production sovereignty, decarbonising mobility, regulating digital assets, or reviving the atom, India's industrial roadmap must be guided by inclusivity, sustainability, and strategic autonomy. In this brave new world, only those who think intelligently and act collectively shall shape the future.

Charting India's Strategic Ascent in a Digitised, Decarbonised World

With the world transiting into an era where silicon rivals steel and algorithms supplant assembly lines, the contours of industrial modernity are being radically redrawn. The said theme provided a panoramic yet granular examination of the epochal shifts redefining production, protection, and prosperity. From cyber fortresses to tokenised finance, and from AI-driven factories to fusion-powered energy, the leitmotif was clear: agility, innovation, and inclusivity must converge to architect the industries of tomorrow.

The digital domain was depicted not as a mere adjunct to industry but as its very nervous system - vulnerable, volatile, and vitally strategic. With 66% of global enterprises expressing concern over AI's impact on cybersecurity, yet few feeling adequately equipped, the imperative for anticipatory governance loomed large. India's exposure was particularly acute; with cybersecurity incidents galore on the rise post-2020. Policy prescriptions may include a legislation akin to EU's Cyber Resilience Act, targeted MSME capacity-building, and a shift from reactive firefighting to institutional foresight.

Simultaneously, the fine gathering unfurled a financial metamorphosis via tokenisation. Real-world assets, once bound by geographical and bureaucratic gravity, are being transmuted into programmable blockchain-based instruments. With the market surpassing \$200 billion and stablecoins like USDC powering ahead in transactions annually, India's response - via CBDC pilots and sandbox provisions - signals latent readiness. Yet, the need for a *Tokenised Asset Regulation Framework (TARF)*, encompassing legal clarity, interoperability, and investor protection, is urgent.

The discourse on frontier technologies in manufacturing revealed the dawn of a new industrial epistemology. At the convention,

Singapore's dual-pronged model of SME support and AI conglomerate empowerment emerged as an archetype. Siemens' Industrial Metaverse recorded a 70% productivity increase and 40% reduction in energy and time-to-market, while India's own *PLI 2.0* and Samarth Udyog Bharat 4.0 offer fertile ground for replication, albeit needing plug-and-play hubs, workforce skilling, and SME-friendly fiscal scaffolds.

The WEF Annual Meeting turned philosophical as much as practical; framing AI as an egalitarian engine for economic transformation. The IMF forecasts a 0.8% annual boost in global GDP from AI, with low-income nations like Rwanda eyeing a 6% leap. However, the global divide remains stark: high-income countries benefit in 60% of occupations, while the Global South lags at 26%. India's dichotomy, boasting AI hubs in megacities like Bengaluru yet digital deserts in rural belts, demands AI literacy campaigns, skilling investments, and public-private infrastructure convergence.

The milieu at the annual meet anchored sustainability at the heart of industrial reinvention. With India targeting about 56 GW of renewable capacity each year in order to reach its 2030 target and investing ₹19,744 crore under the National Green Hydrogen Mission, the urgency for regulatory clarity, concessional green finance, and derisking frameworks cannot be overstated. Technologies like nuclear fusion and long-duration storage were posited not as pipe dreams but as necessary complements to renewables.

The world's, including India's policy frontier must expand to encompass cyber sovereignty, tokenised transparency, AI equity, manufacturing modernisation, and climate-tech leadership. India's industrial destiny, thus, lies in its ability to synergise Atmanirbharta with astute globalism, grounded in regulation, powered by innovation, and guided by inclusive intent.

Industries in This Day and Age: Capital, Code, and Cosmic Frontiers

Humankind is pirouetting into the intelligent age - an era choreographed by AI, renewable energy, space commerce, and fiscal innovation - leading to industrial paradigms being radically re-scripted. The industries of tomorrow are no longer bounded by geography or legacy, but by the audacity to blend intelligence with inclusivity.

AI, smart grids, and IoT are dismantling ossified industrial blueprints. Africa's [Agenda 2063](#) and Saudi Arabia's [Vision 2030](#) illustrated a dynamic south embracing innovation, i.e., from smart ports and green data centres to continent-wide electricity markets. India's [PM Gati Shakti National Master Plan](#) and its goal of 100% railway electrification by 2025-26 reflect a parallel shift, although the imperative remains to accelerate semiconductor sovereignty under the [India Semiconductor Mission](#) with its [₹76,000 crore](#) incentive corpus.

In a world where capital must flow as frictionlessly as information, blended finance emerged as the fiscal panacea to India's [₹115-125 lakh crore](#) infrastructure and climate gap by 2030. Political and corporate leaders from around the globe acknowledged the Sisyphean impediments of anaemic de-risking, institutional mistrust, and asymmetric incentives. India's [Sovereign Green Bonds](#) and [National Infrastructure Pipeline](#) are laudable starts, but demand systemic scaling. The clarion call is to transform multilateral development banks into catalytic de-riskers, harmonise green regulations under SEBI and/or the RBI, and empower sub-national actors to develop bankable projects.

Many at the global-level annual convention, reframed the space economy not as an astral ambition, but as a terrestrial necessity. Valued at over [\\$630 billion](#) today, the global space market is projected to soar to [\\$1.8 trillion](#) by 2035. India's [₹13,043 crore](#) space budget in

2024-25 and private space startups, like [Skyroot](#) and [Agnikul](#), signal a shift towards an entrepreneurial orbital economy. The future of climate monitoring, disaster resilience, and cyber-secure AI communications lies in low-Earth orbit (LEO). But propulsion must be matched with policy; passage of the [Space Activities Bill](#), regulatory facilitation, and strategic trilaterals with Japan and the EU are imperative.

AI is no longer a futuristic luxury but the centrifugal force of modern industry. Significant breakthroughs ranging from [AlphaFold](#)'s protein decoding to AI-driven diagnostics in rural India (namely, [Niramai](#), [Qure.ai](#)) are reconfiguring our socio-economic lattice. India's biotechnology sector is poised to hit [\\$150 billion](#) this year, while the [National Green Hydrogen Mission](#) and AI-powered smart grids mark India's dual embrace of digital and ecological intelligence. The risks of algorithmic bias, digital inequality, and AI geopolitics demand immediate governance. The [IndiaAI Mission](#) and forthcoming [Digital India Act](#) must provide ethical scaffolding for innovation.

From celestial launchpads to carbon-neutral grids, from blended capital flows to AI sovereignty, India is poised not merely as a participant but as a key protagonist in the intelligent age. The road ahead necessitates:

- Strategic policy propulsion (e.g., [Digital India Act](#), [Space Bill](#), [Green Bond Frameworks](#))
- Deepened public-private synergies
- Regional leadership in global forums (G20, BRICS, ASEAN)
- Talent-driven innovation ecosystems ([PMKVY](#), [skilling in AI and space tech](#))

In this age of intelligent industry, growth is not merely a metric - it is a philosophy, imbued with cognition, climate consciousness, and capital efficiency.

From Digital Public Goods to Intangible Capital

The twin engines of *Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI)* and *intangible capital* are redefining the architecture of modern industry, courtesy the contours of global economic power shifting from the tangible to the cerebral. In an era choreographed by code, algorithms, and knowledge networks, these sessions coalesced around a singular insight: value creation in the intelligent age transcends factories and physical infrastructure; it now resides in digital systems, data, and human intellect.

India, with its Aadhaar-enabled DPI stack and Unified Payments Interface (UPI), stands at the vanguard of digital democratisation. Having processed over 18.3 billion UPI transactions in a single month (Mar, 2025), India's model has become a benchmark for inclusivity and global interoperability. Even so, globally, around 1.4 billion people remain unbanked, and over 1 billion lack digital IDs, rendering DPI both a necessity and a responsibility.

Simultaneously, intangible assets, such as intellectual property, human capital, proprietary algorithms, et cetera, now exceed \$61 trillion. However, India's R&D expenditure remains below 0.7% of GDP, and a mere 6.8% of MSMEs own formal IP. Many new IPs are emerging from the Global South; India must lead reforms in IP valuation, generative AI governance, and talent measurement.

Policy imperatives are thus manifold: embed cybersecurity into DPI frameworks, incentivise energy-efficient AI, and reimagine GDP accounting to include digital and cognitive productivity. Ultimately, for India, these aren't just policy domains - they are instruments of digital nation-building in an age where ideas, not iron, shape empires.

Conclusion

This theme laid bare a paradigmatic reconfiguration of industrial, economic, and technological ethos - a shift from the mechanistic to the cognitive, from smokestacks to smart stacks. India, standing at the confluence of silicon, sustainability, and sovereign aspirations, must now script its own industrial renaissance through an alchemy of intelligent policy, inclusive innovation, and institutional agility. Whether navigating the algorithmic labyrinth of AI, harvesting the ether of space commerce, or architecting digital public goods as new-age commons, the imperative is clear: growth must be green, governance must be anticipatory, and capital must be both tangible and intangible. In this crucible of transition, India must not merely adapt to the Intelligent Age, it must animate it.



SAFEGUARDING THE PLANET

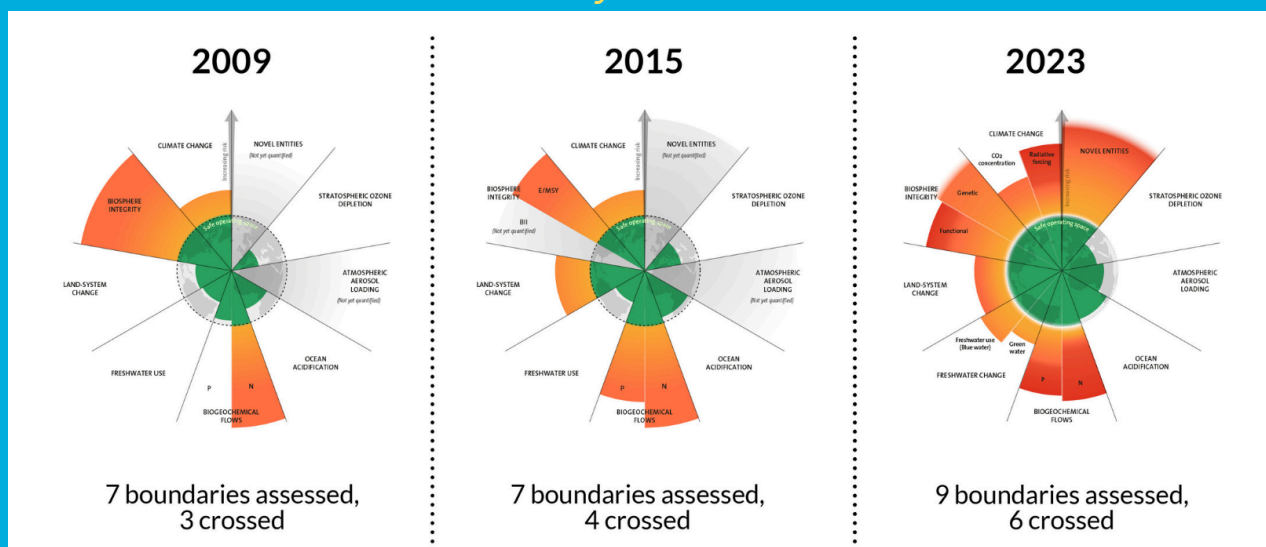


Climate Commitments, Carbon Pricing, and India's Decarbonisation Trajectory

The international community advances toward the 30th Conference of the Parties (COP30) in Belém, Brazil, nestled in the heart of the Amazon rainforest; the global climate discourse stands at a transformative inflection point. A decade since the Paris Agreement's adoption, COP30 is no longer a ceremonial checkpoint but a crucible for operationalising climate commitments into verifiable action. The outcomes of COP29 offer a cautiously optimistic prelude, that is, the global establishment of a landmark \$1.3

trillion climate finance target, including \$300 billion annually by 2035 from developed economies, signals an evolving ethos of accountability. Equally momentous was the operationalisation of the Loss and Damage Fund (LDF), representing a moral and financial reckoning for climate injustices disproportionately borne by the Global South. These developments unfold against a backdrop of intensifying planetary distress, that of, six of the nine planetary boundaries having already been transgressed, including those for biodiversity loss, chemical pollution, and freshwater use, portending grave ecological and economic consequences.

Planetary Boundaries



The evolution of the planetary boundaries framework.

(Credit: Azote for Stockholm Resilience Centre, Stockholm University. Based on Richardson et al. 2023, Steffen et al. 2015, and Rockström et al. 2009.)

In this context, carbon pricing emerges not merely as a fiscal mechanism but as a catalytic tool for incentivising decarbonisation. However, the voluntary carbon market has suffered a precipitous decline, from over \$1 billion to a little over \$700 million in a single year, eroded by the proliferation of low-quality credits and weak governance. By contrast, Chile's 2014 carbon tax - tied directly to public health co-benefits - demonstrates the promise of equitable and transparent pricing models. More broadly, Article 6 of the Paris Agreement now offers a legally

supported framework for international carbon markets, facilitating cross-border cooperation and private sector engagement. Yet a truly transformative global architecture still demands standardised pricing, robust monitoring, and interoperability between voluntary and compliance markets.

India's role in this dynamic climate architecture is simultaneously urgent and aspirational. As the world's third-largest CO₂ emitter, yet with among the lowest per capita emissions, India straddles a unique duality -

balancing development imperatives with decarbonisation goals. Its [Net Zero by 2070](#) commitment is undergirded by interim targets like achieving 500 GW of non-fossil energy by 2030, a trajectory bolstered by record-breaking investments in green energy, which globally reached over [\\$2 trillion](#) in 2024; surpassing fossil fuel investments for the first time. As of early 2025, India has installed over [105 GW](#) of solar and a total of [220.10 GW](#) of renewable capacity.

Notwithstanding these advances, India's energy transition faces critical chokepoints, most notably grid limitations and insufficient storage capacity. Moreover, climate vulnerability persists: from forest canopy degradation in biodiversity hotspots to water stress threatening agricultural livelihoods. These ecological fissures mirror global climate instabilities: scientists warn that crossing the 1.5°C threshold could trigger cascading impacts, including the collapse of the Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation (AMOC), sea level rise, and Arctic warming rapidly. The stakes are not just environmental but profoundly economic, with climate change threatening to cause up to [\\$38 trillion](#) in annual losses by 2050, and slashing global GDP by [40%](#).

Policy responses must now transcend incrementalism. India's pioneering initiatives, the *National Green Hydrogen Mission*, the [Energy Conservation \(Amendment\) Act, 2022](#), and the evolving domestic carbon market anchored by the Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE), provide promising frameworks. Still, systemic reforms are essential. Climate ambition must be institutionalised through science-based targets, climate-linked executive compensation, and mandatory ESG disclosures. Adaptation also requires frontloaded investments in micro-irrigation, climate-smart agriculture, community-based resilience and enhanced funding for the [National Adaptation Fund for Climate Change \(NAFCC\)](#) as well as bottom-up implementation via Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs).

India must now pivot from a reactive negotiator to a proactive norm-setter, leveraging platforms like the G20, [International Solar Alliance \(ISA\)](#), and the [Global Biofuels Alliance](#) to shape an equitable and technologically agile climate regime. COP30 is thus not merely a global rendezvous in Belém, but a decisive waypoint on India's journey to reimagine its growth model, institutionalise ecological stewardship, and lead the global green transition with ambition, accountability, and urgency.

Rehumanising Sustainability

The confluence of climate imperatives, energy justice, water security, biodiversity protection, food resilience, and planetary intelligence defined the multifaceted discourse on sustainable development at the annual gathering in Davos. It examined how nations, particularly from the Global South, might reconcile economic aspirations with environmental stewardship. Emphasising decentralised industrial models like [Envision Group's](#) net-zero manufacturing parks in renewable-rich regions such as Papua New Guinea, Mongolia, et cetera, the forum highlighted the dual potential of trade and FDI to enable climate-aligned growth. Yet, systemic barriers - ranging from high investment risks and elevated costs of renewable technologies like green hydrogen, to the inadequacies of multilateral development banks - continue to obstruct progress.

India, poised as a pivotal actor with [220.10 GW](#) of total installed renewable energy (RE) capacity as of March 2025, is advancing through policies like the [Production Linked Incentive \(PLI\)](#) scheme for green manufacturing, yet remains encumbered by the chronic under-delivery of the promised \$100 billion in climate finance. Simultaneously, experts at the forum stressed upon the moral asymmetries in global energy transitions, noting that while over [70%](#) of global renewable potential lies in the Global

South, these nations are being pressed to bypass conventional development without adequate compensation. The paltry mobilisation of the Loss and Damage Fund, which stands at a meagre \$768.40 million (as in *Apr, 2025*), exemplifies this deficit. With over 220 GW of RE capacity, India's decentralised solar microgrid deployments in states like Bihar and Odisha serve as models for community-led electrification. Yet, unequal access to capital, high sovereign debt burdens, and the North's prioritisation of energy-intensive AI infrastructure raise urgent concerns about ecological equity.

Water, an often overlooked but existential element in the climate matrix, formed the nucleus of another session that detailed the global crisis of freshwater scarcity. With the UN projecting that 50% of the world's population will face water shortages by as early as 2025, and \$1.2 trillion in global assets at risk (due to climate hazards, particularly water stress), the urgency is unambiguous. India, where hundreds of millions of people endure high to extreme water stress, must urgently rethink its hydrological priorities, especially given the rise of ultra water-intensive industries like semiconductor manufacturing. The proposal by Peru for 'blue certificates', akin to carbon credits, along with innovations such as water-positive data centres, offers a blueprint for sustainable industrialisation. A ton of inspiration is up for grabs from the DR of Congo's (DRC) creation of the world's largest tropical forest corridor, spanning 108,000 sq. km and aiming to generate over 5,00,000 green jobs. Backed by a €1 billion EU commitment and robust PPPs, the DRC initiative exemplifies how climate action can foster peace, jobs, and biodiversity. India's own parallel efforts, from the National Mission for Green India and FAME scheme to the visionary One Sun, One World, One Grid (OSOWOG), affirm its ambition to align development with decarbonisation.

The interdependence of global systems was also explored, which spotlighted the paradox

of food insecurity: 733 million suffer from hunger even as over 1 billion are obese. This grotesque imbalance reflects a deeper malaise of ecological mismanagement and social inequity. With calls for regenerative agriculture, gender-equitable land rights, and AI-led climate-smart farming, the attendees of the annual meeting echoed the need for a systemic overhaul. India's own food architecture, stressed by erratic monsoons and declining groundwater, must evolve by integrating indigenous knowledge systems with frontier technology.

The Forum also offered a cerebral exploration into humanity's evolving relationship with the planet, as refracted through the lens of advanced Earth observation technologies. It brought to the fore the immense potential of real-time data analytics, AI (of course), satellite imaging, and open data platforms in diagnosing and mitigating the environmental crises wrought by human activity. Amidst the growing spectre of rising global temperatures, erratic weather events, and biodiversity loss, the discussions at the forum accentuated the indispensability of adopting a systems-thinking approach, i.e., one that views Earth not as a disjointed collection of biomes but as an intricately interwoven whole. In the Indian context, this is especially salient. As a committed signatory to the Paris Agreement, India has pledged to achieve Net Zero emissions by 2070.

This ambition is undergirded by robust Earth observation programmes spearheaded by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), whose CARTOSAT and RISAT satellite series have transformed agricultural planning and disaster risk mitigation. Meanwhile, the National Geospatial Policy 2022 has catalysed the democratisation of high-resolution spatial data, enabling urban sustainability, climate-resilient infrastructure, and integrated water management. Technological interventions like synthetic aperture radar (SAR), AI-powered urban heat mapping, and real-time deforestation alerts were showcased as

critical instruments of planetary governance. Moreover, the [*National Mission on Biodiversity and Human Well-Being*](#) exemplifies the fusion of ecological science, traditional knowledge, and grassroots engagement to nurture a resilient environmental future. A three-pronged strategy was suggested, namely:

- institutionalising Earth observation tools into local governance via platforms like [*Bhuvan Panchayat*](#);
- scaling PPPs, such as *Tokio Marine's* SAR-driven insurance models, which Indian startups like can emulate;
- embedding indigenous ecological knowledge into national policy.

Furthermore, integrating ecological literacy and citizen science into school curricula, as proposed in the NEP-2020, will cultivate environmental stewardship from a young age.

The gathering articulated a unifying thesis: that no single challenge, be it climate, energy, water, forests, food, or planetary cognition, can be tackled in isolation. A grand convergence of policy, finance, science, and civil society is imperative, one that not only decarbonises economies but rehumanises development, redistributes resilience, and reclaims sustainability as a shared planetary purpose.

Navigating Insurance Deserts and Oceanic Opportunities

The intensifying climate crisis has wrought an unsettling duality in global discourse; while it decimates existing financial safety nets, it simultaneously amplifies the urgency of recalibrating our economic models, most notably through the burgeoning ocean economy. The forum also brought to the fore a sobering global phenomenon - the proliferation of regions where climate insurance has become either prohibitively expensive or altogether unavailable. In 2024 alone, climate-related catastrophes caused

global economic losses amounting to a staggering [*\\$320 billion*](#), with insurers covering a meagre little over [*40%*](#) of these. This chronic under-insurance - growing at 5-7% annually against a global GDP growth of just 1-2% - signals not only economic fragility but the slow erosion of a critical buffer against climate shocks.

Yet, amid this fiscal aridity, the ocean economy emerges as a veritable oasis of opportunity and resilience. Contributing over [*\\$2.5 trillion*](#) to global GDP and sustaining nearly [*600 million*](#) livelihoods, the oceans function as planetary shock absorbers - absorbing [*90%*](#) of excess heat and sequestering [*30%*](#) of anthropogenic CO₂ emissions. For countries like India, where around [*18%*](#) of the population depends on coastal economies, and climate-induced losses reached [*\\$56 billion*](#) in 2024; the stakes are existential.

India's vulnerabilities are compounded by its 7,517 km coastline, meteorological volatility, and low non-life insurance penetration - less than [*1%*](#). The slow retreat of private insurers from high-risk zones like Odisha and coastal Maharashtra mirrors global trends, such as the exodus from California and Florida. Without adaptive innovations like [*parametric insurance*](#) and public-private mechanisms akin to California's [*FAIR Plan*](#), entire geographies risk becoming uninsurable.

In this context, India's pivot toward a blue economy is both timely and visionary. Flagship programmes such as the [*Deep Ocean Mission*](#) and [*Sagarmala*](#) aim to harness marine resources responsibly, while initiatives under [*Swachh Sagor*](#), [*Surakshit Sagor*](#) addressed marine pollution. The Gulf of Mannar coral regeneration projects and Sundarbans mangrove restoration further highlight India's commitment to ecological stewardship.

Yet the ocean economy is not merely a conservation project; it is a strategic lever to pre-empt future insurance deserts.

Investments in mangrove buffers, green port infrastructure, and reef insurance mechanisms not only mitigate risk but also lower insurance premiums in cities adopting such green infrastructure. Financial tools like [Blue Bonds](#), as exemplified by Mexico's [\\$220 billion Blue Bond Initiative](#), should be explored in India to unlock marine resilience finance at scale.

Ultimately, the threats of climate-induced fiscal voids and the promise of sustainable maritime wealth must be viewed not as disparate phenomena, but as two sides of the same planetary coin. India stands uniquely poised, endowed with ecological diversity, developmental ambition, and geopolitical clout, to pioneer a climate-secure, ocean-centric economic paradigm for the Global South. In this audacious journey, bridging the chasm between insurance deserts and blue frontiers will be nothing short of epochal.

Battle Against Land Degradation

The escalating scourge of land degradation, now affecting a staggering [40%](#) of the Earth's terrestrial surface, has emerged as one of the most pressing ecological and economic threats of the 21st century. The consequences of this degradation are stark, such as diminishing agricultural productivity, increasing frequency and intensity of droughts, and deteriorating water quality. The crisis has now reached a critical inflection point, necessitating urgent, scalable, and innovative solutions. Indeed, the [Bezos Earth Fund](#) has pledged \$1 billion toward land restoration, primarily in Africa, reiterating the gravity of the situation and the necessity for bold philanthropic interventions. Yet, this battle cannot be won by charitable endeavours alone.

Notably, only a very small percentage of global land restoration funding currently originates from private sector actors, despite estimates that every [\\$1](#) invested in land restoration yields a return of [\\$7 - \\$9](#). This economic irrationality demands recalibrated

incentive structures to galvanise private investment. Complementing this is the burgeoning array of climate-resilient practices, including vertical farming which uses [230](#) times less land and [90%](#) less water than conventional agriculture and regenerative techniques that restore soil health without recourse to synthetic fertilisers. [Cross-border stream restoration](#) efforts and the introduction of drought-resilient native species further highlight the potential of regional cooperation and indigenous wisdom.

In the Indian context, the challenge is especially acute. Home to [18%](#) of the global population but occupying only [2.4%](#) of the planet's landmass, India faces an urgent imperative to reconcile land use with sustainability. According to the ISRO's [Desertification and Land Degradation Atlas - 2021](#), nearly 29.7% of India's total geographical area is under degradation. Recognising this, the Government of India has pledged to restore [26 million hectares](#) of degraded land by 2030 as part of its land degradation neutrality target under the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) framework. Policy instruments such as the National Mission for Green India, the [National Agroforestry Policy \(2014\)](#), the [PM Krishi Sinchayee Yojana](#), and the [Soil Health Card Scheme](#) collectively display India's pivot towards sustainable agriculture. This is harmonised with its global climate commitments, including its updated Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) submitted under the Paris Agreement and its ambition to achieve Net Zero emissions by 2070.

Albeit, declarations must translate into action. India's policy architecture must undergo a tripartite transformation encompassing institutional strengthening, financial innovation, and grassroots capacity building. *Firstly*, the establishment of a comprehensive national framework for climate-smart agriculture, with an emphasis on precision

irrigation, native afforestation, and regenerative soil practices, is non-negotiable. *Secondly*, the private sector must be actively courted through blended finance models, green bonds, and PPPs that mitigate risk and reward sustainability. *Thirdly*, public investment in land and agricultural research must receive a fillip in order to catalyse innovations in AI-assisted agronomy, satellite-based soil monitoring, and hydroponic farming systems.

Water conservation, too, must be integrated into land policy. Schemes like [Atal Bhujal Yojana](#) need to be harmonised with soil and crop management strategies to enhance groundwater recharge while ensuring agricultural viability. Finally, the onus must also lie on equipping farmers with the requisite skills and incentives to adopt

sustainable practices, particularly during the precarious initial years when yields may dip. Knowledge dissemination networks, crop insurance, and transition subsidies will be integral in this regard.

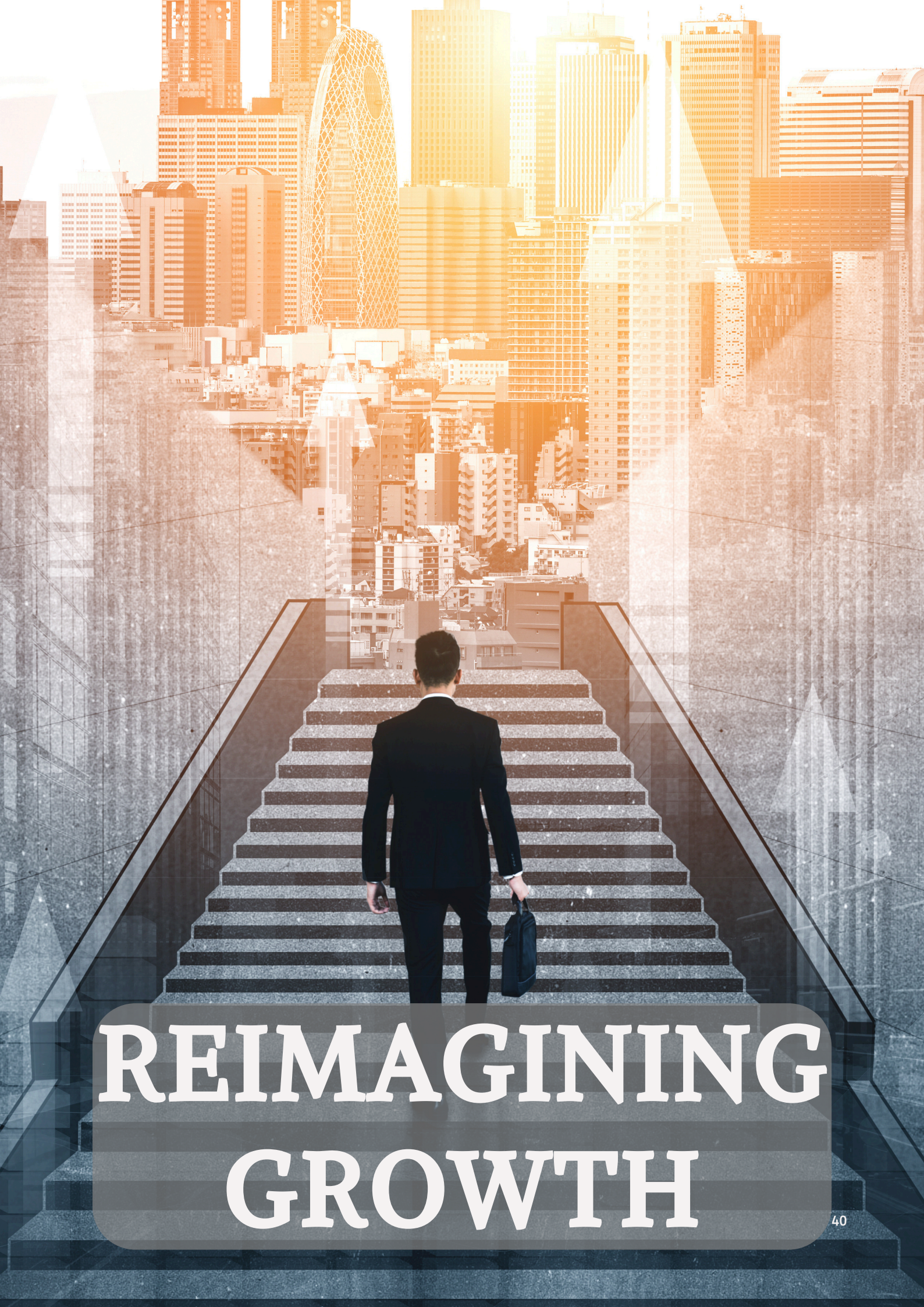
In toto, the global challenge of land degradation is not merely an ecological issue but a profound developmental quandary with implications for food security, economic stability, and geopolitical peace. A new ethos of stewardship, anchored in science, sustained by communities, and enabled by policy, must now guide us forward. Land restoration is not an act of benevolence toward nature, but a sine qua non for our own survival and prosperity. By leading through example, India has the potential not only to rejuvenate its landscapes but to emerge as a global harbinger of sustainable land governance.



Atal Bhujal Yojana

A central sector scheme which aims for sustainable management of groundwater with community participation. How? By the formation of water budgeting, Gram Panchayat-wise water security plans, etc.





REIMAGINING GROWTH

Demographics, Digitisation, and the Green Growth Imperative

The global landscape is at a crossroads, where demographic, economic, and technological transformations are converging to reshape societies, particularly in India. As the world's population peaks at 10.3 billion by 2084, India, poised to reach its population zenith by 2062, faces both opportunities and challenges. The country's youthful workforce, currently a demographic advantage, must be harnessed through initiatives like Digital India, Skill India, and Start-Up India. However, the country's aging population, rising dependency ratios, and evolving labour market dynamics, aggravated by declining fertility rates and rising life expectancy, require significant policy interventions to address long-term pension sustainability and elderly care needs (NFHS-5, 2019-21). Globally, countries in the Scandinavian region and Canada have effectively integrated women and older adults into the workforce, offering valuable lessons in demographic adaptability and labour force inclusivity. India's demographic transition offers an opportunity to build collaborations with Africa's rapidly growing population, strategically utilising migration and trade to offset challenges posed by a shrinking working-age population.

Simultaneously, India's banking sector is undergoing its own transformation. In an increasingly digital and AI-driven world, the shift from traditional banking to fintech solutions and digital assets is reshaping the financial landscape. Initiatives such as PM-Jan Dhan Yojana and Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyaan (PMGDISHA) are enhancing financial inclusion, though challenges persist in balancing innovation with operational sustainability. India's banking sector, poised to lead in digital finance, must embrace AI and big data while ensuring equitable access and integrating green finance into its offerings. The rise of AI, while boosting productivity, also brings concerns regarding job displacement and energy consumption,

highlighting the need for sustainable technological integration. Looking forward, India must prioritise sustainability, particularly through green finance, and create a regulatory framework that supports fintech growth while ensuring financial stability.

At the intersection of these demographic and financial shifts lies the evolution of global economic growth. With global GDP growth projected to remain modest, countries must pivot towards a more nuanced approach to globalisation, that is, one that prioritises the strategic movement of capital, talent, and ideas over traditional trade. India, with its vast digital infrastructure and an always growing tech sector, is well-positioned to capitalise on this shift. The country's economic growth will be fuelled by AI, digital skills, and reforms in sectors like MSMEs, with a focus on greater creativity and adaptability. As India balances its demographic dividend with the challenge of an aging population, it must implement policies that ensure economic growth is inclusive and sustainable, emphasising innovation, upskilling, and equitable access to technology.

This global transformation is also being reflected in energy systems, as the world shifts towards renewable and low-carbon alternatives. India, the world's third-largest energy consumer, faces a dual challenge: reducing reliance on fossil fuels while expanding its RE capacity. Initiatives like the National Solar Mission and the PLI scheme for renewable energy reflect India's commitment to shaping the global energy future. However, the geopolitical dynamics of energy and mineral resources, particularly rare earth elements (REEs), create vulnerabilities that India must address through strategic mineral diplomacy and enhancing domestic processing capacities. By focusing on a polycentric energy model that integrates nuclear, solar, hydro, and transitional fuels, India can ensure energy reliability, affordability, and sustainability, positioning itself as a leader in the global energy transition.

Finally, India's industrial policy is undergoing a paradigm shift, with an emphasis on strategic state capitalism. Initiatives like Make in India and the PLI schemes for electronics, semiconductors, and renewable energy are central to revitalising manufacturing. However, the success of these policies depends on addressing regulatory barriers, land acquisition challenges, and providing sustained fiscal incentives for innovation and infrastructure development. As India navigates the complexities of industrial and energy transitions, it must balance protectionism with open trade, ensuring that its domestic policies contribute to global economic integration rather than isolation. Through strategic planning and international collaboration, India can transform these global shifts into opportunities for inclusive and sustainable growth.

The global development architecture is undergoing a significant transformation, as new actors such as impact investors, philanthropic conglomerates, and private-sector-led development coalitions take centre stage. These actors are reshaping traditional donor-recipient relationships, focusing on long-term solutions to complex global challenges such as poverty, conflict, and climate fragility. As 91% of global humanitarian aid is directed towards protracted crises, the private sector is stepping in with impactful investments, exemplified by the \$1 trillion impact investing market and efforts like the International Finance Corporation's \$14.2 billion investment in African enterprises in FY24.

Simultaneously, global debt has skyrocketed to \$323 trillion, further straining both developed and developing economies. Countries like India have responded with strategic fiscal measures, including initiatives such as Digital India, GST, and MSME credit schemes, aligning with its leadership role in global forums like the G20. The call for reformed Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs) and better debt management tools,

such as Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) and debt-for-development swaps, is gaining momentum.

Against this backdrop, economic growth is increasingly seen as a tool for both inclusive development and sustainable environmental practices. Nations like Israel and Taiwan demonstrate the importance of R&D investments in ensuring long-term growth, with countries like India looking to increase its own R&D expenditure from the current 0.7% of GDP. India's initiatives like Startup India aim to democratise opportunity and innovation. Furthermore, India's efforts to expand its non-fossil fuel energy capacity align with its broader commitment to green growth.

With major Asian economies having already ventured into an AI-driven future, the transformative potential of technologies like AI must be harnessed responsibly. In countries like China and Singapore, AI is being deeply integrated into sectors like healthcare and education, with India following suit through its Digital India and National Strategy for AI. India's e-Sanjeevani telemedicine platform, which extends healthcare access to rural areas, exemplifies AI's role in addressing social equity. For India, AI integration is crucial for MSMEs, which contribute significantly to GDP and employment. As AI-driven innovations evolve, ensuring digital inclusion and aligning technological development with social goals will be key to achieving inclusive economic growth.

The global development landscape is being shaped by a confluence of private-sector innovations, AI integration, and shifts in fiscal and development policies, particularly in emerging economies like India. These changes, if managed wisely, could enable sustainable, resilient growth across the Global South, ushering in a new era where innovation and social impact are intertwined.

Geoeconomic Realignments and the Rise of Strategic Sovereignty

The global economic landscape in 2025 presents a complex and interconnected web of resilience, recovery, and emerging challenges across major economies. The US economy, having rebounded strongly post-pandemic, continues to experience growth driven by a consumer-led economy, robust capital markets, and advancements in technology, including AI and clean energy. While energy independence has been achieved, inflation remains a concern, and fiscal deficits are high, posing long-term risks. India's growth strategy mirrors some of the U.S.'s successes, such as digital transformation and renewable energy, but it must balance innovation with fiscal discipline and address inflation and deficits to sustain its economic dynamism.

In China, the focus has shifted towards recalibrating its economic model in the face of global challenges. Despite a strong trade surplus with the US, internal vulnerabilities like stock market declines and an over-reliance on infrastructure-driven growth have emerged. China's shift to green and technological innovation presents both inspiration and caution for India, which must avoid pitfalls of overreliance on infrastructure and instead emphasise quality manufacturing and sustainable growth.

Russia, facing intense sanctions and internal economic pressures, is dealing with elevated inflation and a stagnant GDP growth forecast. However, India's role in facilitating Russian energy exports through discounted oil imports is significant. This geopolitical shift highlights the need for India to diversify its energy sources and advocate for a more equitable global trade order, while learning from Russia's overreliance on extractive sectors.

Meanwhile, global interest rates and fiscal policies are in a state of flux, with major economies like the EU set to cut rates in

response to slow growth and inflation. For India, this global scenario offers both cautionary tales and opportunities to recalibrate its economic strategies.

Emphasising climate-resilient infrastructure, digital platforms, and fiscal reforms can fortify India's growth, particularly in sectors like renewable energy, manufacturing, and MSMEs. A strategic approach to sovereign debt, green bonds, and MSME support is essential to ensure long-term stability and sustainable growth.

Additionally, private markets are emerging as key drivers of innovation and capital deployment globally. In the U.S. and Europe, private equity has overtaken public markets as a dominant force, especially in sectors like technology, healthcare, and clean energy. India's private capital ecosystem is also growing, with initiatives like Startup India and the National Infrastructure Pipeline attracting significant private investments. Policymakers must focus on creating an environment conducive to long-term strategic capital while ensuring transparency, accountability, and equitable access to ensure inclusive growth.

By integrating these lessons, India can position itself as a resilient, innovation-driven economy, drawing from both global trends and its unique strengths to navigate future challenges.

The global economic landscape is undergoing a seismic shift, fuelled by the resurgence of *economic nationalism*, the rapid expansion of the services sector, the critical challenges facing Europe, the rise of industrial clusters as sustainability drivers, and the exponential growth of India's startup ecosystem. Economic nationalism, once relegated to fringe protectionist rhetoric, has now moved to the forefront of global policy. Nations, increasingly wary of their dependencies on foreign powers for critical infrastructure and resources, are revisiting their economic strategies. The United States, through a

combined investment of nearly \$53 billion in the CHIPS and Science Act, and Europe, with the €43 billion *European Chips Act*, are reinforcing their technological independence, particularly in semiconductor production. India's own Atmanirbhar Bharat and Digital India programmes echo these sentiments, focusing on self-reliance across critical sectors like electronics and pharmaceuticals. This recalibration of globalisation emphasizes strategic autonomy and resilient supply chains, enabling countries like India to align economic sovereignty with global integration.

Concurrently, the services sector, which accounts for 67-70% of global GDP and plays a significant role in international trade and employment, is increasingly shaping global economies. India's services sector, especially in IT and fintech, has been a key engine of growth, contributing over 50% to GDP. With around 30% of the workforce engaged in service industries, India showcases how service-led innovation can drive inclusive and sustainable growth. However, the challenges of AI sovereignty, digital trade, and regulatory frameworks need to be addressed to fully realise this potential, and collaboration between nations will be key.

Europe, on the other hand, faces an economic crossroads. Stagnation in major economies like Germany and persistent debt issues in Southern Europe add pressure, yet Europe's robust single market and emphasis on skilled labour remain strengths. With the *Digital Compass 2030* and *Recovery and Resilience Facility*, Europe aims to emerge stronger, leveraging green and digital transitions. These strategies align with India's own ambitions, particularly in digitalisation and renewable energy, creating opportunities for collaboration between the two regions.

Industrial clusters are emerging as crucial hubs for clean energy innovation, with countries like Spain and Indonesia showcasing how industrial ecosystems can enable sustainable growth. India's industrial hubs,

particularly around ports like JNPT, have the potential to integrate renewable energy solutions, aligning economic goals with environmental targets. Strategic PPPs and regional collaborations, such as those seen in Europe, will be critical in driving India's clean energy agenda.

India's startup ecosystem has witnessed an extraordinary rise, positioning the country as a global leader with over 100 unicorns. This growth is not only fuelled by investment but also by a vibrant domestic market that supports innovation across sectors, especially in AI and digital services. For continued success, India must prioritise policies that encourage sustainable investment and build a flexible regulatory environment to keep pace with global trends.

The convergence of these diverse yet interconnected global shifts offers India a unique opportunity to redefine its role in the global economy. By leveraging its strengths in services, technology, and industrial innovation, while embracing sustainable growth models, India can position itself as a leader in the new economic order.

Latin America and the Middle East & North Africa (MENA) region, despite facing distinct challenges, both possess significant growth potential rooted in their rich resources and evolving economies. Latin America, endowed with abundant natural resources, including food, minerals, water, and ecological wealth, holds immense promise for global economic relevance. Countries like the Dominican Republic have demonstrated resilience by maintaining steady GDP growth, while Chile is positioning itself as a leader in renewable energy, leveraging its vast reserves of solar, wind, copper, and lithium. Yet, fiscal imbalances, rising debt, and inflationary pressures hinder the region's ability to fully capitalise on these opportunities. The region also faces increasing risks from cyberattacks, particularly in Brazil and Mexico, which could undermine progress in digital transformation.

The region's ability to harness AI for economic growth depends heavily on investment in education, particularly in STEM and digital skills, to prepare the workforce for future technological demands.

MENA, similarly endowed with vast energy resources and a youthful demographic, is grappling with a high youth unemployment rate and significant skills mismatches. This demographic challenge, along with limited intra-regional trade, constrains the region's economic integration and growth potential. However, there are signs of progress, as countries like Saudi Arabia and Egypt are diversifying their economies beyond oil and investing heavily in non-oil sectors. Technological advancements, particularly in AI and digital infrastructure, are seen as crucial drivers of future productivity and economic growth. Projects like Aramco's *generative chemistry AI* initiative and Saudi Arabia's leadership in cheap renewable energy highlight the region's growing role in global sustainability efforts. Still, MENA must address structural issues such as youth unemployment, regional trade barriers, and investment in skills development to realise its growth prospects.

Both regions share a common thread of pursuing economic diversification through innovation, digital transformation, and strategic investments in sustainability. For Latin America, the path forward lies in prioritising fiscal discipline, leveraging its natural resources for sustainable growth, and addressing digital vulnerabilities. For MENA, overcoming youth unemployment, enhancing intra-regional trade, and capitalising on renewable energy and AI technologies will be fundamental for its long-term economic stability. Together, Latin America and MENA can emerge as key players in the global economy, contributing meaningfully to sustainable development and global economic growth.

Economic Fragmentation and Strategic Realignment in a Multipolar World

The global financial landscape is undergoing a seismic transformation, shaped by mounting geopolitical tensions, escalating tariffs, and the growing risk of systemic fragmentation. Core institutions such as the *Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication* (SWIFT), which processes over \$5 trillion in daily transactions, are now under strain due to the emergence of rival payment systems like China's *Cross-Border Interbank Payment System* (CIPS) and Russia's *SPFS*. These alternatives are not merely financial tools but strategic instruments in the weaponisation of finance. Coupled with the inflationary effects of tariffs and the disruptive potential of blockchain technology, the world's financial architecture faces an existential crossroads. For India, this turbulence offers both peril and promise. As consumption patterns across urban and rural areas converge - fuelled by better infrastructure, digital adoption, and rising incomes - the nation finds itself uniquely positioned to craft a resilient financial ecosystem rooted in inclusivity, stability, and innovation. India's digital initiatives have integrated millions into the formal economy, making them stakeholders in the country's growth narrative. With global financial flows now increasingly coming from private capital, India's efforts to attract investment through stable regulatory frameworks and MSME promotion are timely and strategic.

In this fragmented global order, small but strategically agile economies like Bhutan, Singapore, and Switzerland offer valuable lessons. Bhutan's *Gross National Happiness Index* (GNHI), which places well-being over GDP, serves as a pioneering model of sustainable development, with over 70% forest cover and an economy anchored in hydropower and high-value tourism. Singapore, leveraging its strategic location and pro-innovation policies, has transformed itself into a knowledge-driven powerhouse,

with GDP per capita on par with the most advanced economies. Its targeted investments in fintech, digital technologies, and environmental sustainability can inform India's ongoing economic transition. Similarly, Switzerland's dominance in precision engineering and pharmaceuticals, backed by robust R&D and institutional transparency, showcases how focused industrial strategy and global talent integration can help smaller economies punch above their weight. For India, the common thread across these examples is clear - strategic specialisation, institutional strength, and environmental foresight are central to long-term economic resilience. India's green economy ambitions and efforts to become a hub for innovation and advanced manufacturing could be vastly accelerated by emulating these models.

Saudi Arabia's economic metamorphosis, orchestrated under the grandiloquent banner of *Saudi Vision 2030*, represents an audacious attempt to repudiate its hydrocarbon habituation and reconstitute itself as a fulcrum of innovation, sustainability, and geo-economic gravitas. In a remarkable move, non-oil economic activities now account for 52% of the Kingdom's real GDP, with projections suggesting this figure will grow as non-oil growth ascends from 4.8% in 2025 to a formidable 6.2% by 2026. This trajectory is underpinned by an assertive courtship of FDI - most notably, over \$10 billion in cloud infrastructure infusions from tech behemoths such as Amazon and Google. A '*cloud-first*' policy and a near tripling of the digital workforce - from 1,50,000 to 3,81,000 professionals - have catapulted the Kingdom to the apex of global digital skills rankings. AI has been adroitly deployed to solve sectoral challenges, with Aramco leveraging AI to accrue savings galore, and the nation proudly conducting the world's first-ever fully robotic heart transplant, a medical milestone illustrative of its technocratic ambition. The Middle Eastern Kingdom also aims to elevate the private sector's GDP contribution, primarily via synergistic PPPs in arenas

ranging from smart cities to renewable energy.

India, navigating its own digital and demographic transitions, stands to glean considerable inspiration from this transformative Saudi template. Echoing the Kingdom's commitment to digital ascendancy, India's Digital India initiative similarly seeks to universalise access to digital infrastructure and services. Saudi Arabia's rigorous focus on tech-enabled inclusion and algorithmic fairness could lend strategic insights to India's National Mission for AI, while its expansive investment in smart urbanisation, through projects like *NEOM*, offers a provocative model for India's Smart Cities Mission. Furthermore, the Saudi intent to stimulate private sector dynamism parallels India's own ambitions to fortify its MSME sector, which currently contributes 30% to GDP and nearly 47% to exports. The broader policy implications are manifold.

- There is an incontrovertible case for promoting digital inclusion not merely as a convenience but as a catalyst for economic diversification and resilience.
- Recalibrating trade and investment policies to magnetise sustainable, non-extractive capital inflows will be imperative.
- MSME empowerment - via regulatory reforms, infrastructural investments, and incubation ecosystems - ought to constitute the cornerstone of inclusive growth.
- Saudi Arabia's deft navigation of global shocks such as COVID-19 and oil price oscillations through fiscal discipline and macroeconomic foresight provides a compelling case study in resilient governance.

As Riyadh continues to align its lofty aspirations with pragmatic execution, it is not merely reinventing its economy, it is reconfiguring its position in the global economic constellation.

Meanwhile, the global economy is emerging from one of the most aggressive interest rate cycles in recent history, which has revealed stark contrasts between major economic blocs. The United States remains a beacon of innovation, commanding nearly 70% of global market capitalisation, underpinned by legislation such as the CHIPS and Science Act that invests billions into critical technologies. Europe, by contrast, is grappling with economic stagnation, burdened by weak demand, high energy costs, and bureaucratic inertia. While the US is likely to shift towards monetary easing in 2025, Europe's central bank is expected to maintain a hawkish stance amid fiscal constraints. These divergent trajectories are reshaping global capital flows, with investors favouring US-led tech sectors like AI and green energy, while Europe risks capital flight unless it undertakes deep structural reforms. For emerging markets like India, this divergence brings to the fore the importance of maintaining macroeconomic stability while doubling down on innovation and green industrial policy. India's growing stature in the global tech and renewable energy sectors offers it a rare chance to attract capital that is increasingly seeking high-growth, innovation-friendly markets.

The digital transformation of trade and investment is another critical axis of change. Technologies such as AI, blockchain, and the Internet of Things (IoT) are revolutionising global value chains by making them more transparent, efficient, and sustainable. Countries like Singapore have reaped the dividends of investing in digital infrastructure, attracting billions of dollars in digital FDI. India's Digital India programme, alongside trade facilitation tools like e-customs platforms and smart contracts, positions it to harness this transformation. The growing importance of cross-border data flows, as exemplified by Japan's Data Free Flow with Trust initiative, suggests that transparent digital regulation will be crucial in attracting global investment. For India, this means accelerating the development of a

predictable, business-friendly digital policy environment while investing in digital literacy, especially among SMEs. Closing the estimated \$1.7 trillion trade finance gap (which might potentially reach \$2.5 trillion by 2025) through digital technologies can further unlock the potential of India's export sector and deepen financial inclusion, thereby turning technology into a powerful equaliser in the global trade architecture.

Against this backdrop, India's long-term economic roadmap rests on four foundational pillars:

1. public investment in infrastructure;
2. technological innovation;
3. inclusive social development; and
4. streamlined governance.

With an ambitious investment of 3.1% of its GDP earmarked for infrastructure in FY 2025-26, India is clearly committed to building state capacity. Landmark achievements include laying 42.13 lakh route km of optical fiber cable (OFC), electrifying 45,922 km of railway lines, and ramping up port and airport capacities. Technological progress, propelled by the PLI schemes, has elevated India's electronics manufacturing sector to \$120 billion. The startup ecosystem has exploded, now home to over 1,71,000 startups. Social welfare interventions such as the Jan Dhan Yojana, PM Ujjwala Yojana, and Jal Jeevan Mission have delivered transformative outcomes for marginalised communities. The simplification of governance, illustrated by the repeal of obsolete laws and the passage of the Telecom Act 2023, signals a decisive move toward 21st-century regulatory frameworks.

On the trade front, India's exports have surged to over \$820 billion, with bilateral agreements like the India-UAE CEPA tripling trade volumes. However, experts continue to highlight the need for tariff rationalisation to fully leverage India's manufacturing and export capabilities. Strategic supply chain shifts by multinationals such as Apple indicate

India's appeal as an alternative manufacturing hub. As global markets fragment and supply chains recalibrate, India's proactive approach to infrastructure development, regulatory reform, and digital empowerment will determine whether it can seize the mantle of global leadership in the new economic order.

The global economy, thus, is increasingly defined by fragmentation, divergence, and digitalisation. While this presents significant headwinds, it also opens new pathways for strategic realignment and innovation. India's policy response, anchored in inclusive digital growth, regulatory modernisation, and global integration; positions it not only as a participant but potentially as a stabilising force in an increasingly volatile world. By drawing lessons from smaller, agile economies and aligning itself with emerging technologies and capital flows, as exemplified by the Saudi experiment, India stands poised to script a compelling chapter in the evolving narrative of the 21st century global economy.

Demographic Pressures, Climate Migration, and the Quest for Inclusive Growth

The world stands at a transformative juncture, where climate challenges, demographic upheavals, and economic uncertainties converge with unprecedented technological advancements. As the younger generation grapples with the looming threats of climate migration and systemic inequality, they also inhabit an era of unparalleled digital innovation and global connectivity. This paradox pushes the need for inclusive growth, digital economies, and more equitable global trade systems. By 2050, it is projected that there would be 1.2 billion climate refugees, driven by rising sea levels and extreme weather events. The Venezuelan migration crisis, with over 7.7 million displaced individuals as of Aug 2023, illustrates the magnitude of such challenges, as neighbouring countries like Colombia and Brazil bear the social and economic repercussions. Migrants, while undeniably contributing to economic

growth - 45% of Fortune 500 companies are founded by immigrants - also exacerbate strain on host nations' resources and integration systems. Furthermore, Pakistan's severe child malnutrition crisis, with 44% of children stunted, highlights the urgent need for investments in human capital, especially in the context of 12 million out-of-school girls who face systemic gender inequality. This alarming statistic stresses the broader challenges of human capital development in the Global South, which remains the critical impediment to sustainable growth.

A global economic outlook reveals the complexities of navigating economic divergence while highlighting the pressing need for global coordination. Multilateral organisations like the G20 and IMF are central to this discourse, urging cooperation to tackle common challenges such as climate change, debt crises, and disruptions in trade. Regional policies, however, diverge significantly. For example, the US Federal Reserve's aggressive interest rate hikes contrast with the European Central Bank's focus on mitigating recession risks. Bond markets play a critical role in this landscape, acting as indicators of investor sentiment, fiscal policy effectiveness, and inflation expectations. Meanwhile, the European Union remains committed to deepening its common market by integrating electricity markets and championing a green and digital transition. However, its economic recovery from the pandemic has been slow, hindered by high debt levels, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and sluggish reforms. In stark contrast, the US remains a leader in technological innovation, bolstered by policies like the CHIPS Act, which propels growth in semiconductors and AI. Europe, on the other hand, faces challenges such as declining ROI and high energy costs, making it harder to maintain its competitive edge.

Saudi Arabia's Saudi Vision 2030 signals a bold shift towards economic diversification, with investments in sectors like tourism, green energy, and technology, coupled with mega-

projects such as NEOM. This long-term strategy aims to reduce Saudi Arabia's dependence on oil, presenting a dynamic model for other emerging markets. India, for instance, is projected to grow between 6.5-7%, driven by investments in digital infrastructure and its demographic dividend. However, emerging markets such as Brazil and South Africa face significant challenges, including inflation, currency instability, and governance issues. The World Bank's 2025-26 global growth forecast of 2.7% underlines these risks, with geopolitical tensions, inflation, and trade fragmentation posing ongoing threats to economic stability. Amid these challenges, the need for innovation, green technologies, and investments in human capital becomes even more pressing.

For India, a nation where half of the population is below the age of 30, this moment presents an opportunity to recalibrate its development agenda. Programmes such as Digital India and Skill India aim to harness the potential of its young workforce by promoting digital inclusion and facilitating skill development. The MSME sector is a crucial vehicle for economic growth

and entrepreneurship. Moreover, India's experience with internal migration and urbanisation can provide valuable insights for addressing global migration challenges. To realise these opportunities, policy reforms must focus on reshaping migration and trade policies, investing in human capital, and supporting MSMEs with resources and infrastructure to bridge the gaps in education, healthcare, and skills development. The policy implications are clear.

Governments must prioritise digital inclusion, ensuring that AI and other technological tools reach marginalised regions, particularly in the Global South. Migration policies must evolve to recognise the economic contributions of migrants, who often fuel innovation and entrepreneurship. Furthermore, investments in human capital, particularly in education and nutrition, must become central to development agendas, particularly in regions suffering from systemic inequalities. As technological advancements continue to fuel optimism, particularly among youth, governments must ensure that these opportunities are accessible to all, avoiding the pitfalls of exclusion and inequality that have long plagued development narratives.

REBUILDING TRUST



Rebalancing Global Governance: Africa, Japan, and India at the Crossroads

The global order is undergoing tectonic shifts driven by demographic transformations, economic transitions, and escalating climate challenges; three critical geographies - Africa, Japan, and India - stand at the crossroads of shaping a more equitable and resilient world. Africa's rapidly expanding population, poised to represent 25% of the global populace by 2050, shows the urgent need for stronger African representation in global governance, particularly in platforms like the UN Security Council (UNSC) and the G20. South Africa's G20 presidency has already spotlighted key themes such as energy justice, equitable taxation, and sustainable resource management, notably around critical minerals like cobalt from the DR of Congo. These imperatives are echoed in India's own diplomatic posture as a champion of the Global South, advocating reforms that align with Africa's aspirations for a fairer international system.

Meanwhile, Japan's economic and geopolitical recalibration - from deflationary stagnation to cautious recovery - has prompted a strategic pivot towards greater engagement with the Global South, including India and Africa. With GDP crossing ¥600 trillion and corporate Japan shifting from passive stock buybacks to aggressive capital investments, Tokyo's approach displays a new era of assertive economic diplomacy. Yet, demographic headwinds - projected to shrink Japan's working-age population by 20% in a little less than two decades - compel deeper reforms in immigration, labour participation (especially female inclusion), and AI-driven productivity growth. These structural transitions offer significant lessons for India, whose own demographic dividend and growing tech sector mirror similar development dynamics. Moreover, Japan's commitment to energy security via nuclear revival and renewables provides a potential collaboration blueprint for India's clean energy ambitions.

The Global Cooperation Barometer 2025

situates these national narratives within broader global trends. While overall cooperation has plateaued since 2020, peace and security have deteriorated, with 2024 recording the highest number of civil conflicts since the Cold War. It notes a disconcerting decline in cross-border R&D collaboration and a geographic skew in FDI towards developed economies, leaving the Global South increasingly marginalised. This is particularly concerning for India and Africa, which risk being left behind unless international financial and innovation ecosystems are rebalanced. However, encouraging shifts, such as rising trade between India and Central Europe, and the US-ASEAN capital flows, signal new avenues for diversification and resilience.

Together, these insights reinforce the pressing need for global institutional reform, inclusive trade frameworks, and sustainable technology investment. India, positioned as both a knowledge economy and a geopolitical balancer, must lead efforts to deepen PPPs, support fair taxation of multinational corporations, and amplify Global South voices in global fora. By drawing lessons from Japan's demographic resilience and aligning with Africa's developmental trajectory, India can catalyse a more cohesive, climate-resilient, and cooperative international order.

Restoring Institutional Integrity and Digital Trust

The annual meeting highlighted the critical importance of governance, digital transformation, security frameworks, and geopolitical strategies in shaping a more resilient future for nations globally, particularly India. It underscored the profound need for accountability, transparency, and ethical leadership in governance, especially at the sub-national level, where gaps in policy implementation often lead to disenchantment; particularly stressing on how governance failures, as exemplified by institutions like the IMF, contribute to

economic instability and social unrest in fragile states, thereby, showcasing the necessity of strengthening India's digital governance frameworks, such as Digital India and the [Digital Personal Data Protection Act \(DPDP\), 2023](#). India's ongoing efforts to tackle corruption through institutions like the Central Vigilance Commission (CVC) and Lokpal must be supported by decentralised accountability mechanisms, empowering urban local bodies and PRIs, along with leveraging AI in anti-corruption technologies. Ergo, rebuilding trust in governance requires a moral reorientation, alongside institutional reforms and technological safeguards.

Latin America's political and economic challenges echoed similar themes of institutional rebuilding and trust. Despite turmoil, countries like Peru have demonstrated resilience with disciplined fiscal management and agricultural expansion, leading to growth even amidst political instability. In the face of organised crime and political instability, initiatives by the [Inter-American Development Bank](#) have strengthened regional security. India's parallel journey in digital governance, with projects like Aadhaar and the [Aspirational Districts Programme](#), demonstrates how state-led transparency can rebuild public trust. The lessons from Latin America suggest that India must continue strengthening data security, transparency, and public-private collaboration to fortify institutional integrity in a similarly complex geopolitical landscape.

Global security challenges were also highlighted at Davos this year, specifically the shifting dynamics in a multipolar world, with great power rivalries, particularly between the US, China, and Russia, reshaping international diplomacy. India's response through strategic autonomy and multilateral engagements, such as the G20 and Quad, mirrors global efforts to reassert state sovereignty amidst shifting power paradigms. India's commitment to nuclear non-proliferation and cyber security further positions it as a responsible global

actor. The enactment of the DPDP Act, 2023 was noted as essential for balancing national security with individual privacy, a stance that India must continue to uphold to maintain credibility in global forums.

The rise of disinformation, particularly through digital platforms, is another global concern that India must address. With over [800 million](#) internet users, India faces increasing risks of digital manipulation, as evidenced by disinformation campaigns during Moldova's election and elsewhere as well. India's Election Commission's [cVIGIL](#) app and AI-based content verification mechanisms must evolve to tackle these threats, drawing lessons from the EU's Digital Services Act and expanding media literacy to empower citizens.

Finally, ASEAN's digital transformation and sustainability initiatives present both a challenge and an opportunity for India. ASEAN's focus on enhancing digital economies and promoting green energy reflects the region's strategic importance in global trade and geopolitics. India's participation in ASEAN's [Digital Economic Framework Agreement](#) (DEFA) and the [ASEAN Power Grid](#) (APG) will help align its policy priorities with the region's sustainable growth trajectory. By strengthening its regulatory frameworks in digital trade and energy, and by contributing to peace-building efforts in Myanmar, India can enhance its diplomatic influence in Southeast Asia and solidify trust in multilateral collaborations.

The path to resilient governance and security in the 21st century hinges on fortifying institutional frameworks, ensuring technological transparency, and enhancing international cooperation. For India, aligning its digital governance strategies with these global lessons will be key to overcoming the complex challenges ahead.

Humanitarian Diplomacy and Regional Security in an Era of Overlapping Crises

The geopolitical challenges across Asia, particularly in regions like the South China Sea (SCS), the Taiwan Strait, and North Korea, are inextricably linked to ongoing humanitarian crises in countries such as Sudan, Myanmar, Haiti, Syria, and Venezuela. These crises are driven by political instability, displacement, and resource constraints, and demand urgent global attention. While much of the world's focus has been on major conflicts like those in Ukraine and Gaza, the humanitarian disasters in these countries continue to escalate, with devastating implications for millions of vulnerable people. In Sudan, for instance, the largest displacement crisis globally is compounded by alarming levels of malnutrition and famine. Similarly, Haiti has seen over 7,00,000 individuals displaced due to gang violence, and in Syria, millions of children are exposed to landmines and unexploded ordnance.

In Asia, the second administration of U.S. President Donald Trump placed emphasis on regional security, putting the spotlight on the significance of multilateral alliances like the Quad and AUKUS, which share the burden of regional defense. This evolving security landscape is paralleled by shifting global trade dynamics, with intra-Asia trade expected to surge exponentially by 2030. Strategic responses such as Vietnam's, Malaysia's and Indonesia's to firms' 'China Plus One' strategy - designed to reduce dependence on China through the industrialisation of critical mineral sectors - are key to this shift. Similarly, the Philippines, with its youthful workforce and a steady GDP growth rate of just under 6%, faces the challenge of balancing its trade relations with China and the US while navigating regional security tensions.

For India, these developments hold substantial implications. As ASEAN countries continue to advocate for regional stability, India's participation in multilateral platforms

like BRICS, the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) becomes crucial. India's engagement in these platforms allows it to play a vital role in nurturing multilateralism and a rules-based trade governance system that ensures its interests are safeguarded amid a rapidly changing global landscape. Moreover, India's experience in disaster relief and refugee management positions it as a key player in addressing humanitarian crises worldwide. India's leadership in climate change mitigation can offer valuable expertise in addressing the compounded effects of climate-related displacement in vulnerable nations. India's growing role in regional trade and security arrangements enhances its ability to contribute meaningfully to humanitarian solutions through South-South Cooperation, offering both technical and financial support to crisis-affected countries.

As the region faces mounting instability, a pragmatic and collaborative approach to both regional security and global humanitarian efforts is essential for ensuring long-term prosperity. India, leveraging its strategic position and commitment to multilateralism, can help maintain stability in Asia while also advocating for a more inclusive and efficient global governance framework, particularly in the UNSC. The global community must prioritise underreported crises and integrate climate change adaptation into humanitarian responses, with India playing an integral role in ensuring that the needs of displaced populations and vulnerable groups remain a priority on the international stage.

Navigating the Great Power Triangle: US, EU, China, and India's Strategic Balancing Act

The experts at the annual meet up ventured into the exploration of the dynamic and evolving relationships among the US, the EU, and China, examining the geopolitical and economic tensions that shape global policies.

Central to the discussion was the concept of the *Thucydides Trap*, which suggests that when a rising power, such as China, challenges a ruling power like the US, the likelihood of conflict increases. Economically, the EU-China trade reached around €800 billion in 2023, with Europe facing a substantial trade deficit, contrasting sharply with the US-EU trade, where the EU maintains a modest surplus. Such imbalances suggest that while the EU has a significant role to play, it must carefully balance its interests between the US and China.

For India, the dynamics between the US, EU, and China offer both opportunities and challenges. The EU's strategic autonomy is particularly significant, as it navigates its relationships with both the US and China. India, like Europe, can draw lessons from the EU's approach of maintaining independence while strategically engaging with these powers. China's leadership in critical sectors such as renewable energy technologies, including solar and wind, presents India with both competition and opportunities for collaboration in the green transition. Also, India's role in the Indo-Pacific can act as a bridge, strengthening its ties with the US and EU while simultaneously engaging with China in ways that advance its own economic and

geopolitical interests.

India can also work to amplify the voice of the Global South, whose perspectives are often underrepresented in international discussions, ensuring more inclusive and equitable global governance.

The evolving triangular relationship requires recalibration to prevent tensions from escalating and to maximise opportunities for collaboration. Europe's role as a middle power enables it to serve as a mediator between the US and China, preserving its strategic autonomy while engaging with both. For India, adopting a multilateral approach will be essential in strengthening ties with both the US and China, while simultaneously reducing dependencies by investing in critical technologies like semiconductors and RE.

The need for multilateral dialogues is paramount, with India playing a key role in advancing these discussions. Furthermore, the global community must prioritise the inclusion of the Global South in geopolitics, ensuring that international policies are equitable and inclusive. By addressing shared challenges, such as climate change and economic resilience, the US, EU, and China can work toward a more stable and cooperative global order.



SPECIAL SESSIONS



Strategic Statesmanship in an Age of Fragmentation: Migration, Multilateralism, and Moral Diplomacy)

In an era marked by seismic demographic transitions, geopolitical tumult, and tectonic shifts in global governance, several high-level dialogues at recent global forums converged on a singular truth: the world stands at an inflection point, where leadership must evolve from transactional maneuvering to strategic statesmanship rooted in multilateralism, inclusive development, and human dignity.

Governments are underprepared for the demographic shifts driven by modern migration. Whether caused by conflict, climate distress, or economic disparities, migration today demands a radical reframing from a perceived threat to a developmental tool. Experts championed models like circular migration and diaspora-led growth, while warning of the developmental vacuum left behind in conflict-ridden regions like the DR of Congo, where over 7 million people remain displaced. Rather than investing predominantly in border fortification, leaders at WEF's annual meeting advocated for multi-stakeholder approaches that prioritise peace-building, skill development, and visa regime reforms, particularly in the Global North.

In parallel, geopolitical heavyweights used their platforms to recast economic architecture and governance norms.



In his dialogue with WEF founder *Klaus Schwab*, Chinese Vice-Premier *Ding Xuexiang* positioned China as a standard-bearer of multilateralism and equitable globalisation. Celebrating the UN's 80th anniversary, Ding reiterated his nation's commitment to rule-based diplomacy, trade liberalisation, and technological equity; priorities that resonate closely with India's Global South vision.



Vietnam's journey, meanwhile, stood out as a paragon of post-colonial transformation.



Prime Minister *Pham Minh Chinh* outlined the country's 7% growth trajectory in 2023, fuelled by R&D-led industrial diversification, climate-resilient agriculture, and green energy ambitions. Its one-million-hectare plan for low-emission rice cultivation and its shift towards semiconductors and advanced electronics mirrors India's own ambitions for self-reliant, future-ready economic systems. With Vietnam being an ASEAN lynchpin, Indo-Vietnamese cooperation in clean tech, supply chain security, and AI innovation can yield high dividends in the Indo-Pacific calculus.

Finally, a voice from the heart of West Asia brought moral gravitas to the proceedings.



Qatari PM *Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani*, articulating his nation's role in mediating the Gaza ceasefire, laid out a powerful case for value-driven diplomacy. With close to all of Gaza's infrastructure decimated, the call for reconstruction was not merely logistical but was rather existential. Qatar's commitment to nuclear non-proliferation, humanitarian diplomacy, and dialogue with adversaries offers a template for India as it balances ties with Israel and Palestine. With Qatar also being India's largest LNG supplier, regional instability holds not just diplomatic but energy-security implications. India's expertise in infrastructure rebuilding, pharmaceutical diplomacy, and telemedicine could make it a frontline actor in West Asia's healing and rebuilding.

Taken together, the statesmen of each of the above-mentioned countries offer a critical insight: the world's fault lines, whether demographic, geopolitical, or climatic, demand more than policy prescriptions. They demand a reimagining of global cooperation. For India, this is an opportune moment to project leadership not through coercive instruments, but through developmental diplomacy, climate equity, technological pluralism, and normative stewardship. Whether through migration reform, digital public infrastructure (DPI), or peacebuilding, India's path forward lies in being not just a counterweight, but a co-architect of a more humane, sustainable, and multilateral global order.

Contours of Conflict and Cooperation: Reimagining West Asia's Future

In times marked by moral urgency and geopolitical poignancy, *Dr. Javad Zarif*, former Foreign Minister and current Vice President for Strategic Affairs of Iran, and *Varsen Aghabekian*, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA), both highlighted critical issues in the Middle East, offering valuable insights into Iran's shifting geopolitical position and the devastating humanitarian crisis in Gaza.



Zarif focused on Iran's evolving foreign policy, which seeks to move away from a threat-oriented security narrative to one centred on regional engagement, dialogue, and solidarity. He emphasised Iran's support for resistance movements such as Hezbollah and Hamas, positioning this not merely as ideological foreign policy but as solidarity with oppressed populations resisting occupation. *Zarif's* argument that resistance in Palestine would persist even without Iranian patronage challenges the simplified Iran-Israel binary

often portrayed in Western discourse. The VP also reiterated Iran's commitment to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), despite US withdrawal and ongoing sanctions, signalling Iran's strategic autonomy and the need for regional cooperation. He also highlighted Iran's internal progress, such as the appointment of female vice-presidents and ethnic minority governors, while calling for the creation of a *Muslim West Asia Dialogue Association (MWADA)* to build peace through mutual respect and self-determination. For India, *Zarif's* speech suggests the opportunity to engage in diplomatic dialogue and support regional stability, leveraging its ties with both Iran and the Arab world.

Meanwhile, *Aghabekian* painted a grim picture of the humanitarian disaster in Gaza, where almost the entire population faces famine, and critical infrastructure has been obliterated. Despite this, she presented a forward-looking *Gaza Reform and Rehabilitation Plan*, focusing on renewable energy, climate-resilient agriculture, localised healthcare, and digital education.



Aghabekian's blueprint provides an opening for India to leverage its expertise in renewable energy deployment, particularly through the ISA, and to offer innovative solutions in areas like digital health and agritech. India's success with microgrids and telemedicine platforms such as eSanjeevani could provide crucial support to Gaza's reconstruction efforts. Furthermore, *Aghabekian* reaffirmed the two-state solution as the only viable pathway to peace, aligning with India's longstanding position. This creates a unique diplomatic opportunity for India to act as a mediator, drawing upon its G20 and BRICS influence to champion a just resolution for Palestine.

There have been repeated calls for an urgent

need for dialogue and cooperation in the region. This provides India with a dual opportunity: to act as a bridge for regional diplomacy and to contribute substantively to the humanitarian and developmental needs of Palestine. This moment of geopolitical introspection presents India not just as a passive observer but as a proactive force in shaping the future of West Asia.

India in an Age of Disruption: Strategic Leadership Amidst Global Risk Polycrises

The *Global Risks Report 2025* unfurls a disquieting canvas of converging crises, ranging from AI-induced institutional fragility and ecological destabilisation to the resurgence of nuclear brinkmanship, ideological polarisation, and systemic economic recalibration. Within this volatile tableau, India emerges not as a silent spectator, but as a uniquely positioned actor ready to shape the contours of a reimagined global order.

At the technological frontier, AI has been spotlighted as both a harbinger of progress and a Pandora's box of societal disruption. The erosion of trust in institutions, worsened by disinformation and algorithmic opacity, poses real threats to democratic integrity. Yet, India's digitally native population of hundreds of millions of internet users and the government's push towards ethical AI governance signal a model for techno-democratic resilience.

India's leadership is further crystallising in the climate arena. The *Global Risks Report 2025* and voices like *Muhammad Yunus*, Chief Adviser of the Interim Government of Bangladesh, converge on the urgency of ecological stewardship. *Yunus's 'three zeros'* - zero poverty, zero unemployment, and zero net carbon emissions - resonate deeply with India's developmental ethos. With over ₹32.61 lakh crore disbursed through the Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana and scores of rural women empowered via Self-Help Groups

(SHGs), India's bottom-up ecosystem embodies social business at scale. Simultaneously, green innovation, courtesy the National Green Hydrogen Mission, FAME-II, and AI-integrated smart agriculture is reflective of the country's dual commitment to decarbonisation and inclusive growth.

However, the spectre of nuclear escalation looms ominously. The destabilising effects of unchecked arsenals, from China's tripling of warheads to Iran's weapons-grade enrichment capacity. The militarisation of AI in nuclear decision-making, epitomised by the US's *El Capitan* supercomputer, raises existential questions about machine-speed deterrence. India's approach, founded on credible minimum deterrence and diplomatic multilateralism, must now evolve into a New Delhi Consensus that happens to anchor in strategic prudence, cost-efficiency, and normative leadership.

On the economic front, India's recalibration within an increasingly fragmented trade order is yielding dividends. The PLI schemes, significant FDI inflows and strategic routes like the *India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC)* exemplify the country's rise as a resilient node in global value chains. However, amid this technocratic rise, Argentine President *Javier Milei* offered a provocative ideological foil - championing radical fiscal discipline, minimal state intervention, and classical liberalism as the pathway to national revival. His elimination of Argentina's fiscal deficit and the dramatic fall of inflation nearly 55%, sparked introspection over the ideological orientation of welfare states like India's, where the fiscal deficit remains at 4.4% of GDP.

Finally, the intertwined futures of India and Africa were discussed at the annual congregation in the context of demographic bulges, insurgency, and development diplomacy. India's \$83 billion in bilateral trade with Africa last year and its DPI exports, especially Aadhaar and UPI, demonstrate its

potential as a South-South interlocutor, exporting a governance model grounded in democratic legitimacy, frugal innovation, and institutional capacity-building.

The ‘*Global Risks 2025*’ landscape is fraught with peril but equally rich with potential. For India, this is not a time for reticence but for responsible ambition. By harmonising technological assertiveness, climate stewardship, fiscal discipline, and multilateral diplomacy, India can become not just the world’s fastest-growing economy, but also its most stabilising force. As disillusionment deepens globally, India’s promise lies in offering not a utopia, but a coherent, plural, and sustainable alternative.

Reclaiming Trust: Democracy, Development, and India’s Normative Leadership

The conjoined insights from leaders across the board at the annual meeting converged on a singular, urgent truth: *the erosion of public trust*, whether in democratic institutions or in the global development order, poses an existential threat to both governance and progress in this century. Across geographies, from established democracies like the United States and India to emerging economies in Latin America and Africa, a malaise of disenchantment is palpable. According to the [2025 Edelman Trust Barometer](#), only 46% of Americans and a meagre 43% of Germans express trust in their governments, exhibiting a crisis of legitimacy in some of the world’s most influential democracies. In a world grappling with tectonic disruptions, 61% of the global population now harbours a moderate to high sense of grievance against institutional elites, believing that ‘*business and government serve only the select few*’. Meanwhile, trust inequality festers, with double-digit disparities between high- and low-income respondents in 22 countries, undermining the very premise of equitable governance. The cumulative consequence of this disillusionment is a surging cynicism; 67% believe the wealthy fail to pay their fair share

of taxes, and 40% of young adults now approve of hostile activism as a viable recourse to systemic inertia.

At the heart of this trust deficit lies a perfect storm of misinformation, opaque institutions, grievance-based politics, and constricted civic space, all of which are especially corrosive in democracies with large youth populations. In India, for instance, where digital transformation has intersected with a burgeoning Gen Z electorate, most question the legitimacy of electoral outcomes, with only a select few endorsing violence as a valid mode of political expression. This disillusionment parallels the Global South’s growing frustration with a skewed development paradigm. Despite housing over [6 billion](#) people in middle-income nations, these countries remain tethered to a donor-recipient hierarchy that frequently falls short; epitomised by the developed world’s failure to honour its \$100 billion annual climate finance pledge, and the glaring \$4.5 trillion annual SDG financing gap.

India emerges at this crossroads not merely as a stakeholder but as a potential normative leader. Its growth is undergirded by a thriving digital economy and green infrastructure investments, positioning it as a beacon for plural, participatory, and planet-sensitive development. This economic dynamism must be matched by democratic deepening. Countries like India must resist the temptation to emulate authoritarian digital laws and instead champion civic literacy, protect dissenting voices and harness digital public goods to safeguard deliberative democracy. Concurrently, Global South nations ought to articulate autonomous visions of modernity, leveraging instruments like blended finance, green bonds, and innovations such as the DPI stack to close systemic gaps.

Trust is no longer a rhetorical ideal but a structural necessity for governance and equitable development. India must lead globally through *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*.



A satellite image of the Earth at night, showing the illuminated landmasses against the dark background of space. The Indian subcontinent is prominently featured in the lower center, glowing with yellow and orange light from city lights. The surrounding oceans and other landmasses are also visible, though less brightly lit. A semi-transparent grey rounded rectangle is overlaid on the top left, containing the title text.

GOING FORWARD: IMPLICATIONS FOR INDIA

Strategising Sovereignty, Sustainability, and Synergy in the Intelligent Age

The world is pirouetting into the *Intelligent Age* - a period defined by the rapid coalescence of AI, climate imperatives, and geo-economic fragmentation - India must undertake a thoughtful recalibration of its policy architecture to remain not merely a participant, but a pace-setter in this unfolding global theatre. The deliberations at the WEF Annual Meeting 2025 set an urgent imperative - to harmonise our demographic dividend, technological prowess, and moral authority into a coherent strategy of inclusive modernity. In this regard, several recalibrations are in order.

First, India must institutionalise a *National AI Reskilling and Redeployment Strategy*, given that hundreds of Indian workers will require skill augmentation by 2030 to remain relevant in a labour market increasingly mediated by intelligent machines. The IMF has already warned that 40% of global jobs are vulnerable to AI disruption, most of which will be subject to augmentation rather than obliteration. This necessitates the integration of next-generation technologies into India's skilling programmes through AI-enabled adaptive learning platforms and digital credentialing.

Second, the contours of industrial sovereignty must be redrawn in light of the semiconductor, cyber, and crypto realignments. While India's Semicon India Programme has initiated a long-overdue shift towards chip sovereignty, the nation must now expand into upstream domains such as design innovation, fabless ecosystems, and supply chain de-risking to reduce dependence on East Asian chokepoints. In the digital domain, the Digital India Act and IndiaAI Mission must together evolve into a governance superstructure that ensures ethical interoperability, mitigates algorithmic bias, and builds public trust. Likewise, India's ambivalence toward digital assets must give way to some kind of tokenised asset regulation framework that'd

be meant for reconciling fiscal prudence with crypto innovation - especially as global tokenisation crossed the \$200 billion threshold last year.

Third, India must position itself globally as a normative architect of the *Intelligent Age*, leveraging its moral capital and institutional ingenuity to offer scalable, ethical, and inclusive development pathways. India's Aadhaar-enabled DPI stack is now being emulated by countries across Africa and Latin America, elevating India as a vanguard of digital sovereignty and interoperability. This unique Indian model of '*frugal techno-democracy*' can serve as the fulcrum of a *Global South Digital Compact*, championing open APIs, identity verification, and mobile-first banking in regions still grappling with over a billion people unbanked globally. Furthermore, India must not merely ride the AI wave but steer it, offering a middle path between Silicon Valley excess and Beijing-style techno-authoritarianism.

In parallel, India's climate diplomacy must evolve from rhetorical grandeur to green realism. The *National Green Hydrogen Mission* places India at the cusp of a hydrogen-led decarbonisation arc. However, this must be matched with multilateral leadership in forums like the ISA and *Glasgow Financial Alliance for Net Zero* (GFANZ), where India can advocate for blended finance, concessional lending, and debt-for-climate swaps to operationalise the infrastructure and climate finance gap by 2030. Simultaneously, India must champion *climate-tech co-development corridors* with ASEAN, Africa, and Latin America to proliferate technologies like carbon capture, SMRs, and AI-driven climate modelling.

Finally, the imperatives of regional cooperation within South Asia can no longer be subordinated to geopolitics. India must propose a *South Asian Digital and Green Compact* under the aegis of BIMSTEC or a revitalised SAARC 2.0. Such a compact would

prioritise cross-border digital IDs, interoperable payment systems, green energy trade, and a common climate fund. Given that India imports lithium-ion batteries and aspires to become a hub for EV manufacturing, a subregional EV battery value chain - incorporating Bhutanese hydropower, Bangladeshi labour, and Sri Lankan logistics - can promote circular economy integration and reduce dependencies on China. Worth mentioning is India's pharmaceutical might - worth a whopping \$50 billion - could be leveraged to create a *South Asia Vaccine and Diagnostics Alliance*, particularly for diseases like HIV, where novel treatments such as Lenacapavir, priced at unrealistically high

rates in the West, remain unaffordable to the region's most vulnerable populations.

The 2025 Davos-Klosters event has provided not merely a mirror to the world's anxieties, but a map of its aspirations. For India, the Intelligent Age represents not a technological endgame, but a moral and strategic opportunity. It is an invitation to reimagine growth as both equitable and exponential, sovereignty as both digital and green, and leadership as both national and planetary. If India acts with foresight and resolve, it can emerge not just as a stakeholder, but as a shaper of civilisation's next chapter.



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Reimagining India's Strategic Trajectory Through the Prism of Davos

The World Economic Forum's 2025 Annual Meeting, with its prescient theme *Collaboration for the Intelligent Age*, served not merely as a conclave of elites, but as a crucible wherein the aspirations, anxieties, and actionable agendas of a world in flux were intellectually interrogated. For India, a nation on the brink of demographic crescendo and technological ascent, the discussions at Davos were not just diplomatically symbolic, they were profoundly consequential. The deliberations reaffirmed that global cooperation in the Intelligent Age is not a utopian aspiration but a policy necessity. Whether in the realm of AI governance, sustainable finance, or inclusive digital economies, India's future policy trajectories must now be framed in consonance with the tectonic shifts highlighted at Davos. The forum's five thematic pillars - trust, growth, human capital, planetary stewardship and intelligent industry - offered India a panoramic blueprint to embed resilience, equity, and sustainability into its policy genome.

India's potential to emerge as a lodestar in this new era lies in its rare confluence of digital infrastructure, youth-driven innovation, and

normative leadership. With the digital economy a promising cornerstone of growth and development, India's UPI-led DPI model has positioned it as a global exemplar of tech-enabled inclusion. Simultaneously, India's vast talent pool and burgeoning startup ecosystem offer it the chance to not merely participate in but help script the global AI narrative. On the sustainability front, India's policy leadership has begun recalibrating growth through an ecological lens. Although, given the vast green finance gap, blended finance mechanisms, sovereign green bonds, and SEBI-led ESG taxonomies must be scaled and deepened. Equally crucial are governance reforms that re-embed trust in institutions. India's democratic model must exemplify a governance ethic that is transparent, participatory, and digitally empowered.

Thus, the WEF'25 summit offered India a rarefied opportunity to reposition itself not as a reactive rule-taker but as a proactive rule-shaper in the evolving global order. By aligning domestic priorities with global best practices in tech governance, climate innovation, and inclusive economics, India can architect an Intelligent Age that is not just smart, but also just. In this critical moment of transition, it is not merely a matter of economic ambition, but of civilisational responsibility.

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