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INDIA, THE BEAUTIFUL — BUT FIRST, INDIA THE FUNCTIONAL

- India is a land of extraordinary contrasts and unmatched **diversity**. Snow-capped mountains, tropical beaches, ancient monuments, and modern cities coexist within one nation, giving it immense tourism **potential**.
- Yet this richness presents a **paradox**: despite its scale and appeal, India attracts far fewer foreign tourists than expected.
- With only 5.6 million foreign tourist arrivals by August 2025, India trails significantly behind smaller nations.
- Tourism today is defined not merely by attractions but by the quality of the **experience**, an area where India must improve to compete globally.

The Three Core Challenges: Image, Infrastructure, and India Itself

- **Image: The Battle of Perception**
 - India's global perception is often shaped by concerns over **safety**, especially for women, poor **sanitation**, scams, and bureaucratic hurdles.
 - Tourists seek reassurance and consistency, qualities that successful destinations carefully cultivate.
 - Promoting Spiritual India, Adventure India, Luxury India, and Cultural India through clearly defined circuits can help target different global audiences with precision and clarity.
- **Infrastructure: The Foundation of Tourist Experience**
 - Strong **infrastructure** is the backbone of tourism. Airports, immigration counters, roads, signage, internet access, and clean public facilities shape first impressions.
 - In India, weak last-mile **connectivity**, poor signage, and inconsistent maintenance often undermine even premium hospitality offerings.
 - Improving transport, heritage-site upkeep, digital museums, and **accessibility** is essential for enhancing tourist satisfaction and value for money.

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- **India Itself: Scale, Service, and Social Challenges**
 - India's vastness can overwhelm visitors. Dense **crowds**, noise, inconsistent service standards, and the presence of touts and scammers reduce comfort and erode **trust**.
 - These issues are worsened by a shortage of trained hospitality staff, driven by the lack of **professionalisation** in tourism careers.
 - **Immigration** procedures also influence visitor experience. Despite e-visas, India ranks low on ease-of-travel indices.

Strategies for Reform: Fixing the Tourism Deficit

- **Rebranding and Targeted Promotion**
 - Tourism branding must shift from generic messaging to focused storytelling using digital platforms, immersive content, and global influencers.
 - Well-marked circuits with strong safety standards should anchor promotion.
 - **Infrastructure Development**
 - Public-private partnerships should support heritage conservation and transport upgrades.
 - Cleanliness, signage, and digital integration must be prioritised nationwide.
 - **Safety and Skill Development**
 - Dedicated tourist police, especially women officers, verified service platforms, and skill training can improve safety and service quality.
 - **Visa and Immigration Reforms**
 - Simplified visa processes, long-term visas for frequent travellers, and courteous border management are essential components of meaningful **reform**.
 - **Sustainability and Authenticity**
 - Long-term growth requires **sustainability**. Regulating footfalls, promoting eco-tourism, and empowering local communities will protect fragile cultural and environmental assets.
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CYBERCRIME AND THE CRISIS OF GLOBAL GOVERNANCE

- The signing of the **United Nations Cybercrime Convention** in late 2024 marked the first new multilateral criminal justice instrument in over two decades.
- Rather than signalling renewed **multilateralism**, the refusal of several major states to sign revealed deep divisions in governing **cyberspace**.
- For **India**, the Convention exposes a strategic dilemma shaped by shifting power balances, contested norms, and weakening global institutions.

India's Reluctance and the Limits of Global Influence

- India's decision not to sign reflects a careful cost-benefit calculation rather than disengagement.
- Unlike earlier cybercrime frameworks, New Delhi participated actively in negotiations but failed to secure acceptance of its proposals, particularly those aimed at protecting national **sovereignty** and control over citizens' **data**.
- This outcome points to a broader decline in India's influence over global norm-setting compared to its earlier successes in climate diplomacy.
- India's caution is driven by concern over preserving institutional autonomy in a fragmented system.
- While some powers seek to reshape global norms and others aim to preserve their seat at the table, India remains wary of commitments that could constrain domestic policymaking.
- The resulting divisions cut across traditional **alliances**, highlighting the growing complexity of contemporary **governance**.

The Growing Gulf Between Principles and Practice

- The Convention also illustrates the widening gap between shared **principles** and uneven **implementation**.
- Initial agreement focused on combating universally condemned harms, such as online child sexual abuse.



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- However, broad and imprecise definitions of cybercrime allow states significant discretion in expanding criminal liability, potentially at the expense of civil liberties.
- This pattern mirrors developments in the regulation of **artificial intelligence**.
- Across global forums, governments endorse common values such as safety and trust, yet translate them into highly divergent domestic rules.
- India's draft requirements for watermarking AI-generated content demonstrate how accepted objectives can lead to unusually prescriptive **regulation**, complicating cross-border cooperation and raising questions about proportionality.

Polycentrism and the Crisis of Multilateralism

- The Cybercrime Convention must be viewed within a wider crisis of global institutions. Financial retrenchment, institutional paralysis, and declining trust have weakened traditional forums.
- In this environment, global rule-making increasingly relies on smaller, overlapping arrangements, producing **polycentricism**.
- Multiple frameworks now coexist, interact, and sometimes conflict, placing heavy demands on state **institutions**.
- Cybercrime and cross-border data governance exemplify this trend. While there is broad agreement on goals, mechanisms differ widely, increasing compliance costs and testing national **capacity**. For countries like India, navigating this dense institutional landscape is becoming progressively more challenging.

Conclusion

- The UN Cybercrime Convention reflects not a unified digital future but a fragmented international order.
 - For India, maintaining strategic **autonomy** will require more than principled restraint.
 - It demands sustained investment in technical expertise, regulatory coherence, and the ability to engage simultaneously across multiple forums.
 - Without such efforts, India risks losing influence in shaping the rules that will govern its digital and economic future.
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WHAT IS NIPAH VIRUS?



- Nipah virus (NiV) is a **zoonotic virus** (it is transmitted from animals to humans) and can **also be transmitted through contaminated food or directly between people.**
- **Fruit bats** of the Pteropodidae family are the **natural hosts** of Nipah virus.
- In infected people, it causes a **range of illnesses** from **asymptomatic (subclinical) infection to acute respiratory illness and fatal encephalitis.**
- NiV infection is one of the **priority diseases** on the World Health Organization (WHO) R&D Blueprint because of its **epidemic or pandemic potential.**
- **Symptoms:**
 - Infected people initially develop symptoms including **fever, headaches, myalgia (muscle pain), vomiting and sore throat.**
- **Treatment:**
 - There are **no specifically approved treatments or vaccines** available for NiV infection, either for people or animals.
 - **Intensive supportive care is recommended** to treat severe respiratory and neurologic complications.

JALAJ LIVELIHOOD CENTRES



- It is a joint initiative of the **Namami Gange Mission and the Wildlife Institute of India (WII).**
- **Aim:** It is aimed at **integrating river conservation with sustainable livelihoods** in the **Ganga river basin.**
- Jalaj is based on the **circular economy model** where the local people will be trained in **sustainable livelihood practices** and mobilized to contribute to biodiversity conservation and clean river ecosystem.

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- **Features of JALAJ Livelihood Centres:**
 - The initiative **promotes community ownership** of conservation efforts while creating dignified livelihood opportunities, with a special **focus on women's participation**.
 - It is a concept to establish **symbiotic linkages between river and people**.
 - The Jalaj sites are established at **different locations in the Ganga basin** represent the culture and communities indigenous to that area.
 - These are established as holistic **Centres of overall community well-being**, conservation education and livelihood trainings.
 - It will have facilities for dissemination of the **information on aquatic biodiversity** conservation, **livelihood training and sale centres** for the products developed by livelihood trainees.
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NEW SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

- India's solid waste governance is primarily guided by rules framed under the **Environment (Protection) Act, 1986**.
- Solid waste management is a critical urban governance challenge in India, driven by rapid urbanisation, changing consumption patterns, and population growth.
- According to recent estimates, India generates about **1.85 lakh tonnes of solid waste per day**, of which nearly **30-40% comes from bulk waste generators** such as residential societies, commercial complexes, institutions, and government buildings.
- Despite improvements in door-to-door collection and segregation under flagship initiatives like **Swachh Bharat Mission (Urban)**, waste processing has lagged behind waste generation.
- A significant share of collected waste continues to be dumped in landfills, leading to land degradation, groundwater contamination, air pollution, and public health risks.
- Poor segregation at source has been one of the most persistent bottlenecks, increasing the cost and inefficiency of downstream processing.

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Regulatory Framework for Solid Waste Management

- The **Solid Waste Management Rules, 2016** marked a shift from landfill-centric disposal to scientific waste management, emphasising segregation, decentralised processing, and waste-to-resource approaches.
- Key features of the earlier framework included:
 - Mandatory segregation of waste at source
 - Responsibilities assigned to urban local bodies (ULBs) for collection and processing
 - Inclusion of bulk waste generators within regulatory oversight
 - Promotion of composting, biomethanation, and recycling
- However, weak enforcement, limited institutional capacity of ULBs, and the absence of clear accountability mechanisms diluted the impact of these provisions.
- This regulatory gap has been addressed through the newly notified **SWM Rules, 2026**, which replace the decade-old regime.

Mandatory Segregation Norms

- The Rules prescribe **four mandatory waste streams**:
 - Wet waste, Dry waste, Sanitary waste and Special care waste (such as batteries, tube lights, and e-waste)
- This detailed categorisation aims to improve recycling efficiency and reduce contamination.

Extended Bulk Waste Generator Responsibility

- Bulk generators are required to:
 - Process wet waste on-site wherever feasible
 - Obtain an Extended Bulk Waste Generator Responsibility (EBWGR) certificate if on-site processing is not possible
 - Ensure environmentally sound collection, transport, and processing
 - A **centralised online monitoring portal** will enable real-time tracking and enforcement.
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BARAMATI PLANE CRASH: AVIATION SAFETY GAPS EXPLAINED

A plane crash in Baramati that killed Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar has drawn attention to earlier warnings by a Parliamentary Standing Committee about gaps in India's civil aviation safety framework.

The committee highlighted specific vulnerabilities in the **non-scheduled aviation sector**, including private jets and charter aircraft. It noted that while this segment has expanded quickly, **safety oversight and enforcement mechanisms** have not kept pace.

Private and Charter Aircraft Safety Under Scrutiny

- **Concerns Over Maintenance and Safety Practices** - The Parliamentary Committee raised concerns about maintenance standards, documentation, and operational controls among non-scheduled operators. It noted that some charter firms operate with small technical and safety teams, which can weaken maintenance planning and oversight.
- **Need for Stronger DGCA Oversight** - The panel urged the DGCA to step up surveillance of private and charter aircraft through surprise inspections and more frequent, stricter audits to ensure compliance with safety norms.
- **Gaps in Operational Support Systems** - Unlike scheduled airlines, smaller operators often lack layered operational control centres to support pilots, especially during bad weather or diversions. This absence was flagged as a key safety vulnerability.
- **Mandatory Safety Management Systems** - The committee called for mandatory and fully functional Safety Management Systems (SMS) across all private operators, stressing that safety processes in the charter segment must be on par with scheduled airlines.
- **Flight Planning and Risk Assessment** - The report highlighted weaknesses in flight planning, weather assessment, and pre-departure risk evaluation in private operations. It stressed that alternate planning and real-time operational oversight should not be compromised simply because flights are non-scheduled.



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Aviation Regulator Under Strain

- The Parliamentary Committee flagged that the DGCA is overburdened, facing manpower shortages and expanding responsibilities that often force it into a reactive approach to safety oversight.
- It recommended strengthening technical staffing, improving training, and adopting data-driven, predictive risk assessment tools.
- The report warned that rapid fleet expansion, new airports, and rising aircraft movements require parallel enhancement of safety surveillance, or else the margin for error in civil aviation will continue to shrink.

ATC Capacity and Fatigue Risks

- **Controllers Under Rising Workload** - The Parliamentary Committee described Air Traffic Control (ATC) as the backbone of aviation safety and warned that controllers at busy airports are managing dense traffic without matching increases in manpower.
- **Fatigue and Human Error Concerns** - High workload, especially during peak hours and adverse weather, was flagged as a key risk. The panel noted that fatigue and stress among controllers can significantly raise the chances of human error.
- **Need for Staffing and System Upgrades** - The committee recommended faster recruitment of ATC personnel, better rostering to limit fatigue, and quicker modernisation of communication, navigation, and surveillance systems.
- **Redundancy and Airspace Coordination** - It also stressed the importance of system redundancy and smoother civil–defence airspace coordination to ensure safer and more resilient air traffic management.

Growth Must Not Outpace Aviation Safety

- The Parliamentary panel cautioned that India’s rapid aviation growth must be matched by equal, if not greater, emphasis on safety.
 - It warned that expansion without strengthening oversight, ATC capacity, and operator discipline—particularly in private aviation—could heighten systemic risks.
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