

# THE CIVIL LENS

*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*



**For the first time, private firms and joint ventures are permitted to build and operate nuclear plants under strict regulation.**



**There is some self-interest behind every friendship. There is no friendship without self-interest. This is a bitter Truth.**

**Chanakya**

*Read Inside*

If refugees represent displacement across borders, stateless persons embody exclusion within them.

*Read Next*

Environment,  
Sustainability, and  
Climate Change



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# Winter Session 2025: How Parliament Redrew India's Economic and Governance Map

EKTA GROVER

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For decades, Parliament's role has often been seen as distant from everyday life. The Winter Session of 2025 proved the opposite.

Held from 1 December to 19 December 2025, the session marked the sixth sitting of the 18th Lok Sabha and the 269th sitting of the Rajya Sabha, with 15 sittings over 19 days. What made this session exceptional was not just the number of Bills passed, but the breadth of transformation they represented — from taxation and insurance to nuclear energy, rural employment, and national security.

This was not routine lawmaking. It was a decisive shift toward the government's vision of Viksit Bharat — a developed, secure, and economically resilient India.

## A Parliament Shaped by Crisis and Reform

The session opened with a special discussion on the 150th anniversary of "Vande Mataram", symbolising national unity at a time when India's policy priorities are undergoing a structural shift. Alongside discussions on election reforms and supplementary grants for 2025–26, Parliament passed eight major Bills that together reflect a new policy direction: stronger regulation, higher compliance, deeper digitalisation, and strategic state intervention.

These reforms can be understood through three big themes:

- (1) Economic discipline and revenue reform,
- (2) Strategic security and sustainability, and
- (3) Social protection and institutional modernisation.

### 1. Economic Discipline and Revenue Reform

#### Manipur GST (Second Amendment) Bill, 2025

With Manipur under President's Rule, Parliament legislated on behalf of the state to replace an ordinance. The Bill introduced a digital track-and-trace mechanism, compulsory business registration, stricter reporting standards, and tougher penalties. It aligns Manipur's GST framework with the Central GST Act, ensuring tax uniformity and reducing compliance loopholes.

#### Central Excise (Amendment) Bill, 2025

This Bill raised excise duties on tobacco products, including cigarettes, chewing tobacco, cigars, and heated tobacco devices. With GST compensation cess nearing its sunset, this move ensures revenue continuity while simultaneously

discouraging harmful consumption. The sharp duty increases signal a shift toward sin taxation as a public health tool.

#### Health Security & National Security Cess Bill, 2025

Perhaps the most unconventional tax reform of the session, this Bill introduced a capacity-based cess on paan masala and similar products. Tax is calculated not on output, but on machine speed and pouch size. This system reduces evasion, enforces compliance through machine registration, and channels funds toward national security and public health programmes.

### 2. Strategic Security and Sustainable Growth

#### Sustainable Harnessing and Advancement of Nuclear Energy Bill, 2025

This landmark reform replaced two outdated laws — the Atomic Energy Act of 1962 and the Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act, 2010 — with a unified framework.

For the first time, private firms and joint ventures are permitted to build and operate nuclear plants under strict regulation. The Bill targets 100 GW of nuclear capacity by 2047 and supports India's net-zero by 2070 pledge. It also establishes a Nuclear Damage Claims Commission and ensures state control over nuclear fuel, striking a balance between growth and national security.

### 3. Governance, Welfare, and Institutional Renewal

#### VB-G RAM G Bill, 2025

Replacing MGNREGA, this Bill increases the rural employment guarantee from 100 to 125 days, while introducing digital safeguards like biometric authentication, geospatial monitoring, AI-based audits, and real-time dashboards. It shifts rural employment from fragmented work to infrastructure-led development.

#### Sabka Bima Sabki Raksha Bill, 2025

This Bill allows 100% foreign investment in insurance companies and strengthens consumer protection. It establishes an education and protection fund, enforces data security, streamlines claims processing, and empowers IRDAI with enhanced regulatory tools. The goal is simple: faster growth with stronger trust.

#### Repealing and Amending Bill, 2025

A classic example of legislative housekeeping, this Bill

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removes obsolete colonial laws, modernises legal terminology, and eliminates discriminatory provisions. It ensures that India's legal system remains clean, current, and functional.

#### **Appropriation (No.4) Bill, 2025**

This Bill authorised ₹1.32 lakh crore in supplementary spending for departments ranging from telecom and fertilisers to defence and higher education, reinforcing parliamentary control over public finance.

#### **A Parliament in Motion**

The Winter Session of 2025 demonstrated that Parliament is no longer just reacting to change — it is designing India's future architecture.

From green energy to digital governance, from fiscal discipline to rural employment, this session showed a legislature willing to modernise institutions while safeguarding public interest. These laws are not abstract policies; they shape jobs, health, security, and trust in the state.

In many ways, Winter Session 2025 was not just a legislative calendar — it was a policy blueprint for a developing nation stepping into its next phase of growth.



## Note from the desk of the Managing Editor

International Relations is often understood through treaties signed, wars declared, and summits convened. Yet, beneath these visible moments lies a quieter, more complex reality -shaped by ethics, memory, power, and human consequence. In an increasingly fractured world, diplomacy today is no longer confined to negotiating tables; it unfolds through borders drawn decades ago, narratives crafted in media spaces, technologies that redefine power, and economies that bind nations together even as politics pulls them apart.

The January Issue of The Civil Lens explores International Relations and Global Diplomacy not as distant abstractions but as lived forces that shape societies, identities, and futures.

From modern warfare that extends far beyond battlefields to the silent negotiations that prevent or prolong conflict, this issue looks at global politics through a lens that is both critical and humane. With ever-changing international dynamics, this edition invites readers to rethink diplomacy not as just statecraft but also as a continuous negotiation between power and principle.

Managing Editor  
Mehak Bansal

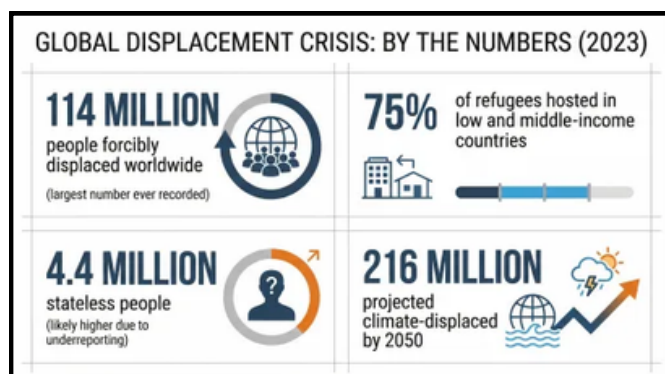


# Refugees, statelessness, & belonging: exploring displacement, migration, and the politics of who gets to belong in a world defined by borders

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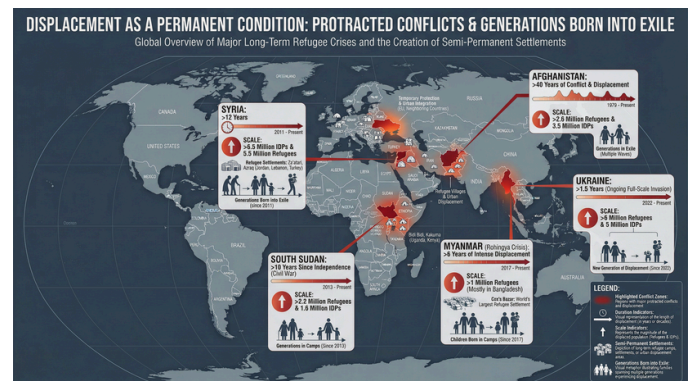
In a world defined by borders, belonging has become one of the most contested political questions of our time. Displacement is no longer an episodic consequence of war or natural disasters; it is a structural reality of the global order. According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), by the end of 2023, over 114 million people worldwide were forcibly displaced due to conflict, persecution, violence, or human rights violations, the highest number ever recorded. Behind this staggering figure lies a deeper crisis: not merely of movement, but of recognition, rights, and belonging.



## Displacement as a permanent condition

Traditionally, refugees were understood as temporary victims of extraordinary events, expected to return home once conflicts subsided. Today, displacement has become prolonged and often permanent. UNHCR data shows that nearly 75% of refugees are hosted in low and middle-income countries, many of which struggle with their own economic and political challenges. Protracted conflicts in Syria, Afghanistan, South Sudan, Myanmar, and Ukraine have created generations born into exile, where camps turn into semi-permanent settlements, and uncertainty becomes inherited.

Migration, both forced and voluntary, increasingly intersects with climate change. The World Bank estimates that by 2050, over 216 million people could be internally displaced due to climate-related factors such as rising sea levels, droughts, and extreme weather. Yet international law still lacks a clear framework for recognising “climate refugees”, leaving millions vulnerable to exclusion and invisibility.



## Statelessness: belonging without citizenship

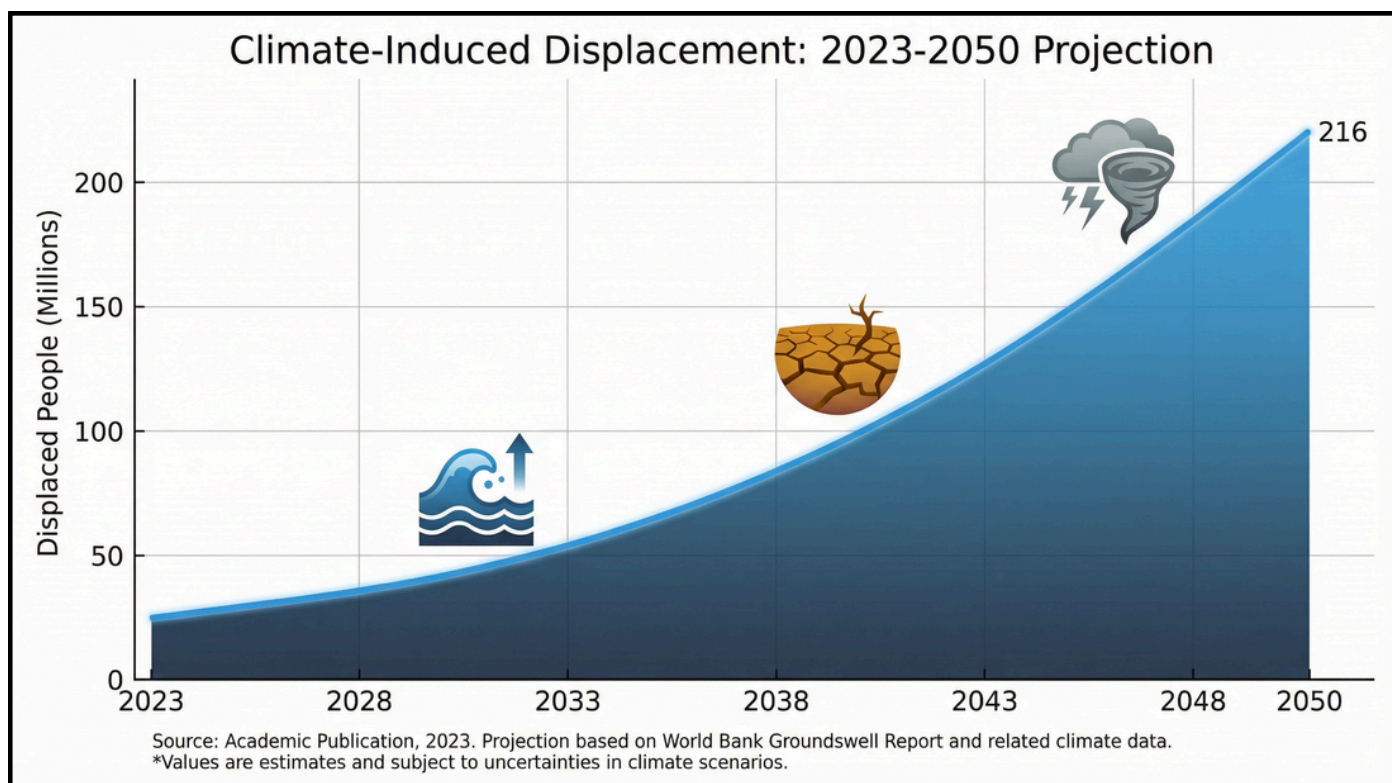
If refugees represent displacement across borders, stateless persons embody exclusion within them. Statelessness occurs when individuals are not recognised as nationals by any state, depriving them of basic rights such as education, healthcare, employment, and legal protection. UNHCR estimates that at least 4.4 million people worldwide are stateless, though the actual number is likely much higher due to underreporting.

Statelessness is often the result of discriminatory nationality laws, state succession, or political exclusion. From the Rohingya in Myanmar to minority populations in parts of Africa and the Middle East, the denial of citizenship becomes a powerful political tool—one that redraws the boundaries of belonging without moving a single border. In such cases, exclusion is not accidental but institutionalised, transforming citizenship from a legal status into a gatekeeping mechanism of power.

## The politics of who gets to belong

At the heart of refugee and migration debates lies a moral paradox. While international conventions—such as the 1951 Refugee Convention—commit states to protect displaced persons, national policies increasingly prioritise border security, deterrence, and selective humanitarianism. Wealthier nations, despite greater capacity, host a disproportionately smaller share of refugees, while tightening asylum regimes and externalising border controls.

Belonging, in this context, is politicised. Refugees are often



that emphasize radical inclusion—granting displaced populations meaningful access to education, dignified employment, and comprehensive social protection—do not merely serve the vulnerable; they fortify the resilience and economic vitality of host communities. When we treat inclusion as an investment rather than a burden, we transform the narrative of displacement from one of loss to one of shared potential.

More fundamentally, the modern migration crisis forces a rigorous rethinking of belonging itself. For too long, the "right to have rights" has been chained to the whims of the nation-state. In our hyper-interconnected world, belonging must be reimagined. It can no longer be defined by exclusionary nationalism or the accidents of birth; it must be grounded in a shared responsibility and a universal recognition of our common humanity.

### **Where does humanity live in global diplomacy?**

Refugees and stateless persons are not anomalies in the global system; they are its products. Their lives expose the ethical limits of borders and the fragility of rights tied exclusively to nation-states. As displacement becomes a defining feature of the 21st century, the question is no longer whether borders should exist, but whether humanity can exist meaningfully within them. The true measure of global diplomacy lies not in how effectively states guard their boundaries, but in how they protect those who fall outside them.

framed as economic burdens, security threats, or cultural outsiders rather than rights-bearing individuals. Media narratives and political rhetoric shape public perception, influencing who is deemed "deserving" of protection. The result is a hierarchy of suffering, where some lives mobilise global empathy while others remain invisible.

### **Migration, identity, and global inequality**

Migration flows reflect deep global inequalities. People rarely migrate without reason; they move because opportunity, safety, or dignity is absent at home. Yet global mobility remains highly unequal. Citizens of wealthier nations enjoy visa-free access to large parts of the world, while those from conflict-affected or poorer regions face restrictive regimes, lengthy asylum processes, and criminalisation.

This asymmetry exposes a central contradiction of globalisation: capital, goods, and information cross borders with relative ease, but people do not. The politics of migration thus becomes a mirror of global power relations, revealing who has the privilege of movement and who is confined by borders they did not choose.

### **Beyond borders: rethinking belonging**

The current global landscape demands a shift from reactive crisis management to proactive responsibility-sharing. Beyond the immediate provision of aid, we must establish robust legal pathways for migration that move away from securitization and toward human-centric mobility. Policies

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# Media, War and Truth

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War has always been a contest of force and power, but in this new age, it has become much more, beyond the missile and drone strikes, a parallel conflict unfolds in front of our eyes, here the conflict is not just for territorial gain, it's about narrative, about justifying action, whose story the world is compelled to witness and whose is allowed to ignore.

## The architecture of invisibility

Conflicts today are covered by media worldwide, such as Palestine or Ukraine, in detail with reporters from countries like the USA present at ground zero, this is because of the historical and the political significance of the said places, Palestine has centuries of history of conflict itself dating back to the initial christian crusades, and Ukraine is a profound member of NATO, this creates an embedded narrative gravitational field which ensures that the cycle (more on this later) includes these countries, in contrast, countries like Sudan and Myanmar don't get this recognition, their historical conflicts are often reduced to tribal conflicts or civil strikes, making it hard to the "free" western media to convert it into a story and present it to the audience.

Talking about geopolitics now, these media efforts are very obviously linked to the strategic interests of the West, the U.S.-Israel alliance and the Middle East's resource and trade significance ensure Palestine remains in the spotlight. Ukraine's role as a European bulwark against Russia aligns with NATO's strategic focus, warranting continuous reportage. In comparison, Myanmar and Sudan do have some vital resources and regional importance, but they are not central to Western power projection; they are marginalised when it comes to media investment.

## The vicious cycle

Imagine this, conflicts in places like Sudan are deemed low priority of western news outlets, this leads to the UN or any other international organisation which might provide aid to a certain extent also not talking about this, because it wasn't talked about to begin with, this in turn leads to these news outlets not giving enough resources to the reporters or the editors to report on said places, this leads to superficial reports with second hand information and it leads to poor reception in terms of viewership, media executives then cite this as proof of lack of interest and use this to justify their

initial underinvestment, consequently, the conflict remains institutionally invisible, its victims are rendered less "grievable", and the cycle is locked in, low priority justifies low investment, which produces poor coverage and public disengagement, which in turn reinforces the perception of low priority, but in reality, it's a cause and effect relationship.

## Digital amplification

Propaganda, once controlled via radio, then television, now being run at a level much more advanced than both of the aforementioned transmission technologies, I'm talking about social media, platforms that were designed to connect the world have now become a playground for psychological operations (PSYOP's) And information warfare, simplified, emotionally charged images and slogans go viral, disguised as memes, these go above the rational part of the mind and attack the consciousness on a deep level, embedding certain ideas into your brain, this is how China and Israel maintain their national identity.

## The erasure and censorship

The digital battlefield has an immense cost. Suffering itself becomes curated content. Out of context imagery can be used to provoke hatred, while necessary, contextualised reporting on atrocities can be suppressed by platform policies or state censorship. The suffering of some is leveraged for geopolitical points; the suffering of others is algorithmically suppressed or deemed not "engageable" enough for global feeds.

However, this creates a paradox; we now have more war footage (real) than ever before, thanks to citizens and journalists using smartphones, but it's our duty to filter out what we can. A video of Gaza being shelled will be released next to contradictory statements from military officials, leaving the public with no clear answer.

The wars of our time are being fought with weapons as well as with words. The former can justify the latter. As consumers and creators of media, we should not be passive spectators in this war; we should be participants. Our attention, our critical inquiry, and our refusal to accept simplistic stories are the essential defences in the struggle to ensure that truth, complex, painful, and indispensable, remains a casualty of war, and not its first and final victim.

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## FACULTY COLUMN

## Care Economy and Public Policy: Valuing Women's Unpaid Labor in India's GDP

Dr. PALLAVI MOHANAN, *Assistant Professor*  
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The invisible backbone of India's economy remains unaccounted for in our national income calculations. Women's unpaid care work which encompasses childcare, eldercare, household management, and community support constitutes an estimated 39% of India's GDP, yet remains excluded from official economic metrics and policy frameworks.

India's Time Use Survey (2019) reveals that women spend an average of 299 minutes daily on unpaid domestic services compared to 97 minutes by men. This translates to approximately 16.4 billion hours of unpaid work annually, valued at roughly ₹19 trillion which is nearly equivalent to the entire manufacturing sector's contribution. This systematic exclusion from GDP calculations perpetuates the undervaluation of women's economic contributions and reinforces gender inequalities in fiscal policy design.

The constitutional implications are profound. While Article 39(d) mandates equal pay for equal work, the invisibility of care work in economic accounting undermines women's claims to social security, pension rights, and economic recognition. This creates significant opportunity costs limiting women's labour force participation, educational advancement, and entrepreneurial potential.

International frameworks offer guidance. Countries like Australia and the UK have integrated satellite accounts to measure unpaid work, while Uruguay has established a National Care System recognizing care as a universal right and shared responsibility. India must adopt similar approaches through time-use data integration into policy planning, care infrastructure investment, and social protection schemes for care workers.

The path forward requires recognizing care work not as a private burden but as essential public infrastructure. By valuing the invisible economy, India can unlock transformative fiscal policies that advance both gender equity and sustainable economic development.

## STUDENTS AT CONFERENCE

## From Consultation to Change: Why Youth Belong at the Policy Table

The students recently participated in a Youth Stakeholder Consultation on Air Quality under the Air Quality Action Forum (Phase II), organised by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and supported by the Paytm Foundation. What distinguished this consultation was not merely its focus on air quality data or regulatory frameworks, but its emphasis on ownership—of air, health, and the future young people are set to inherit.

A recurring concern across conversations was the tendency to treat youth engagement as symbolic rather than substantive. Too often, young people are positioned as awareness tools—expected to amplify messages without being meaningfully involved in shaping them. This approach limits both impact and accountability. If India's National Clean Air Programme (NCAP) is to achieve lasting outcomes, youth participation must move beyond tokenism towards capacity-building, local leadership, and sustained community engagement.

What stood out most was the shift from abstract indicators to lived realities. Air quality is not experienced through rankings alone; it is felt in schools, workplaces, households, and neighbourhoods. Young stakeholders, by virtue of their proximity to these spaces, have the ability to influence peer behaviour, reshape narratives, and translate policy intent into everyday action.

The consultation reinforced an essential lesson: youth are not merely beneficiaries of environmental policy, they are stakeholders with agency. Recognising this requires institutional trust, access to decision-making spaces, and the willingness to invest in youth-led solutions. The work, however, does not end with consultation rooms.

It continues on the ground—louder, smarter, and closer to communities. Clean air action will only be sustainable when youth are treated not as participants for visibility, but as partners for change.

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# The New Commercial Realpolitik: India's Trade Pivot in an Age of Friction

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For decades, India's trade policy was defined by what could best be described as a "defensive crouch." It was a posture shaped by a long memory of colonial exploitation and a post-independence anxiety over economic vulnerability. This manifested as a fortress of carefully calibrated tariffs, a deep suspicion of multilateralism, and a belief that protectionism was the only shield for a nascent domestic industry.

But look closely at the flurry of diplomatic activity characterizing the start of 2026, and it becomes evident that the crouch has turned into a sprint. From the nuanced high-wire act with Washington to the historic finalization of the India-EU Free Trade Agreement, New Delhi is signaling a profound departure from its past. Trade is no longer the quieter, technocratic cousin of foreign policy; it has emerged as the very spine of India's global strategy.

This shift is neither accidental nor merely reactive. It reflects a maturing realization within the South Block: in an increasingly fragmented world order, economic integration is not a concession of sovereignty, but a vital tool to preserve it.

## Beyond the Rhetoric of Alignment

The India-US trade relationship is frequently framed as a natural corollary to a shared democratic values system. With bilateral trade now comfortably exceeding \$190 billion, the optics are undeniably positive. Yet, a closer look reveals a relationship defined by friction as much as by cooperation.

Persistent disputes over digital services taxes, data localization, and agricultural access continue to test the partnership's limits. While Washington leans toward a model of comprehensive regulatory alignment, New Delhi has drawn firm red lines. However, this tension should not be viewed as a diplomatic failure. Rather, it is evidence of a relationship that has moved past the honeymoon phase into one of clear-eyed, strategic interest.

India is no longer negotiating from a position of dependency. It seeks American capital and high-end technology; exemplified by the Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies (iCET), but it refuses to surrender its policy space, particularly in the digital domain where

data is now inseparable from the national interest. It is a partnership of "cooperation without capitulation," proving that two powers can be strategically aligned while remaining economically distinct.

## The EU Gambit: Discipline over Ease

If the relationship with the U.S. is about leverage, the engagement with the European Union is a testament to India's new-found appetite for discipline. The EU is a notoriously demanding partner; its insistence on stringent environmental standards, labor norms, and the controversial Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) has often been dismissed in India as "green protectionism."

Yet, India's persistence in bridging these gaps marks a significant strategic calculation. The EU represents a stable, high-value consumer market. By choosing to engage with this high-standard ecosystem, India is implicitly signaling a "grow up" moment for its own domestic industries. This is not about blindly conceding to Brussels; it is about recognizing that long-term global leadership requires internal reform. An FTA with the EU is less about immediate trade volumes and more about forcing Indian manufacturing to evolve—moving from low-cost competition to high-quality, value-chain integration.

## Trade as Industrial Policy

It is essential to recognize that trade agreements are no longer mere diplomatic trophies to be brandished at summits; they have become instruments of domestic transformation. By aligning trade policy with industrial policy much like the successful East Asian economies of the late 20th century, India is using international treaties to sharpen its domestic edge.

Initiatives like the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) schemes are now being synced with these trade deals. The goal is clear: ensure that the opening of markets is preceded by the strengthening of the domestic base. Whether in semiconductors, green hydrogen, or textiles, the current strategy bets on the fact that Indian industry is now resilient enough to not just survive global competition, but to define it. A trade deal that fails to restructure a domestic industry is merely expensive paperwork; New Delhi seems finally determined to ensure its deals have teeth.

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## The Architecture of Autonomy

The global trading system is currently under immense strain, bucking under the weight of "friend-shoring" and geopolitical blocs. In such a volatile climate, the old label of India as a "fence-sitter" has become obsolete. India is not avoiding choices; it is making them with a deliberate, often ruthless, focus on its own trajectory.

By balancing the economic muscle of the United States with the regulatory sophistication of Europe, while simultaneously championing the interests of the Global South, India is practicing "engagement without entanglement."

The measure of India's diplomatic weight in the coming decade will not lie in rhetorical flourishes at international forums, but in the grit of its negotiators and the resilience of its supply chains. India has stopped asking for a seat at the table. By weaving its economic interests into the very fabric of the global order, it has begun constructing a table of its own.



## India's Trade Journey: Key Milestones

- 1991: Liberalisation opens India to global trade
- 2005: India joins WTO negotiations as a key developing economy
- 2016–2019: Rising protectionism, tariff hikes
- 2020: India exits RCEP
- 2021–23: PLI schemes + supply chain focus
- 2024–25: Renewed FTA push with EU, strategic trade with US

## INDIA'S BIGGEST TRADING PARTNERS



## One Policy Term, Explained

What Is "Strategic Autonomy"?

Strategic autonomy is the ability of a country to engage globally without surrendering its decision-making power. It does not mean isolation, but independence within interdependence.

In trade, this translates to diversifying partners, protecting critical sectors, and retaining policy space in areas such as digital governance, agriculture, and public health. India's approach reflects a shift from defensive protectionism to selective openness—negotiating agreements that serve long-term national interests rather than short-term pressures.

In a fragmented global economy, strategic autonomy allows India to participate confidently in global markets while choosing its commitments on its own terms.

# India Between BRICS and the U.S. : A Careful Balance in a Changing Global Economy

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Globally, economic and political changes are influencing how the financial system works, shifting from developed countries to emerging economies, leading to new debates and adjustments. One important issue in this change is de-dollarisation, which basically means reducing the use of the US dollar in international trade and finance. This idea has become popular, especially among BRICS countries. However, India's position in this whole debate is not very straightforward. India is part of BRICS, but at the same time, it has strong economic and strategic relations with the United States. So, India is stuck in between and has to take a very balanced and careful approach.

Many countries want to move away from the US dollar because it gives a lot of power to the United States. The use of sanctions and financial pressure has shown how dependent the world is on the dollar. Countries like China and Russia strongly support de-dollarisation because it helps them reduce US influence. Within BRICS, ideas like using local currencies for trade or creating a common BRICS currency are often discussed. These ideas sound attractive, especially for developing countries that want more control over their economies.

But for India, the situation is different. India's economy is closely connected to the global market, where the US dollar plays a very important role. Most of India's imports, especially oil, are paid for in dollars. Foreign investments also come in mainly through dollar-based systems. Because of this, suddenly moving away from the dollar can create serious problems like currency instability and loss of investor confidence. This is why India does not openly support aggressive de-dollarisation plans.

India is not against change, but it believes that such changes should happen slowly and carefully. Instead of completely rejecting the dollar, India has tried small steps like settling trade in local currencies with a few countries. These steps are more about reducing risk than challenging the US dollar. Even Indian leaders have clearly said that de-dollarisation is not India's main goal. For India, economic stability is more important than making political statements.

Another big reason for India's cautious stand is its

relationship with the United States. Over the years, India and the US have become strong partners in trade, defence, technology, and global politics. The US is one of India's biggest trading partners and also an important source of investment and innovation. If India strongly supports anti-dollar moves within BRICS, it could damage this relationship. India does not want to choose one side and lose the benefits of the other.

There are also issues within BRICS itself. China has a very strong position in the group, and this makes India uncomfortable. Any BRICS currency or financial system will likely be influenced by China's interests. Given the existing economic and political tensions between India and China, India does not want to support something that could increase China's dominance. So, India prefers practical cooperation within BRICS rather than big monetary experiments.

Overall, India is trying to follow a middle path. It wants to support reforms in the global system and represent developing countries, but without hurting its own economy or strategic interests. India believes in strategic autonomy, which means staying independent and not blindly following any power bloc. Instead of fully supporting BRICS or fully aligning with the US, India is trying to balance both.

In conclusion, India's struggle between BRICS and the US is not confusion but a smart and realistic strategy. The world is changing, but the US dollar is still very powerful and will remain important for some time. India understands this reality. By staying cautious, flexible, and practical, India is protecting its economic interests while slowly adapting to global changes. This balanced approach reflects how India wants to grow, strong, independent, and stable in an uncertain global economy.



# Technology, Trust, and the Limits of Protection: Reflections from the Child Safety Tech Summit 2026

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The Prosperity Futures: Child Safety Tech Summit 2026, held at the Constitution Club of India and organised by the Just Rights for Children Foundation in collaboration with the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY), brought together policymakers, technologists, child rights advocates, and practitioners to confront a difficult reality: in the digital age, children are among the most vulnerable users of technology.

A central theme emerging from the discussions was the idea that technology is never neutral. Digital platforms can act as tools of empowerment and protection, but they can also become sites of harm, exploitation, and violence—often faster than policy responses can keep pace. Online crimes involving children frequently outstrip the capacity of legal systems that remain reactive, focused on prosecution after harm has already occurred. This gap underscored the urgency of shifting towards preventive, protection-first frameworks.

The launch of RAKSHA, an AI-based digital safety tool for children, reflected this evolving approach. Designed to support early risk detection, child tracing, and systemic prevention, the tool emphasised a sequence that many speakers reiterated: prevention before protection, and protection before prosecution. The promise of AI, in this context, lies in its ability to flag risks early, identify patterns of abuse, and support institutions in acting before irreversible harm occurs.

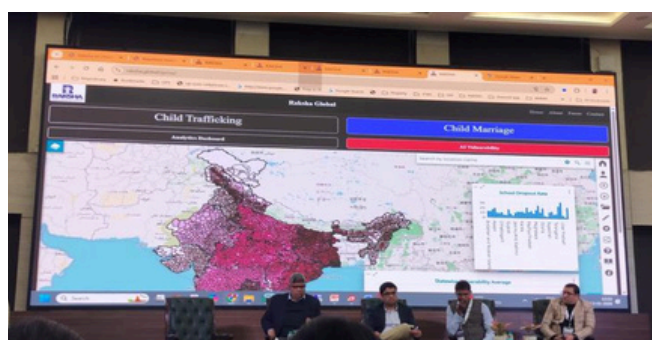


However, the summit also raised critical questions that cannot be ignored. While AI-driven safety tools offer scale and speed, they also introduce concerns around data privacy, surveillance, and algorithmic bias.

Children's data is among the most sensitive forms of personal information, and its collection, storage, and use demand the highest ethical standards. Without robust safeguards, tools designed for protection risk becoming instruments of intrusive monitoring or misuse. Another concern lies in over-reliance on technological solutions. While platforms like RAKSHA can strengthen institutional response, technology cannot substitute for human judgement, community engagement, or strong social services. Preventive systems are only as effective as the institutions that act upon their alerts. In regions with limited child welfare infrastructure or uneven law enforcement capacity, early detection may not translate into timely intervention.

The discussions also highlighted the uneven digital realities across India. Child safety technologies often assume access to stable internet, digital literacy, and institutional connectivity—conditions not uniformly present across socio-economic contexts. Without addressing these gaps, technological interventions risk reinforcing existing inequalities rather than resolving them. What the summit made clear is that child safety cannot be outsourced to technology alone. It requires political will, ethical design, transparent governance frameworks, and continuous public awareness. Parents, schools, platforms, law enforcement agencies, and policymakers all share responsibility. As several speakers noted, the success of digital safety tools will ultimately depend on trust—trust in institutions, in technology, and in the intent behind their deployment.

The summit offered a crucial reminder: if we fail to protect children in digital spaces today, the promise of technological progress loses its moral foundation. Technology can support safer futures, but only when guided by accountability, ethics, and a child-centric vision that places dignity above efficiency.



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# Strategic Hyphenation in Russia-North Korea Relations

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Northeast Asia has been witnessing geopolitical turmoil. In this region, hyphenation and ‘solidification’ of bilateral ties between North Korea and Russia is escalating security vulnerabilities characterised by the regional and global security implications. The recent historic signing of a Treaty on Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between North Korea and Russia symbolises the changing reality in the Northeast Asian region, where two strategic security complexes are emerging, viz. the US, Japan and South Korea on the one side and Russia, China and North Korea on the other side. This treaty replaced the 1961 and 2000 treaties and the 2000 and 2001 Moscow and Pyongyang declarations.

The 2024 treaty places a strong focus on mutual security assurances in the case of an attack, escalating threat perceptions in the Northeast Asia region, particularly for the US, Japan and South Korea. This action formally authorises Russia to purchase munitions from North Korea, which would be a flagrant violation of the UNSC sanctions against North Korea. Russia had vetoed a United Nations resolution that intended to renew an independent expert panel investigating North Korea’s violations of Security Council sanctions. In the 15-member Security Council, 13 votes were in favour, while Russia opposed and China abstained. Russia claims that UN Resolution 1718, passed in 2006, which established 7 member panel sanctioning North Korea have not yielded the intended consequences on the Korean Peninsula. Russian Ambassador to the UN Vassily Nebenzia called the UN-imposed sanctions regime on Pyongyang “detached from reality.” The stand taken by Russia for North Korea is indicative of the growing Moscow-Pyongyang strategic hyphenation.

Furthermore, North Korea recently test-fired short-range ballistic missiles in its eastern waters. This came when US Secretary of State Antony Blinken inaugurated a summit on democracy in South Korea. The launches come days after the US and South Korea wrapped up 11 days of Freedom Shield joint military drills, which North Korea has been condemning, calling them rehearsals for an invasion. Just a month ago, in February this year, Russian President Vladimir Putin gifted Mr Kim a high-end Aurus Senat limousine, a Russian-made car, showing growing bilateral closeness between the two leaders and countries. However, the pace and the depth appear to have gained momentum

since the Ukraine war in 2022. In 2023, bilateral ties accelerated to the next level. Russia’s Ambassador to North Korea, Alexander Matsegora, anticipated that 2024 would be a breakthrough year for both countries. Putin is expected to visit Pyongyang in 2024.

## Past is Present

Historically, the two nations maintained diplomatic ties since the Cold War era, which were largely driven by shared ideological affinities. During the Cold War period, the Soviet Union was the first state to recognise North Korea as the sole legitimate authority of the Korean peninsula and provided economic and military assistance. It saw in Pyongyang a fellow ideologue and a new partner. Nonetheless, the relationship witnessed a decline when Kim Il-sung began purging pro-Soviet factions within the North’s leadership to solidify his control. When the fate of the Soviet Union was in the doldrums, and the policies of Perestroika and Glasnost espoused by Gorbachev were already wreaking catastrophe, the Soviet Union withdrew the aid from North Korea and tilted towards its arch-enemy and sister state, South Korea. The dullness in their relationship faded with the ascendance of Vladimir Putin. Both nations signed the treaty on “Friendship, Good-neighbourly Relations and Cooperation” in 2000, with Russia further writing off 90% of North Korea’s USD 11 million debts in 2012. With the coming of Kim Jong-Un to power in Pyongyang in 2011, North Korea and Russia’s collaboration in nuclear and space technology intensified.

Since the 2020 Special Military Operation of Russia over Ukraine, the world has witnessed increasing cooperation between Moscow and Pyongyang. Despite sharing deep cordial relations, Pyongyang-Moscow ties seem to be resting on the idea of quid pro quo. Currently, Russia needs a partner who can supply it with ammunition to keep its game in Ukraine strong. On the other hand, North Korea, reeling under the harsh sanctions of the West, needs sustained help to ensure economic sustenance. Russia has emerged as one of the potential saviours for development in sectors such as energy and transportation, and even in addressing Pyongyang’s chronic food shortages. In the past, concrete steps to strengthen economic cooperation were highlighted by infrastructure projects like the Rajin-Khasan railway, which connected Russia to North Korea’s Rajin port. Consequently, Moscow requires weapons to continue its

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assault on Ukraine, while Pyongyang requires commodities and food.

The 2024 treaty demonstrates the cessation of the strategic isolation phase of North Korea. Russia is open to military-technical cooperation in addition to security assurances as contained in Article 8 of the treaty. Among other vital factors conditioning this rapprochement is the unified challenge posed by the U.S. and its allies. Relations between North Korea and Russia, and the West, have been strained to differing degrees. Moscow sees working with North Korea as a way to affect northeast Asia's overall security environment. In October 2023, Choe Son-hui, the foreign minister of North Korea, noted that strong relations between Moscow and Pyongyang would potentially undermine American efforts to forge a formidable alliance between Washington, Tokyo, and Seoul. Recognition of these mutual needs and benefits draws them together. However, the Russia-North Korea Treaty of Friendship, Good Neighbourliness, and Cooperation of 2000 contain no enforceable sections on automatic mutual military support. Growing contiguity with Pyongyang also has the risk of subverting the gains that Russia has made with Seoul since the end of the Cold War.

In 2023, Kim Jong Un and Vladimir Putin exchanged letters to celebrate bilateral ties and strategic cooperation between the two countries. This event marked the 75th anniversary of bilateral relations between North Korea and Russia, and it came a month after Kim's trip to Moscow. Putin expressed optimism that the relations would strengthen security and stability in the Korean peninsula and Northeast Asia. On the other hand, Kim congratulated Russia for resisting Western hegemony and pressure from imperialists over Ukraine. He further stated that the Russia-North Korea relationship is "based on the comradely friendship and militant unity." Affirmation of strong ties from both sides opens up a new horizon of strategic thinking and engagement.

The strategic interests of the two states became more manifest with the Moscow-Pyongyang meet-up. Tensions escalated the pre-emptive action of Washington when US State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller issued a warning to impose harsh sanctions in the event of an arms deal. Voices of condemnation sprang up from the eastern-flanked nations, too. South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol categorically stated that the potential arms deal would

be tantamount to "a direct provocation" and that Seoul and its allies would not stand idly by. However, resisting such provocations, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov met North Korean leader Kim on October 19, and reiterated that Moscow emphatically valued Pyongyang's "unwavering and principled support" for Russia in the Ukraine war.

Furthermore, there has been a rising trend in the proliferation of nuclear warheads, which will further escalate the situation. The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) has estimated that as of 2025, the U.S, Russia, and China hold a combined total of 12,241 nuclear warheads, with over 9,600 in military stockpiles. SIPRI report warns that without a new agreement, the number of warheads deployed on strategic missiles may increase after the expiration of the New START treaty in February 2026.

### **Shift in Global Geopolitics**

Emboldened by Russia's actions in Ukraine, North Korea may gain confidence to demonstrate an offensive posture against South Korea and may further concretise its nuclear ambitions. Regionalisation and securitisation of organisations will escalate. This is evident with the entry of neutral states such as Finland into NATO and Sweden also applying for its membership. Symptomatically, with the navies of the U.S. and South Korea joined by Canada, New Zealand, Belgium and the Philippines on October 19th for an anti-naval mine exercise off South Korea's coast, it reflects the growing security competition and confrontation in the proximity of the Korean Peninsula. As a result of the ballooning security dilemma, East Asian nations such as Japan and South Korea will amp up their defence stockpiles and prowess.

Furthermore, terror will engulf the Eastern European nations, primarily those bordering Russia. They may intensify military buildup and defence procurement, secure membership and security organizations and may even resort to economic damnation to alleviate the 'trilateral danger' of the Russia-China-North Korea alliance. This will unambiguously increase the fragility in the world market. With the world being more interconnected than ever before, the emergence of any security alliance or war can adversely disrupt the global supply chains, as evinced in the Russia-Ukraine war.

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un described the relationship as a "fiery friendship" and called the June 2024 treaty a "breakthrough document" and the "strongest ever treaty".

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# Living on the Margins: Everyday Constraints Faced by the Arunthathiyar Community in Kilpennathur, Tiruvannamalai District

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Kilpennathur block in Tiruvannamalai district, Tamil Nadu, presents a stark example of how structural neglect continues to shape everyday life for historically marginalised communities. In particular, the lived realities of the Arunthathiyar community in and around Alaganandal Panchayat, Tiruvannamalai district and Kannika Nagaram of Melpappambadi village, Senji constituency, Vizhuppuram district reveal persistent gaps in access to health care, education, housing, transport and basic dignity. These are not isolated issues. They are interconnected constraints that reinforce poverty, exclusion and vulnerability across generations.

## **Alaganandal Panchayat: Living Without Basic Public Services**

In Alaganandal Panchayat, Tiruvannamalai District, the absence of essential public infrastructure is striking. There is no functioning Primary Health Care Centre serving the local population. A health centre that once existed was permanently shut down nearly a decade ago due to an insufficient number of nurses. Since then, residents have been left with no local option for even basic medical care.

For any health-related need, ranging from routine check-ups to emergencies, villagers are forced to travel 5 to 6 kilometres to the Tiruvannamalai Government Hospital. This distance becomes particularly dangerous due to the lack of transport facilities. Public transport is extremely limited, with only three buses operating at fixed times, around 9 am, 12 pm and 7 pm. There is no reliable private transport (except their own vehicles, like a bike or a tempo) either. In emergencies, this delay can mean the difference between life and death.

Another deeply troubling issue is the continued denial of burial grounds for the Arunthathiyar community. Despite burial grounds being a basic human necessity, access has been repeatedly obstructed due to community and caste-based discrimination. This denial reflects not just administrative neglect but a deeper social injustice that affects the dignity of life and death alike.

Education in the panchayat also remains constrained. Most adults in the village are illiterate, largely due to long-

standing economic hardship. The primary school in Alaganandal runs only up to the 9th standard. Students who wish to pursue higher education must travel to Tiruvannamalai town to attend government schools and colleges. Ironically, several private colleges are located within a 3-kilometre radius of the village, yet they remain inaccessible to most families due to high fees.

According to the 2011 Census, the sex ratio in the area stands at 940 women per 1000 men. Tamil Nadu Rural Development(TNRD) states that in Alaganandal panchayat, Tiruvannamalai constituency, Tiruvannamalai District, the total population was 1807, out of which 1038 were men and 769 were women. Most of the problems stated were commonly experienced by people from the SCA community. While this figure is low, it reflects broader socio-economic challenges faced by women in terms of education, health and employment opportunities.

Livelihoods in Alaganandal are largely informal and labour-intensive. Most men work in upholstery-related jobs, stitching shoes, sofa covers and bike seat covers. Women supplement household income through tailoring and daily wage work as coolies. These occupations offer little job security, no social protection and limited scope for upward mobility.

## **Melpappambadi Panchayat: Housing Insecurity and Migrant Labour**

In Kannika Nagaram of Melpappambadi village, Senji constituency, Vizhuppuram district, housing insecurity is one of the most visible indicators of distress. Around 75 families are crowded into approximately 22 houses. Many live in huts or partially constructed structures, sharing cramped spaces across multiple households. Basic sanitation facilities are inadequate, and access to essential services is shared under strained conditions.

A particularly concerning issue is land ownership. Families possess a joint Patta, meaning land titles are shared rather than individually assigned. This complicates access to welfare schemes, housing benefits and credit facilities, leaving residents in a state of permanent insecurity.

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The primary livelihood in this panchayat revolves around brick kiln work. Men and women migrate for contract-based labour every year, leaving around November and returning only by August of the following year. This seasonal migration disrupts family life and has severe consequences for children’s education. Due to unstable living conditions and frequent movement, many parents are unable or unwilling to send their children to school consistently, perpetuating cycles of illiteracy and poverty.

**A Shared Crisis: Youth and Substance Abuse**

Despite differences in livelihood and living conditions, both Alaganandal and Melpappambadi face a common and growing challenge: drug addiction among youth. Limited employment opportunities, lack of recreational spaces, disrupted education, and social marginalisation have created an environment where substance abuse is increasingly prevalent. This not only affects individual health but also

weakens family structures and community resilience.

The situation in these two panchayats is not merely about missing facilities. It reflects a pattern of exclusion where basic rights such as health care, education, housing, transport and even burial grounds remain inaccessible to a specific community. The constraints faced by the Arunthathiyar community in Kilpennathur are rooted in both administrative neglect and entrenched social hierarchies.

Addressing these issues requires more than temporary schemes. It demands targeted public investment, accountability in service delivery and a serious commitment to social justice. Without this, the promise of development will continue to bypass those who need it the most.

# Handshake or Power Play?

International relations are not driven by friendship or morality alone but by national interests, power, and strategic calculation. It highlights how trade, sanctions, alliances, and diplomacy are tools states use to advance their economic and political goals. Global cooperation often hides unequal power dynamics, where stronger countries influence rules and outcomes. Overall, it emphasises that global politics is shaped more by interests and power than by idealistic notions of equality or goodwill.



January Issue | International Relations & Global Diplomacy - TCL - The Civil Lens

# World Book Fair 2026 | New Delhi



The World Book Fair 2026, held in January at Pragati Maidan, New Delhi, brought together voices from across borders to celebrate literature, dialogue, and the global exchange of ideas. Beyond books and publishing, the fair became a space for conversations on politics, culture, sustainability, and knowledge in a changing world. In a time marked by rapid technological shifts and geopolitical tensions, the fair offered a quiet yet powerful reminder: diplomacy does not operate only through treaties and summits, but also through stories, scholarship, and the circulation of ideas. The World Book Fair 2026 thus echoed the spirit of this issue, underscoring how cultural exchange remains central to international understanding and global cooperation.

## Call for Entries | February Issue

### Theme: Environment, Sustainability and Climate Change

The climate crisis is no longer a distant forecast. It is a present reality shaping economies, politics, livelihoods, and everyday life. From extreme weather events and ecological degradation to climate policy, green transitions, and questions of environmental justice, the challenges of sustainability demand urgent and thoughtful engagement.

For our February Issue, The Civil Lens invites articles, essays, opinion pieces, and research-driven narratives that critically examine environmental change and sustainable futures. We encourage contributions that explore climate action not only as an environmental concern, but as a political, economic, social, and ethical imperative.

Suggested focus areas include (but are not limited to):

- Climate change and public policy
- Environmental justice and inequality
- Sustainable development and green economies
- Climate diplomacy and global climate governance
- Indigenous knowledge and ecological conservation
- Urban sustainability, energy transitions, and climate resilience



We welcome interdisciplinary perspectives and voices that challenge conventional narratives, grounded in research, lived experience, or policy analysis.

Submit your article at: [thecivillens@iilm.edu](mailto:thecivillens@iilm.edu)

For further queries, you can write to us too.