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Zooming in on what matters

An Initiative by the students of MA Public Policy (2025-27), IILM University, Greater Noida

This Month's Exclusive Read

If the state seeks to expand the Orange Economy, it must simultaneously invest in cognitive capital, strengthening public education, digital literacy, and critical thinking frameworks.

"Preserve and cherish the pale blue dot, the only home we've ever known.

Carl Sagan

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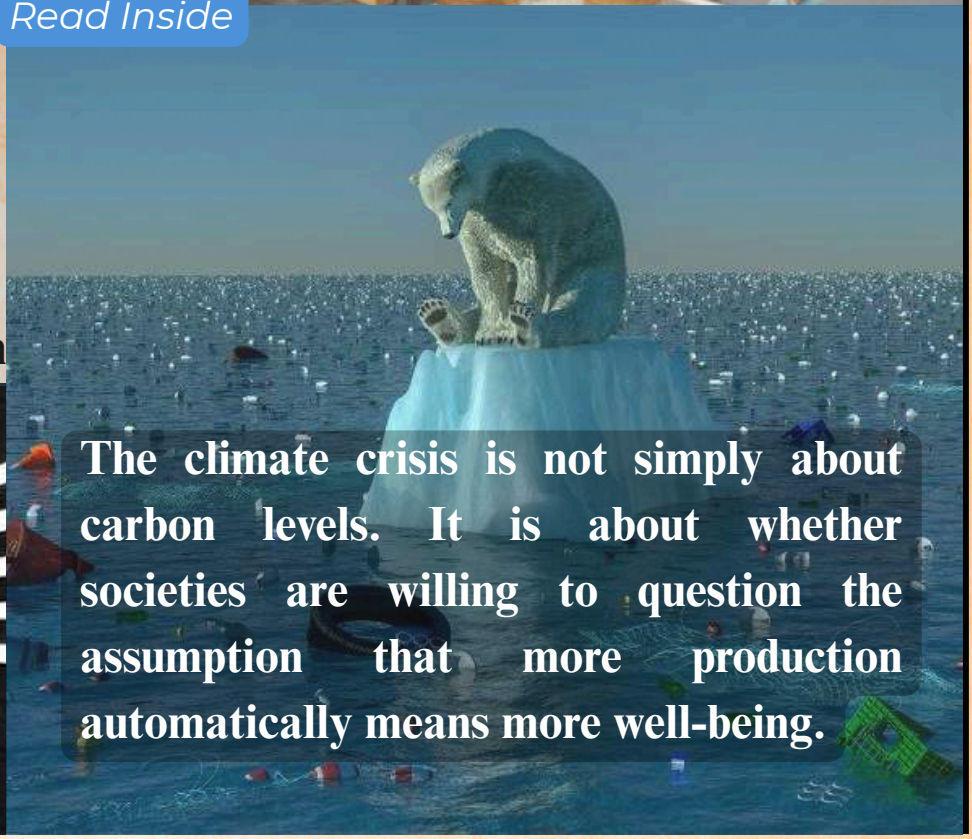

The climate crisis is not simply about carbon levels. It is about whether societies are willing to question the assumption that more production automatically means more well-being.

Read Next

Understanding and dissecting the 2026-27 Union Budget

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For a student of public policy, a national budget is rarely just a collection of fiscal targets and departmental outlays; it is a declaration of state intent. The Union Budget 2026-27, presented against a backdrop of global trade uncertainty and a maturing domestic economy, represents a profound shift in India's developmental DNA. Moving away from the "infrastructure-at-any-cost" phase of the early 2020s, this budget pivots toward what can be termed as Institutional Calibration. It is the first budget prepared in Kartavya Bhawan, and it carries that weight by framing its entire logic around three "Kartavyas": sustaining growth, fulfilling aspirations, and ensuring inclusive prosperity.

At its core, the 2026-27 fiscal roadmap is anchored by a historic transition in fiscal management. For the first time in decades, the government has signalled a move away from annual deficit obsession toward a Debt-to-GDP anchor, targeting a reduction of central debt to 50% by 2031. Yet, the true policy narrative lies in the government's pursuit of a "Productivity-Led Growth" model. By maintaining a rigorous path of fiscal consolidation (targeting a 4.3% deficit) while simultaneously elevating public capital expenditure to a record ₹12.2 lakh crore, the state is attempting a delicate balancing act. From the launch of Biopharma SHAKTI to the rollout of ISM 2.0, the budget suggests that in the race to 2047, the Indian state is transitioning from a provider of physical assets to a sophisticated architect of high-tech ecosystems. It is a fiscal gamble that bets on "Strategic Indispensability," the idea that by securing rare earth corridors and semiconductor IP, India will not just grow, but become an unshakeable pillar of the global supply chain.

The most visible lever in this Budget remains capital expenditure. At ₹12.2 lakh crore, it is not merely a number but a signal that the state continues to believe in public investment as the primary catalyst for long-term growth. Yet the composition of this capex reveals a structural evolution. Earlier cycles were asphalt-heavy: highways, freight corridors, ports. Necessary, transformative, but largely physical. The 2026–27 allocations increasingly tilt toward intangible infrastructure: semiconductor fabrication, research-linked incentives, advanced life sciences, critical minerals, and clean energy grids.

Through ISM 2.0, India is attempting to embed itself in one of the most geopolitically sensitive industries of the century. reduction of central debt to 50% by 2031 signals credibility. Semiconductor ecosystems are not built in budget cycles; they are built in decades. Fabrication plants demand uninterrupted power, water security, precision logistics, and a talent pipeline that begins in universities long before the first wafer is processed. The Budget's allocation signals intent, but its real test will lie in whether industrial policy is matched by educational reform, R&D spending, and regulatory coherence. Without these complements, capex risks becoming capital without capability.

Similarly, Biopharma SHAKTI reflects a quiet but significant shift in India's health-industrial strategy. Having dominated generics, India now seeks upstream value: biologics, vaccine innovation, complex therapies. In an era where supply chain disruptions can paralyse nations, pharmaceutical self-reliance is no longer a commercial ambition but a strategic buffer. If executed with institutional rigour, this sector could position India not only as a global supplier but as a scientific innovator. However, innovation ecosystems are fragile. They require intellectual property enforcement, venture capital depth, and university-industry collaboration that India is still in the process of institutionalising.

Beyond manufacturing, the Budget's emphasis on rare earth corridors deserves particular scrutiny. Critical minerals underpin renewable energy systems, defence electronics, and battery technologies. Securing these inputs reduces vulnerability in a world increasingly defined by resource nationalism. Yet extraction must coexist with environmental safeguards. A state cannot simultaneously champion sustainability and ignore ecological trade-offs in mining expansion. The credibility of India's green transition will depend on how carefully this balance is maintained.

On sustainability, the Budget reinforces India's long-term net-zero commitment. Investments in green hydrogen, battery storage systems, offshore wind, and EV infrastructure are not symbolic environmental gestures; they are economic hedges. Global trade is steadily embedding climate conditionalities. Carbon border adjustments, ESG compliance norms, and green financing criteria will shape market access in the coming decades. By accelerating clean energy capacity and storage ecosystems now, India is attempting to future-proof its export competitiveness.

Yet the sustainability transition introduces fiscal and social tensions. Renewable energy expansion demands grid modernisation. Electric mobility requires charging infrastructure density and battery recycling frameworks. Green hydrogen production is capital-intensive and technologically evolving. The state's ambition is evident, but ambition without administrative coordination risks diffusion. The challenge is less about announcing missions and more about synchronising ministries, states, regulators, and private capital into a coherent transition architecture.

Perhaps the most culturally transformative and politically intriguing component of this Budget is the articulation of the "Orange Economy." By formally recognising the creative and content industries as growth sectors, the state is acknowledging a structural shift in value creation. India's demographic profile, digital penetration, and platform economy have already made it one of the world's largest consumer bases for digital content. The Budget's signals toward animation, gaming, film production, and digital creator ecosystems indicate a desire to convert consumption power into production capacity.

In theory, this is strategically sound. Cultural exports strengthen soft power. Digital entrepreneurship lowers entry barriers. Intellectual property in media and entertainment can generate high-margin global revenues. The creator economy formalises previously informal digital labour markets. However, the expansion of content creation is structurally dependent on content consumption. For creators to thrive, audiences must allocate time, attention, and purchasing power toward digital engagement. In a developing economy where human capital accumulation remains uneven, this introduces a subtle tension. Attention is a finite national resource. Excessive digital immersion, particularly if skewed toward passive consumption, can dilute educational depth and workforce productivity. The economic multiplier of creative industries must therefore be weighed against potential opportunity costs in learning outcomes and skill formation.

The solution is not retreat but recalibration. If the state seeks to expand the Orange Economy, it must simultaneously invest in cognitive capital, strengthening public education, digital literacy, and critical thinking frameworks. The distinction between productive digital engagement and algorithm-driven distraction will shape the long-term returns of this policy direction. A country aspiring to technological sovereignty cannot afford intellectual superficiality.

On the fiscal front, the transition to a Debt-to-GDP anchor introduces both discipline and constraint. Targeting a to global markets and ratings agencies. It reframes fiscal policy as intergenerational stewardship rather than annual optics. Yet such consolidation narrows the space for aggressive counter-cyclical spending. If global trade uncertainty deepens or domestic consumption softens, the government's ability to respond expansively will be limited by its own anchor. This brings the analysis to perhaps the most understated tension within the Budget: the demand question.

While supply-side measures are robust, infrastructure, industrial policy, ecosystem building, and direct demand stimulus are also measured. Tax relief for the middle class remains incremental. Rural demand recovery is gradual. The assumption underlying the fiscal architecture is that public investment will crowd in private capital, which in turn will generate employment and wage growth, feeding consumption organically.

History suggests that crowding-in is not automatic. Private investment responds not only to infrastructure but to confidence in sustained demand. If productivity expansion outpaces purchasing power growth, the economy risks operating below potential. The Budget's success, therefore, hinges on behavioural response as much as fiscal arithmetic.

Finally, the emphasis on compliance reform for MSMEs and administrative simplification reflects the theme of Institutional Calibration. Growth in India is often hindered less by capital scarcity and more by regulatory friction. Streamlining compliance processes, reducing procedural delays, and embedding accountability mechanisms may not generate headlines, but they generate efficiency. In a country where small enterprises form the backbone of employment, such calibration may yield disproportionate long-term dividends.

In sum, the body of the 2026–27 Budget reveals a state attempting something ambitious yet disciplined: to industrialise in high-tech sectors, transition toward sustainable energy, formalise cultural capital, and consolidate fiscally, all at once. It is a strategy of layered bets rather than singular gambles. The risks are real: execution gaps, demand constraints, attention dilution, and global volatility. But the intellectual coherence of the framework is unmistakable.

This is not a budget designed to impress in a single fiscal year. It is structured to reposition India structurally by 2047. Whether the architecture holds will depend not only on allocations, but on institutions, and on whether productivity can rise without compromising the very human capital on which it ultimately depends.

Sustainable Development Goal 7: Is affordable and clean energy truly achievable?

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In 2015, the United Nations adopted the 17 Sustainable Development Goals as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Among these goals, Sustainable Development Goal 7 (SDG 7) seeks to "ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all" by 2030. Energy lies at the heart of development. It powers homes, hospitals, industries, and schools. Without reliable energy, economic growth stalls, healthcare systems weaken, and education suffers. Yet, almost a decade after its adoption, an important question arises: is SDG 7 realistically achievable within the given timeframe?

SDG 7 focuses on three key objectives: ensuring universal access to energy, increasing the global share of renewable energy, and improving energy efficiency. These objectives are interconnected with other global priorities such as poverty reduction, climate action, and sustainable economic growth. Energy access reduces inequality, creates employment opportunities, and improves quality of life. Clean energy sources, such as solar and wind power, also play a crucial role in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and addressing climate change. In theory, SDG 7 represents both a moral commitment and a practical necessity for a sustainable future.

There have been significant improvements in recent years that provide reason for optimism. Renewable energy technologies have become more affordable and efficient. Solar panels and wind turbines are now cheaper than they were a decade ago, making clean energy more accessible. Countries such as India have expanded renewable energy capacity through large-scale solar parks and rural electrification programs. Technological innovation, public–private partnerships, and growing environmental awareness have contributed to measurable progress. In many regions, electrification rates have increased, bringing millions of people into the formal energy network.

However, despite this progress, major challenges remain. Energy inequality continues to divide the world. Large populations, particularly in parts of Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, still lack reliable electricity. Even where electricity connections exist, supply can be irregular and unaffordable. Affordability remains a central issue; renewable infrastructure requires significant upfront investment, and many developing countries struggle with financial constraints. International funding and climate finance have not always been sufficient to bridge this gap.

Another serious obstacle is the continued global dependence on fossil fuels. Coal, oil, and natural gas still dominate energy systems in many countries. Economic growth, industrial demand, and concerns about energy security often lead governments to prioritise short-term stability over long-term sustainability. Geopolitical conflicts and fluctuations in global energy markets further complicate the transition. While renewable energy is expanding, it has not yet replaced fossil fuels at the scale necessary to meet global climate and development targets.

The 2030 deadline also raises concerns about feasibility. Transforming energy systems requires structural change, policy reforms, technological upgrades, and social acceptance. Such a transformation takes time. With only a few years remaining, the pace of change may not be sufficient to achieve universal access and a significant renewable transition worldwide. Political will varies from country to country, and without a coordinated global effort, progress may remain uneven.

Ultimately, whether SDG 7 is achievable depends on perspective. Technologically, the world possesses the tools needed to expand renewable energy and improve efficiency. Economically and politically, however, implementation remains uncertain. The challenge is not merely about installing solar panels or building wind farms; it is about ensuring equitable access, sustainable financing, and consistent policy commitment.

SDG 7 may appear ambitious, even idealistic. Yet its ambition reflects the urgency of the global energy crisis and climate change. Even if the goal is not fully achieved by 2030, the direction it sets is essential. The pursuit of affordable and clean energy represents more than a development objective it represents a commitment to justice, sustainability, and shared prosperity. The real test, therefore, is not whether the goal is perfectly achievable within a deadline, but whether the global community is willing to make the sustained effort required to move closer to it.

Did You Know?

India's push toward 20% ethanol blending (E20) aims to reduce crude oil imports and lower emissions, but it comes with trade-offs. Ethanol absorbs moisture and contains less energy per litre than pure petrol. In older vehicles not designed for higher blends, this can lead to corrosion of fuel components, engine knocking, and slightly reduced fuel efficiency. Even in compatible cars, mileage may dip marginally because ethanol burns faster than petrol. While the policy strengthens energy security and supports domestic biofuel production, its real-world impact depends on vehicle compatibility and engine calibration — making consumer awareness just as important as policy ambition.

FACULTY COLUMN

The Melting Crisis: climate change threatening the strategic stability of the Himalayas

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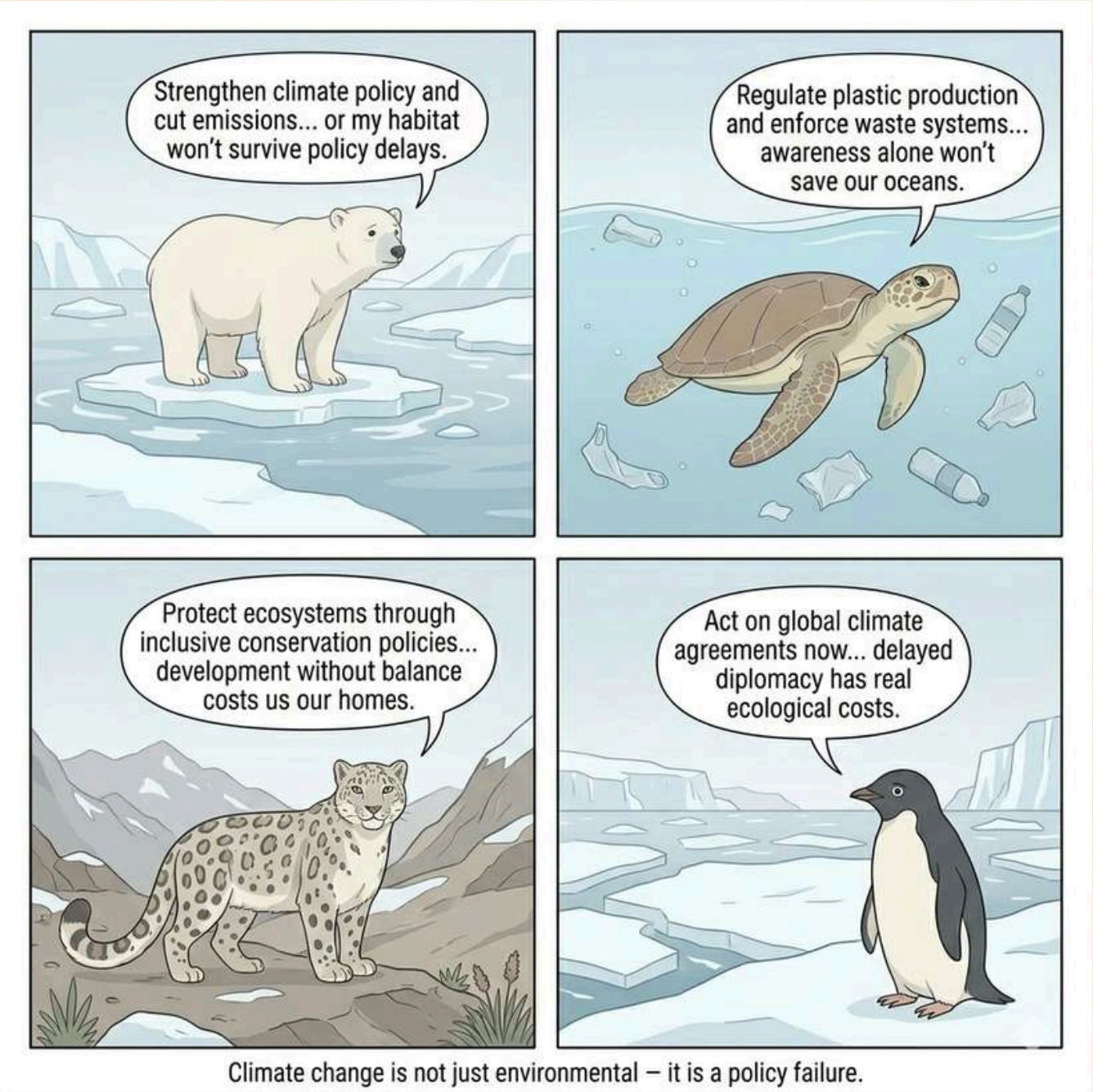
The Himalayas, also known as the “abode of snow,” are going through a silent yet severe transformation. Across the Himalayan states of India and neighbouring regions of Bhutan and Nepal, winters are shorter now, snowfall is declining, and summers are arriving earlier than ever before. There was a climatic rhythm across the country that guided agriculture, pastoralism, and cultural life, which has now been replaced by unpredictability. The changing weather is not merely an environmental issue—it is reshaping societies, economies, and public policy, not just in the Himalayan belt, but across the country. Snow, the lifeline in the Himalayas, once replenished glaciers, sustained rivers, and ensured water security for millions downstream. Today, a reduction in snowfall and rising temperatures is accelerating glacier retreat and disturbing the hydrological cycles. Springs that once flowed reliably are drying up in several Himalayan villages. Once known for their cool climate and winters throughout the year, many villages in the Himalayan region are now experiencing early summers and even heatwaves. Farmers report a decline in "snow," which is crucial for crops like apples, forcing many to shift cultivation to higher altitudes, which is not possible for everyone, leading to abandoned orchards altogether. The ecological stress has intensified the frequency and severity of natural disasters, even in areas where it was never possible earlier, according to geologists. Landslides, flash floods, glacial melt, and heatwaves have repeatedly damaged infrastructure and displaced communities across Himalayan states. The terrain's fragility makes it extremely susceptible to periods of intense rainfall, and soil erosion causes landslides and cloudbursts, which climate experts are increasingly connecting to global warming. Long-term vulnerability is exacerbated by the loss of snow, which also changes vegetation patterns, river flow, and soil moisture.

The crisis of the Himalayas highlights a dilemma of fundamental governance: how to balance development with environmental sustainability? In recent flash floods, we lost many hydropower projects, along with the settlements of the peripheral communes and tourism facilities. All of which are part of development and survival for the majority of the population settled in remote areas of the Himalayas. Now, the question arises: how to pursue infrastructure expansion, including hydropower projects and roads, while addressing the disaster-stricken strains? From a political perspective, the Himalayan crisis highlights a fundamental governance dilemma: how can a fragile ecology coexist with economic growth? The debate is no longer about being anti-development; it is about redefining development in ecologically sensitive regions. Viewed through the prism of public policy, the situation of the Himalayas must confront the complexity by addressing the need for responsive climate strategic planning that integrates geological sensitivity and long-term environmental risk into infrastructural decisions. Environmental Impact Assessments must move beyond procedural formalities and become rigorous, transparent, and science-based mechanisms. Second, adaptation efforts need to focus on local communities. Indigenous agricultural methods, community forest management, and traditional water-conservation systems all provide important lessons in resilience that top-down models frequently ignore. The complexity is added by the federal structure of governance, as environmental regulation involves coordination amongst the centre-state relations along with disaster management authorities and local bodies, and communication gaps frequently undermine the effective response. Working to strengthen decentralised institutions, specifically gram sabhas, in Himalayan regions could lead to context-sensitive

and participatory governance. The Himalayan communities play an integral role in preserving the environment and yet bear the disproportionate consequences, especially during the rainy season, and this calls for stronger climate finance mechanisms and equitable adaptation policies, as sustainable mountain development cannot rely solely on local sacrifice; it also requires systematic and structural support.

Today, the Himalayas are a powerful metaphor for the global climate crisis, and the diminishing snow cover is the sign of more than environmental decline—it reflects the urgency of policy reform and political commitment. The weather is changing, and people are adapting, migrating, and rethinking livelihoods. The critical question is whether public policy can evolve at the same pace. If governance systems fail to respond, the cost will not be confined to the mountains; it will cascade downstream to millions who depend on Himalayan rivers and ecosystems. The melting crown of the Himalayas is not just a warning; rather, it is a call to redefine progress—one that harmonises ecological limits with human aspiration. The future of the mountains, and perhaps of sustainable development itself, depends on how wisely that call is answered.

The question now is - can we answer that call with wisdom and urgency?



Climate change is not just environmental – it is a policy failure.

Social ecology in an age of climate crisis

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In an era marked by rising temperatures, collapsing biodiversity, polluted rivers, and expanding cities, environmental crises are no longer isolated ecological events; they are deeply social phenomena. Climate change is not just about melting glaciers or erratic monsoons; it is about livelihoods lost, migration triggered, food systems destabilised, and inequalities amplified. To understand this interconnected crisis, we must move beyond fragmented thinking. This is where the concept of social ecology becomes profoundly relevant.

Radha Kamal Mukerjee, in his seminal work An Ecological Approach to Sociology, argued that human beings and their environment cannot be treated as separate domains. For him, regions were not passive geographical units but living organisms; dynamic systems shaped by the interplay of physical, biological, economic, and social forces. Human communities, plant life, animal systems, and institutions coexist in a delicate balance. When this balance is disrupted by one-sided exploitation, the consequences ripple across both society and nature.

Today, that warning feels urgent.

Beyond Nature vs. Society

Social ecology challenges the artificial division between "environmental problems" and "social problems." Deforestation is not merely the removal of trees; it is the displacement of communities. Urban pollution is not just an atmospheric issue; it is a public health crisis disproportionately affecting the poor. Water scarcity is not only about rainfall patterns but also about governance failures and inequitable distribution.

It should be emphasised that regions develop characteristic patterns through adaptation in terms of spatial, economic, and social aspects. Human beings organise themselves in relation to landforms, climate, and available resources. However, when adaptation turns into domination, when extraction replaces coexistence, the ecological balance deteriorates.

Climate change today reflects precisely this shift. Industrialisation, rapid urban expansion, fossil-fuel dependency, and unregulated consumption patterns have destabilised ecosystems globally. What was once a relationship of mutual accommodation has increasingly become one of unilateral exploitation. The climate crisis, therefore, is not only a scientific failure but also a social and ethical one.

The impacts of climate change are unevenly distributed. Floods, heatwaves, and droughts do not affect all populations equally. Marginalised communities, informal workers, coastal populations, and agrarian households often bear the heaviest burdens. Social ecology helps us see that vulnerability is structured by social relations - class, caste, gender, and geography.

For example, urban heat islands disproportionately affect low-income settlements where housing lacks insulation and green cover. Agrarian distress intensifies when erratic rainfall patterns disrupt crop cycles. Climate-induced migration reshapes urban demographics and social dynamics. These are not isolated environmental consequences; they are systemic social transformations. Social ecology thus compels us to ask: Who benefits from environmental exploitation, and who pays the cost?

As a student of public policy, the relevance of social ecology becomes even more apparent. Policies are often designed in silos - environmental policy, economic policy, urban policy, without recognising their ecological interdependence. However, climate governance demands integrative thinking.

Public policy grounded in social ecology would recognise:

1. Interdependence: Infrastructure development must account for ecological carrying capacity.
2. Spatial balance: Urban planning should integrate green spaces, water systems, and biodiversity.
3. Social equity: Climate adaptation funds must prioritise vulnerable communities.
4. Long-term sustainability: Economic growth cannot override ecological thresholds.

Take the example of large-scale infrastructure projects. While they promise economic growth and employment, they often involve deforestation, displacement, and habitat destruction. A socially ecological lens would evaluate such projects not merely through cost-benefit analyses, but through long-term ecological and social consequences.

Similarly, renewable energy transitions must be designed with community participation in mind. Solar parks and wind farms, while environmentally beneficial, sometimes lead to land acquisition conflicts if local voices are ignored. Sustainability cannot be technocratic; it must be

participatory.

The ecological logic of urbanisation

Mukerjee's idea that regions are living systems resonates strongly in the context of modern cities. Urban areas today consume disproportionate resources while generating significant carbon emissions. Yet cities are also sites of innovation and resilience.

Social ecology encourages planners to see cities as ecosystems where transport systems, housing patterns, waste management, and green cover are interconnected. Policies promoting public transport, decentralised waste management, rainwater harvesting, and mixed land use are not merely administrative measures; they are attempts to restore ecological balance within urban regions.

Without such balance, cities become zones of environmental stress marked by air pollution, flooding, and infrastructural breakdown.

Sustainability as ethical commitment

At its core, social ecology is about the balance between human ambition and ecological limits. Sustainability is not simply about maintaining resources; it is about reimagining the relationship between society and nature. Climate change has exposed the limits of growth models rooted in unchecked extraction. Economic expansion measured solely through GDP fails to account for ecological degradation. Public policy must therefore move beyond short-term gains toward regenerative models of development.

This includes strengthening environmental impact assessments, encouraging circular economies, supporting sustainable agriculture, integrating indigenous ecological knowledge, and promoting climate justice frameworks.

Ethical governance requires acknowledging that nature is not an infinite reservoir but a shared inheritance.

There exist four ecological processes: distribution, invasion, succession, and accommodation within the sociological complex. These processes are visible today in climate migration patterns, urban expansion into forests, industrial encroachment on coastal zones, and shifting agricultural frontiers. The question is whether policy will respond reactively or proactively. Will governance continue to prioritise rapid expansion, or will it cultivate adaptive resilience?

Social ecology does not romanticise nature; it recognises that human intervention is inevitable. But it insists that intervention must be informed, restrained, and reciprocal.

Reimagining the future

As we confront accelerating climate change, the need for interdisciplinary thinking has never been greater. Environmental sociology, climate science, economics, and public policy must converge. Fragmented solutions will not address systemic crises.

The ecological crisis is also a crisis of imagination. We have imagined development as separation from nature rather than coexistence with it. Social ecology invites us to rethink that narrative.

For policymakers, this means designing laws that are ecologically sensitive and socially inclusive. For institutions, it means embedding sustainability into governance structures. For citizens, it means recognising consumption patterns as political acts.

Social ecology reminds us that both life and region form a unified system. The harmony between the "kingdom of nature" and the "kingdom of man," as Mukerjee envisioned, is not utopian; it is necessary for survival.

In the context of climate change, sustainability cannot be treated as an optional add-on to development. It must become the organising principle of public policy. When human systems disregard ecological limits, the consequences return through floods, fires, food insecurity, and displacement.

The challenge before us is not simply environmental management, but social transformation. If the twentieth century was about mastering nature, the twenty-first must be about restoring balance. The climate crisis is ultimately a test of whether we can move from domination to coexistence, from extraction to adaptation, and from fragmented governance to ecological justice. Only then can sustainability become more than a slogan, and climate action more than a promise.

"The ecological crisis is not merely a crisis of nature, but a crisis of how society chooses to live, organise, and value the world around it. There is no ecological justice without social justice; the two are inseparable threads of the same crisis."

-Mehak Bansal

The velocity of governance: what the “Dubai Model” reveals about Indian state capacity

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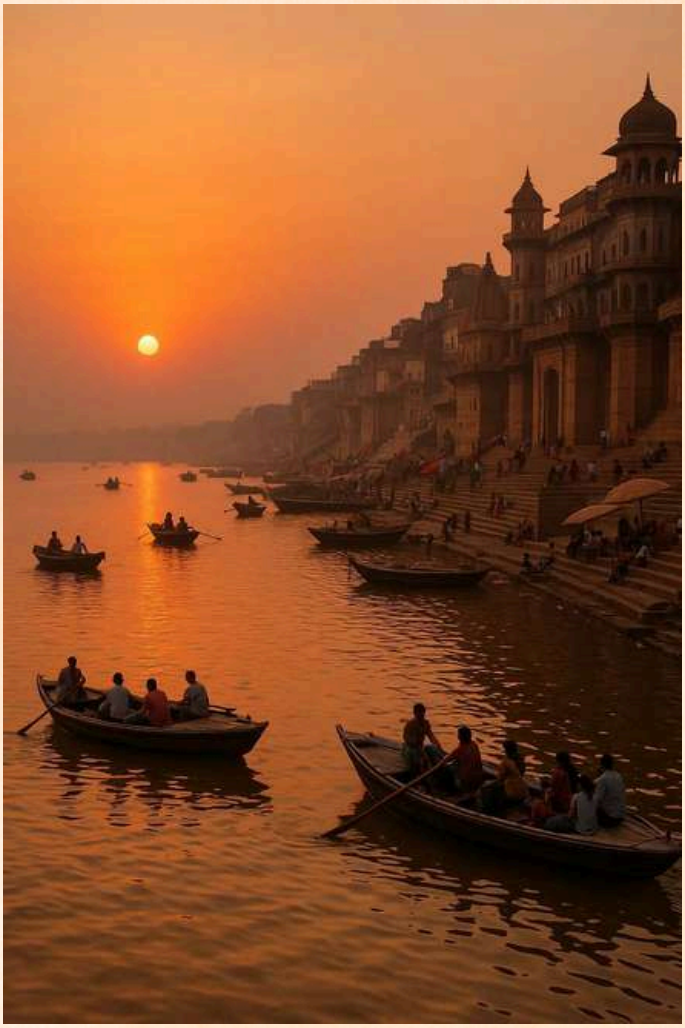
Travel often functions as an unstructured audit of governance. Some cities are overwhelmed with history, and a few with intention. Dubai belongs firmly in the last category. The experience of moving through the city reveals not simply architectural ambition, but administrative choreography. Airports operate with algorithmic precision, highways are seamlessly integrated into urban grids, public services are digitised and accessible, and regulatory processes appear deliberately simplified. The cumulative effect is not merely aesthetic modernity but institutional coherence. For a student of public policy, this coherence invites inquiry. It compels comparison. It raises questions not about whether India can replicate Dubai, but about what Dubai’s model reveals regarding state capacity, execution velocity, and policy alignment.

The divergence between India and Dubai begins with their historical foundations. Dubai’s transformation was neither accidental nor purely resource-driven. Although oil was discovered in the 1960s, its leadership quickly recognised that petroleum wealth was finite. Rather than building a static rentier economy, the emirate invested oil revenues into infrastructure that would outlive hydrocarbons. The dredging of Dubai Creek in the late 1950s signalled an early recognition of trade as a long-term anchor. The development of Jebel Ali Port established one of the most strategically located transhipment hubs in the world. The founding of Emirates in 1985 transformed aviation into a state-backed economic instrument rather than a transport utility. Over time, Dubai International Airport became one of the busiest global transit nodes, reinforcing Dubai’s position as connective tissue between East and West. Each infrastructural investment was not isolated but sequential, designed to compound advantages.

India’s trajectory emerged from a fundamentally different inheritance. At independence in 1947, the Indian state faced partition trauma, food insecurity, institutional fragility, and deep poverty. Its early decades were shaped by the need to stabilise democracy, expand suffrage, establish public institutions, and secure basic economic sovereignty. Five-year plans emphasised heavy industry and public sector dominance. Later reforms, particularly the liberalisation of 1991, opened markets and reoriented the economy toward

integration with global capital flows. However, India’s development unfolded within a pluralistic, federal framework that prioritised inclusion and legitimacy. Where Dubai optimised for agility and anticipatory positioning, India optimised for accommodation and democratic consolidation. This foundational divergence continues to shape administrative behaviour and execution capacity.

Infrastructure illustrates the contrast most visibly. In Dubai, infrastructure functions as a coordinated economic ecosystem. Ports support aviation, aviation reinforces tourism, tourism stimulates real estate, and financial services capitalise on trade flows. The skyline, crowned by icons such as Burj Khalifa, operates not only as an architectural spectacle but as a branding strategy. Urban design, visa regimes, digital governance, and transport networks align toward a unified objective: reducing friction for capital, talent, and visitors. Infrastructure is treated as a competitive asset capable of generating economic returns.

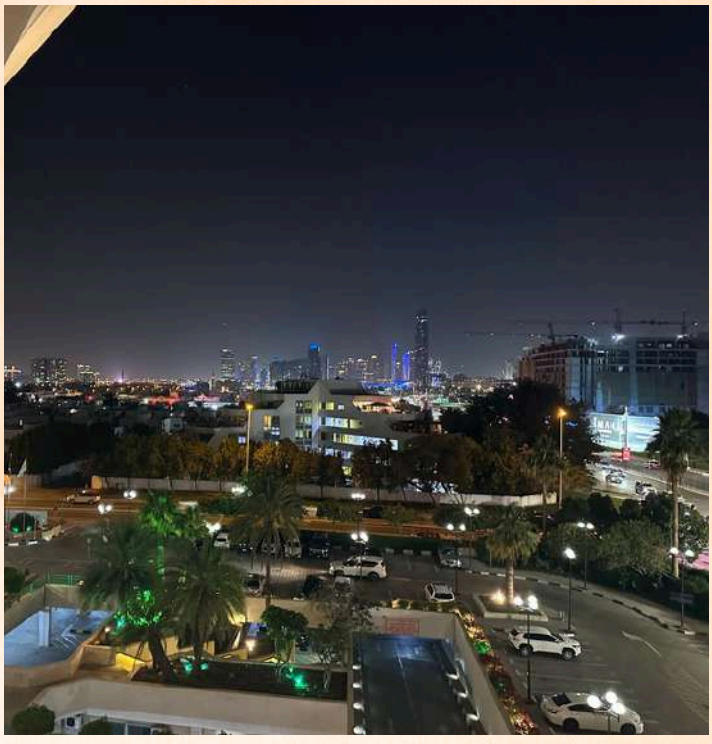


In India, infrastructure has historically been perceived as a developmental obligation. Roads, railways, and ports were built to meet domestic demand and social necessity rather than to proactively capture global flows. In recent years, capital expenditure allocations and multimodal connectivity frameworks have signalled a strategic shift toward integrated planning. Yet execution remains uneven across states due to land acquisition complexities, environmental clearances, judicial oversight, and federal coordination challenges. These processes reflect the safeguards of democracy, but they also introduce latency. The policy challenge for India is therefore not ideological but institutional: how to compress timelines without compressing rights.

Regulatory architecture further illuminates the difference in governance philosophy. Dubai has constructed modular legal environments that provide investors with clarity and predictability. Sector-specific zones operate under streamlined licensing regimes, tax stability, and dispute resolution mechanisms designed to reduce uncertainty. In such environments, simplification itself becomes an economic incentive. Investors respond not only to tax concessions but to administrative predictability.

India has undertaken substantial regulatory reform since 1991, yet complexity persists. Federal and state jurisdictions overlap, compliance procedures vary regionally, and policy shifts sometimes occur without long transition periods. While India offers market scale and demographic depth, regulatory fragmentation can dilute investor confidence. The lesson from Dubai is not the replication of centralised authority but the institutionalisation of consistency. Simplification, when embedded system-wide rather than confined to enclaves, can dramatically enhance state credibility.

Tourism provides another revealing contrast. Dubai, lacking ancient civilizational monuments, curated a narrative of luxury, safety, and global connectivity. Large-scale events, urban spectacle, and seamless visitor services reinforce this branding. The tourist experience is managed from visa application to airport departure through digitised systems and predictable infrastructure. India, by contrast, possesses civilizational capital of extraordinary magnitude. Its heritage sites, spiritual circuits, and ecological diversity far exceed those of Dubai. However, last-mile connectivity gaps, inconsistent urban management, and fragmented marketing often reduce the full economic multiplier of this heritage. The comparison underscores that economic yield is determined not only by resource endowment but by administrative execution.



A deeper layer of comparison concerns governance velocity. Dubai's centralised political structure enables swift decision-making and long-term policy continuity. Projects move from conception to completion within compressed timeframes. India's democratic architecture embeds contestation, judicial review, and public consultation into policy processes. While these features safeguard pluralism, they also extend implementation cycles. Yet democracy need not equate to inefficiency. High-capacity democracies demonstrate that transparency, bureaucratic accountability, and digital governance can coexist with speed. India's constraint lies less in democratic design and more in administrative modernisation. Strengthening performance metrics, digitising workflows, and harmonising inter-ministerial coordination could enhance velocity without eroding constitutional safeguards.

It is also important to recognise the structural sustainability of each model. Dubai's economy is outward-facing and heavily reliant on global capital, expatriate labour, and trade flows. Its agility is supported by a small citizen population and a centralised authority. India's growth model rests on internal demand, technological inclusion, and demographic scale. India's domestic market provides resilience, but its employment challenge is proportionally larger. Dubai must continuously attract external flows to sustain growth, whereas India must continuously absorb and productively employ its population. Each system carries vulnerabilities shaped by its structural conditions.

The broader lesson emerging from this comparison is not imitation but alignment. Dubai's success derives from policy coherence. Aviation, logistics, tourism, finance, and urban planning operate as mutually reinforcing components of a unified strategy. India often articulates sectoral ambition with clarity but struggles with cross-sectoral synchronisation. To move from a provider state to a performing state, India must institutionalise coordination across ministries and states, reduce compliance friction systematically, and treat infrastructure as a strategic instrument rather than a reactive necessity.

Dubai demonstrates what velocity can accomplish within a generation when governance instruments are aligned toward a common narrative. India's scale, democracy, and demographic depth render direct replication neither feasible nor desirable. However, the underlying discipline of execution, regulatory clarity, and infrastructural integration offers valuable insight. The future of the Indian state capacity will depend less on the originality of policy design and more on the credibility and speed of its implementation. If India can harmonise its democratic strengths with institutional efficiency, it will not need to mirror Dubai's model. It will instead refine its own, one that combines legitimacy with velocity and scale with coherence.

Climate justice: who pays the price for a suffering world?

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The adverse effects of climate change are often identified as rising global temperatures, melting glaciers, and extreme weather events. In a country like India, climate change is not just an issue; it also raises questions about how we can ensure equity and justice across classes, genders, geographies, and occupations.

For example, people who contribute less to greenhouse gas emissions are frequently more negatively impacted, with dire repercussions. A large proportion of the unorganised sector lives in tin-roofed houses and informal settlements located in climate-vulnerable zones. As a result, they are unable to access necessities like clean drinking water and adequate sanitation during heat waves and heavy monsoon rains, and they also suffer from the effects of extreme heat waves.

If we look at the rural and aggregate communities, excessive rainfall persists, resulting in even more crop failures and adversely impacting the lives of small and marginal farmers, as they are not covered by any crop insurance or savings buffers. Climate vulnerability leads them and their families into death cycles and even migrations.

Climate change is not gender-neutral. It impacts existing social norms and even the power structure. A gender lens helps us understand that the women in the climate vulnerable areas bear the burdens of the climate invisibly, like in extreme weather conditions, care work increases, such as managing food scarcity, taking care of children and the elderly, and even maintaining the household stability in those displacement settings. In areas where the AQI levels are high, women face higher exposure to indoor air pollution, and the greatest vulnerability is heat stress for pregnant women. Women in the rural areas are primarily responsible for fetching water; even during droughts, they walk longer distances to fetch water. In the climate vulnerable zones, both men and women face the burden of shared but unequal responsibilities, such as further resource collection, where women are primarily responsible, whereas men's involvement is really limited in the same way, and income generation is the social expectation of men as they are considered the primary earners, whereas women are socially considered to stay back and take care of the kids and elders, and mainly work in domestic management. This reflects the climate vulnerability that intersects with patriarchy, but it also interacts with economic expectations placed on men.

This also reflects that climate change leads to structural inequalities in the global system. Addressing climate change without focusing on climate justice deepens the social inequality, as India's per capita emissions are always lower than those of many other industrialised countries, yet it experiences more climate vulnerabilities. While industrialised nations used to account for the majority of greenhouse gas emissions, developing countries are now more vulnerable to climate change. This imbalance brings attention to the ethical and distributional aspects of climate governance.

To ensure climate justice, these policy frameworks can be applied:

1. The government should focus more on green budgeting, which ensures equity among all and focuses on sustainable development goals.
2. Carbon emission trading must be designed with redistributive mechanisms so that low-income households are protected from regressive price shocks.
3. Policies such as Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bheema can be integrated with climate data to ensure timely compensation and enhanced resilience for small and marginal farmers.

Climate change is not merely about rising sea levels and global warming, but it's also increasing social inequality among people. An environmentally friendly nation needs more than technological innovations; it requires ethical commitment towards justice, inclusion, and solidarity. Policy makers and even as citizens, the task should be clear. The climate action must be people-centric, not industrial-driven.

Running in place: climate change and the treadmill of production

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Climate change is often framed as a crisis of consumption: too many cars, too much plastic, too much energy use. Citizens are told to recycle more, switch off lights, and adopt "responsible lifestyles." While individual responsibility matters, this narrative hides a deeper structural problem. Environmental degradation is not merely the result of excessive consumption; it is rooted in the very logic of modern production systems. This is where the treadmill of production approach becomes a powerful lens for understanding the climate crisis.

The treadmill metaphor suggests a system in constant motion, running faster and faster, yet never truly arriving at sustainability. Modern economies are driven by an imperative for continuous growth. Governments seek rising GDP figures, industries pursue expanding profits, and political systems depend on economic expansion to maintain stability and employment. Growth becomes not just a goal, but a necessity.

However, this constant drive for expansion requires ever-increasing extraction of natural resources and greater use of energy. Forests are cleared for infrastructure, rivers are diverted for industrial projects, and minerals are mined for technology and renewable energy systems alike. Each cycle of production generates not only wealth, but also waste like carbon emissions, pollution, and ecological depletion.

The treadmill continues because powerful actors benefit from it. Large corporations gain profits, political institutions gain revenue and legitimacy, and investors gain returns. Even when environmental harm becomes visible, structural incentives rarely change. Instead of questioning the model of endless growth, policy responses often attempt to make the treadmill more efficient rather than slower.

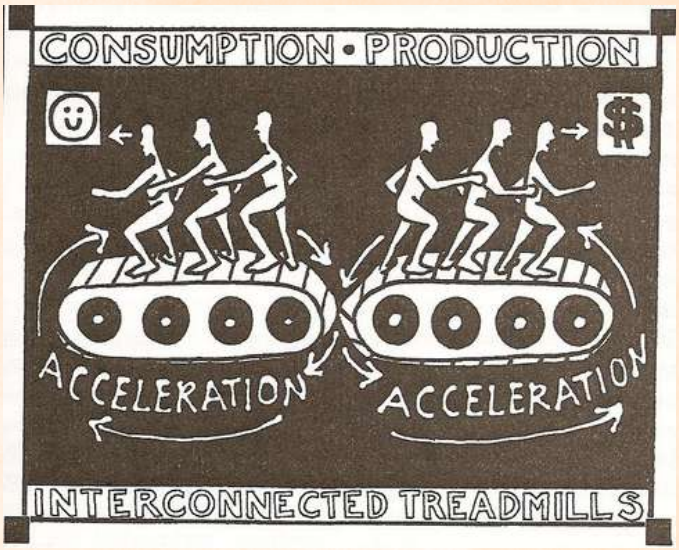
Consider the global shift toward renewable energy. On the surface, this appears to be a break from fossil-fuel dependency. Yet the expansion of solar panels, electric vehicles, and battery storage requires vast amounts of lithium, cobalt, and rare earth minerals. Mining for these resources has intensified in parts of Africa, Latin America, and Asia, often with severe ecological and social consequences. The system changes its energy source, but the logic of extraction and expansion remains intact.

Similarly, in India, large-scale infrastructure projects like expressways, industrial corridors, and ports are framed as engines of development. While they promise economic growth and employment, they frequently involve deforestation, land acquisition, and displacement. Environmental clearances are often expedited in the name of national progress. The result is a familiar pattern: ecological costs are externalised, while economic benefits are concentrated.

The treadmill approach also challenges the idea that environmental problems can be solved purely through consumer behaviour. Policy debates frequently emphasise sustainable consumption, encouraging individuals to buy eco-friendly products or reduce waste. But production decisions of what is manufactured, how it is manufactured, and at what scale are largely controlled by industries and shaped by state policies. Consumers may prefer environmentally responsible goods, yet they operate within markets structured by corporate strategies and regulatory frameworks.

This dynamic is visible in global climate negotiations. Countries pledge emission reductions while simultaneously expanding fossil fuel exploration or subsidising carbon-intensive industries. Economic competition between nations reinforces the pressure to maintain growth rates, even when ecological thresholds are breached. The treadmill does not slow down because no single state wants to risk economic disadvantage.

Another dimension of the treadmill is inequality. Environmental degradation does not affect all groups equally. Polluting industries are often located near marginalised communities. Resource extraction frequently occurs in rural or indigenous regions, while urban elites remain insulated from its immediate consequences. Climate change intensifies this disparity—heatwaves, floods, and crop failures disproportionately impact those with the least adaptive capacity.



Breaking free from the treadmill requires more than technological innovation. It demands structural change in how economies measure success. If policy continues to prioritise short-term returns on investment over ecological stability, environmental reforms will remain limited. Sustainable development must shift from maximising output to optimising balance.

This could involve strengthening environmental regulations rather than diluting them for investment ease. It could mean investing in decentralised renewable systems instead of mega-projects that replicate extractive patterns. It could require rethinking subsidies that encourage overproduction and redirecting them toward regenerative agriculture and circular economies.

The treadmill of production reminds us that climate change is not an accidental byproduct; it is embedded within a growth-dependent political economy. As long as expansion is treated as synonymous with progress, sustainability will remain secondary.

The climate crisis, then, is not simply about carbon levels. It is about whether societies are willing to question the assumption that more production automatically means more well-being. If we continue to run on the treadmill without altering its direction, we may achieve higher growth figures, but at the cost of ecological collapse. True sustainability will begin not when we run faster, but when we dare to rethink why we are running at all.

In conversation with Prof. (Dr.) Eugenia

At IILM University, an engaging conversation with Prof. (Dr.) Eugenia Yu. Vanina unfolded around the theme of Indian history, colonial legacy, and modern challenges. The discussion moved beyond timelines and events to examine the psychology of power embedded within colonialism, which functioned not only as an economic system but as an intellectual project that shaped narratives and cultivated doubt.

We reflected on how India was repeatedly told it lacked originality and historical agency, and how even classical texts such as the Ramayana and the Bhagavata Purana were often interpreted through external lenses that subtly displaced ownership of meaning. Over time, these repeated narratives seeped into consciousness, influencing how history was understood and internalised. Yet the arc of Indian civilisation reveals a different continuity, stretching from its epics to modern milestones, from the philosophical richness of Krishna's stories to Rakesh Sharma looking back at Earth and affirming, "Saare Jahan Se Achha." The central takeaway was clear: decolonisation is not only a political or academic exercise but a mental one, and India's path forward lies not in imitation but in the confidence to think, create, and define itself on its own terms.

Voters of India: A theatrical representation

Enacted by public policy students through Jumla Junction, the performance unfolded as a satirical yet unsettling commentary on the state of electoral consciousness. What began as humor gradually revealed a deeper discomfort, as each exaggerated character embodied a familiar reality — the voter swayed by WhatsApp misinformation, the youth distracted by aesthetics over accountability, the citizen willing to trade a ballot for a blender, and the loyalist defending hollow promises. Through sharp dialogue and layered symbolism, the play exposed how democracy weakens not only through corrupt leaders, but through compromised choices. It illustrated that when votes are reduced to transactions — exchanged for gifts, spectacle, or short-term gratification — governance itself becomes transactional.

The enactment served as a powerful civic intervention, reminding the audience that a vote is neither merchandise nor performance, but an instrument of long-term consequence. In doing so, it urged citizens to move beyond impulse and inducement, and to recognize that the true cost of "selling" one's right is paid collectively, long after the election banners come down.

It was performed by;

1. Dipanker Jha (Play Writer)
2. Ekta Grover
3. Ipsita Sachdev
4. Mehak Bansal
5. Varsha Rai

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