ENVISIONING VIKSIT BHARAT@2047

A Synthesis of Expert Deliberations on India's Strategic Trajectory

CUTS International
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#2516

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Published by

CUTS International
Since 1983

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This paper was curated by Pradeep S. Mehta and Abhishek Kumar in September 2025, with contributions from Tasmita Sengupta of CUTS International.

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Citation:
Envisioning Viksit Bharat @2047: A Synthesis of Expert Deliberations on India's Strategic Trajectory, CUTS International, Jaipur

First published: November 2025

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Executive Summary

India's transformation into a developed nation by 2047 — the centennial vision of Viksit Bharat — is not merely a policy aspiration, but a national mission championed at the highest levels of leadership. Under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's stewardship, this vision has evolved into a unifying development agenda that calls upon government, industry, institutions, and citizens alike to work in concert towards a prosperous, equitable, and future-ready India.

This landscape paper titled "Envisioning Viksit Bharat @2047: A Synthesis of Expert Deliberations on India's Strategic Trajectory" presents a coherent narrative of India's development imperatives by outlining the strategic priorities, trade-offs, and institutional reforms required to realise the Viksit Bharat vision. In the process of channelising insights gathered from a series of expert deliberations hosted by CUTS International, it became evident that the approach draws on long-term nation-building, anchored in reforms that prioritise people, productivity, and progress.

As India navigates a rapidly evolving world, the ability to anticipate, understand, and leverage global and domestic trends has become increasingly significant, providing a springboard for accelerated growth, innovation, and an improved quality of life for all. Grounded in global benchmarks, including the World Bank's framing of what constitutes a "developed nation", this paper brings together expert insights to chart a strategic, practical, and inclusive pathway for India's journey towards Viksit Bharat.

The discussions reveal that India stands at a critical inflexion point, facing a fractured world order, rapid technological disruption, intensifying climate risks, and an implementation gap at the domestic level. Experts emphasised the need to shift from reactive policy-making to deliberate, future-ready choices, beginning with recalibrating the growth model. They highlighted the importance of striking a balance between India's consumption-led and investment-led economic drivers to stimulate productivity and create high-quality employment.

Participants also recognised the urgency of reshaping industrial strategy to support labour-intensive sectors that enable large-scale employment, while simultaneously strengthening high-tech sectors to enhance global competitiveness. India's innovation deficit, evident in its low R&D spending, limited tech commercialisation, and weak industry-academia linkages, further calls for a mission-oriented approach to reinforce the research, digital, and industrial ecosystems.

The deliberations further underscore the need for a reimagined governance and federal compact, as gaps in execution, rather than policy formulation, remain the primary barrier to progress. Strengthening state capacity, reducing regulatory overload, building credible and accountable institutions, and advancing fiscal and functional decentralisation emerged as essential reform directions.

Utility services, which include but are not limited to power, water, urban infrastructure, and digital civic systems, need transparent pricing, reliable access, and climate-resilient planning to enhance productivity and living standards. Broadening capital flows through deeper bond markets, providing patient capital for infrastructure, and implementing calibrated foreign investments, along with innovative instruments such as blended finance and social impact funding, can also strengthen sustainable growth pathways.

Human capital, encompassing education, health, social security, and skills development, remains central to India's long-term competitiveness. Improving public systems, enhancing learning outcomes, expanding primary healthcare, and aligning skills with emerging job markets, while making the workforce adaptable to rapid changes, are seen as crucial for converting the demographic opportunity into a productive dividend.

The paper also recommended advancing agricultural reforms through consensus-based mechanisms inspired by the GST Council, leveraging technology and market linkages to enhance farmer incomes. National security requires an integrated approach linking economic resilience, climate adaptation, cyber and cognitive security, and defence preparedness.

This paper presents a concise roadmap for India's journey to a Viksit Bharat, emphasising the clarity of choices, coherence of reform, and discipline of implementation to convert intent into lasting outcomes. It further highlights the need to establish a High-Powered Commission on National Development Reforms, modelled on the Sarkaria Commission on Centre–State Relations, to drive a shared national agenda for Viksit Bharat. This Commission would serve as a formal platform to bring together diverse stakeholders, including the executive, legislature, judiciary, industry, farmers, civil society, trade unions, and the media, from across all states, a step needed to strengthen the implementability of any reform. Such broad-based consensus-building is essential to enable cohesive, sustained, and politically viable reforms that truly advance India's transformation.

Additionally, some of the overarching recommendations extracted from the Action Matrix, as composed in the paper, emphasise the need to strengthen policy coherence, shift towards an investment-led and export-oriented growth model, institutionalise outcome-based governance, embed innovation in public policy, and reinforce budget allocation and monitoring frameworks.

Together, these actions provide a forward-looking reform agenda to enhance India's competitiveness, accelerate economic transformation, and ensure inclusive and sustainable progress. If implemented with consensus, accountability, and coordinated execution, these reforms can significantly advance India's journey towards achieving the Viksit Bharat vision by 2047.

While the Action Matrix presented in this paper provides a comprehensive set of strategic directions, it is intended to be indicative rather than exhaustive, offering a foundational blueprint to guide India's reform journey towards 2047.

Introduction

The vision of *Viksit Bharat* (Developed India) by 2047 — the centenary of independence, rests on a clear understanding of what it means to be a "developed country." According to the World Bank, to achieve this vision, India would need to sustain an average annual growth rate of 7.8% over the next two decades.[1] Three criteria define this status: (a) a per capita income of at least US$14,005 in nominal terms, (b) a Human Development Index (HDI) rank within the top 75, and (c) a significant level of industrialisation, with Manufacturing contributes at least 230 percent of GDP.

Dr C. Rangarajan's recent analysis suggests that India can achieve the benchmark by 2047 if it sustains an average real growth rate of 7 percent. According to Dr C. Rangarajan's recent study, India can reach the benchmark by 2047 if it sustains an average real growth rate of 7 percent annually. This will require maintaining an investment rate (both private and public) of 34-35 percent of GDP by 2035, given the current Incremental Capital-Output Ratio (ICOR) of 5.1, which is expected to decline only gradually, given there is improvement in capacity utilisation with higher investment in infrastructure, especially in the manufacturing sector. Currently, gross fixed capital formation is around 32-33 percent, which is close yet not sufficient.

In terms of human development, India is on a stronger trajectory. India's Human Development Index currently stands at 0.644, representing a 48.4 percent increase from 1990, according to the Economic Survey of 2024-25. Thus, comparing long-term data (1975-2000 and 2000-2025) shows consistent progress, with the gap between India's HDI score and the threshold for a "high" ranking narrowing rapidly. By 2047, crossing the HDI benchmark appears highly feasible. However, we should keep in mind that India still ranks around 130 globally, and its HDI is reduced by nearly 31 percent when inequality particularly in income and gender is factored in. This underscores that sustaining progress will require not just growth, but equitable growth that closes these persistent gaps.

Industrialisation, however, poses the most significant challenge. Manufacturing contributes only 17–18 percent of GDP today, far short of the 25 percent target, as per the National Manufacturing Policy, 2011. There is, however, an ongoing debate within the World Bank and among economists on whether this benchmark should be redefined. Those advocating revision argue for a combined focus on manufacturing and modern services, provided it enables large-scale absorption of surplus labour from agriculture into value-added, medium-to-high-skilled activities. On that count, India has made some progress, with many first-generation workers from farming households transitioning into IT and other skill-intensive services. Yet, this shift remains limited in scale, underscoring the need for deliberate policies to deepen skill development, expand labour mobility, and connect rural talent with emerging sectors.

[1] https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/india/overview#:~:text=The%20World%20Bank%20is%20partnering,equitable%20future%20for%20all%20Indians.

However, in view of the expanding e-commerce and mobile-enabled services, the demand for gig workers has gone up phenomenally. Apart from that, due to the failure of policing, security services have expanded significantly.

Overall, India has the potential to meet all three conditions by 2047, but only if reforms are both ambitious, unhindered, and effectively implemented, and if pervasive corruption is reined in. Equally important is the establishment of an institutional mechanism to drive consensus. A High-Powered Commission on national development reforms, on the lines of the Sarkaria Commission on Centre-State Relations, should be constituted to engage diverse stakeholders, including the executive, legislature, judiciary, industry, farmers, civil society, trade unions, and the media, across all states. Building such a consensus is indispensable for advancing the reforms necessary to realise the vision of Viksit Bharat.

This report draws upon and synthesises a series of expert dialogues convened by CUTS International to chart a credible pathway towards Viksit Bharat by 2047. The dialogues included politicians, civil servants, economic and public policy experts, and media persons, with a gender balance and a variety of views, including dissent. What began as an exercise in scenario building gradually evolved, with participants agreeing to develop it into a Landscape Paper.

The central challenge articulated across these deliberations is the need to achieve national transformation amidst intensifying factors both globally and domestically. This complex environment is shaped by a confluence of accelerating geopolitical volatility, deep technological disruption, escalating physical and economic stresses from climate change and biodiversity loss, and the need to improve domestic equilibrium.

To reflect on these elements, three roundtable discussions were held, bringing together senior policymakers, economists, strategic analysts, and industry leaders. They were encouraged to move beyond aspirational goals to identify the concrete policy choices, structural reforms, and strategic trade-offs that will shape India's trajectory over the next two decades, taking into account exogenous factors. Easier said than done, the complexities considerable, hence some first principles have been identified instead of specifying individual reforms. A detailed list of participants is provided in Annexure 1.

Structure of the Outcome Paper

The paper is organised into three sections. Section I presents the collective wisdom from the roundtable discussions. It carefully documents points of convergence, divergence, and the critical trade-offs on foundational questions, such as geopolitical alignment, industrial strategy, and the structure of federal governance. The section is also thematically organised: it opens with the external environment and India’s contested position in an increasingly transactional global order; proceeds to the core domestic debates over growth models, employment and productivity; and concludes with an examination of the machinery of the state — governance, federalism and implementation capacity.

Section II identifies the principal policy and institutional gaps that must be addressed to prepare India for the dynamism of the twenty-first century. Section III then translates the diagnostics from Sections I and II into a practical, sequenced reform agenda designed to be politically feasible and oriented toward measurable delivery.

Section I:

Collective Wisdom: Convergences and Departures

Navigating a Fractured and Transactional Global Order

The New Geopolitical Reality: A "Trump-Like" Norm

A central theme emerging from the discussions is that the unpredictable and economically irrational positions taken by leaders such as the new US President are not a transient anomaly but symptomatic of more profound, structural shifts in the global order. They are rooted in international and national inequality, rapid technological change, evolving geopolitical equations, often driven by domestic politics and societal transformations, climate stress, and mounting debt, for which a coherent pre-Trump strategy was never developed.

Populist pressures, strategic ambiguity, and deliberate weakening of institutional autonomy characterise the current era. This is accompanied by greater centralisation and a stronger state apparatus. Such dynamics are therefore regarded as a foreseeable norm for any realistic scenario planning. The assumption that India can ride out this phase and await a return to a more predictable, rules-based order would be a dangerous miscalculation.

This structural change is further compounded by the growing influence of large technology platforms on public opinion, which amplifies populist trends. Its practical manifestation is a visible global shift towards transactionalism. Equally noteworthy is the expanding power of mega corporations, especially in the technology sector, and their growing influence on government policies.

In this context, a Viksit Bharat must shape its foreign policy around multilateralism, trade, technology and commerce — moving beyond the binaries of China and the West — and reflect the psychology and responsibilities of a developed nation with deep civilisational roots.

India's Strategic Posture in Flux: The "Multi-Alignment" Dilemma

Against this backdrop of global fracturing, the effectiveness and meaning of India's stated foreign policy of multi-alignment came under intense scrutiny. Discussants critically examined the evolution of India's strategic slogans, tracing a path from non-alignment in a bipolar world, to strategic autonomy in a unipolar world, and now to multi-alignment in the current multipolar context. It was observed that these terms are often a way to mask reluctance to make difficult choices and that they lack operational substance.

However, this perspective is not universally shared, revealing a deep-seated disagreement on the nature of India's current strategic posture. Some discussants dismissed India's proclaimed strategic autonomy, arguing that in practice, the country remains tied to the US-Israeli apron

strings. They pointed to India's compliance with US sanctions on Iran as clear evidence of a lack of genuine autonomy. This view suggests that India's actions do not align with its rhetoric and that its multi-alignment policy serves as a veil for a de facto alignment with the West, albeit not at the expense of its deep relations with Russia.

On the other hand, it argued that India adheres fairly closely to its policy of strategic autonomy by abstaining from key UN votes on contentious issues, such as those related to Ukraine and Iran. This fundamental disagreement suggests that the debate over strategic autonomy is not merely about policy tactics but reflects a more profound and unresolved national uncertainty about India's actual position and role in the world.

Trade as a Geopolitical Arena: FTAs, China, the CPTPP and the WTO

The discussions on trade policy clearly positioned it not as a purely economic activity but as a central arena for geopolitical manoeuvring. A significant strategic shift in India's approach to Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) was identified. The discussants traced this evolution from a challenging experience with the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), which it ultimately chose not to join, to a new FTA 2.0 strategy.

A crucial distinction was made between India's past and present FTA strategies. Whereas the ASEAN FTA was with a bloc of competitive economies, the current focus is on more complementary partners, such as the UK, UAE, and Australia. This shift is viewed as a structural improvement in strategy, designed to yield more favourable outcomes.

The most critical and contentious geoeconomic issue discussed was India's relationship with China. There was a consensus that while geopolitical tensions necessitate extreme caution, total economic decoupling is impractical. Instead, the concept of de-risking rather than decoupling was emphasised. A pragmatic middle path, which can be described as a 'small yard, high fence' strategy, was proposed. This would entail restricting Chinese investment and participation in highly sensitive strategic sectors, such as defence, critical infrastructure, and telecommunications, while remaining open to engagement in non-strategic areas, such as consumer electronics or renewable energy components.

However, this view was challenged by deep-seated scepticism. Some discussants cautioned against being overly optimistic about Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) from Chinese lead firms, expressing strong doubts about the likelihood of genuine technology transfer and raising the risk of Indian firms being relegated to the status of low-value contract manufacturing. They highlighted India's experience of deindustrialising pressures caused by cheap Chinese imports to support this concern.

Amidst the challenges of dealing with China and the deadlocked multilateral system at the World Trade Organisation (WTO), several experts advocated exploring a third path: accession to the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP). The pact currently includes major economies such as Japan, Canada, and Australia, but excludes both the US and China. It was expressed that it can be a viable platform for pursuing high-

standard, rules-based trade. Joining the CPTPP would send a powerful signal of India's commitment to open markets and deep economic integration.

However, this path is fraught with domestic challenges. It was explicitly acknowledged that there is currently a limited appetite in India for the degree of internal reform required to meet the CPTPP's stringent standards on issues like labour, environment, and state-owned enterprises. A bold move towards the CPTPP would signal a strong appetite for reform, whereas continued caution would convey the opposite.

However, it was also emphasised that India should make its best efforts to revive the WTO by working with like-minded parties to reform it. Simultaneously, it should strive to shed its image as an obstructive player and transform it into a positive one. This is a crucial ingredient for ensuring the success of multilateralism and is tied to her aspirations to become a developed country by 2047.

The Domestic Imperative: Re-engineering the Indian Growth Engine

While navigating the turbulent global environment is critical, the expert dialogues repeatedly returned to the fact that primary determinants of India's success in achieving the Viksit Bharat vision lie in addressing its own domestic structural challenges. The discussions revealed deep-seated debates about the fundamental nature of India's growth model, the persistent failure to create sufficient high-quality employment, and the role of the state in the economy.

Several experts also emphasised that the vision of Viksit Bharat hinges on revitalising private sector dynamism — encouraging greater investment, innovation, and risk-taking. The current imbalance, with public capex driving most of the capital formation, calls for addressing bottlenecks such as demand stagnation, credit constraints, and the need for genuine ease of doing business reforms to unlock private enterprise.

The Search for a Sustainable Growth Model

A foundational question raised was whether India's current economic model is fit for the journey to 2047. The dialogues identify a critical choice between a consumption-led and an investment-driven growth path.

The current model is heavily reliant on consumption, which accounts for approximately 60 percent of GDP. However, this engine is showing signs of weakness, with sluggish private consumption being offset by increased government expenditure, a trend that may not be fiscally sustainable in the long run. The challenge, therefore, is how to engineer a balanced strategic shift towards a supply-driven economy, rather than a consumption-led one – an economy that can create productive assets and future capacity without simultaneously exacerbating the already acute problem of unemployment.

This led to a central and unresolved debate on which sectors should power future growth: manufacturing or services. Discussants noted that manufacturing's share of GDP has remained stagnant at or below 17 percent, far from the target of 25 percent set over a decade ago. This

historical underperformance raises fundamental questions about the viability of a manufacturing-led path.

In this context, discussants observed that modern manufacturing encompasses high-value services, ranging from R&D and design to logistics and after-sales support. Accordingly, a dual-track approach was proposed, prioritising labour-intensive manufacturing for mass job creation while simultaneously pushing into technology-intensive services and industries to build future competitiveness and avoid the middle-income trap. In other words, a two-track industry strategy is needed: job-rich sectors for the present, and technology sectors for the future.

At the heart of the government's current industrial strategy is the Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme, which became a significant point of contention among discussants. Questions arose about whether it genuinely stimulates private sector R&D and innovation or merely operates as a large-scale fiscal subsidy that burdens the exchequer. While often portrayed as an industrial policy measure, PLI falls short of that definition — it excludes several labour-intensive industries and strategic sectors, such as defence, both of which are essential for large-scale employment and national capability building.

This raises concerns about whether the scheme can deliver broad-based industrial transformation or whether it risks creating narrow pockets of support without addressing structural gaps, underscoring the need for a more holistic industrial policy. Furthermore, the policy lacks a focus on MSMEs, as real benefits often accrue to the large, organised sector. Some participants suggested that targeted finance, improved compliance ease, and reduced friction in governance could help address these gaps.

Further doubts were expressed about the scheme’s design, which involves selecting and backing a handful of firms in each sector. Such an approach risks undermining competition, entrenching market concentration, and creating uneven playing fields. The scepticism around PLI reflects a deeper divide in thinking about the best path to boost domestic manufacturing.

In short, the focus should be on generating employment, which in turn will create a consumption class and drive growth. In this regard, Employment Linked Incentives (ELIs) could play a complementary and effective role.

The Employment Conundrum: Dividend or Disaster?

Across all discussions, a powerful and unwavering consensus emerged that job creation must be the central and non-negotiable pivot for all future policymaking. The discussants emphasised that the challenge is not merely unemployment but pervasive and systemic underemployment.

According to some estimates, a staggering 88 percent of Indians are employed in low competency jobs, indicating a workforce trapped in low-productivity and low-wage roles. Other reports offer an equally sobering view of the country’s income structure, revealing that a monthly income of just ₹75,000 places an individual in the top one percent of earners. This data highlights a significant challenge to shared prosperity: the benefits of economic growth are not translating into substantial income gains for the vast majority of the population.

This employment crisis is not viewed as a cyclical problem that can be resolved solely by higher GDP growth. Instead, it is considered as a product of deep-seated structural flaws, manifested as a trio of interconnected challenges: the chronic lack of quality job creation, severe and worsening environmental degradation, and dangerously rising inequality. These were not viewed as separate issues, but rather as intertwined symptoms of a dysfunctional growth model that required urgent correction.

The Machinery of State: Governance, Federalism, and Institutional Capacity

Across multiple roundtables and webinars, experts from diverse fields converged on the diagnosis that India's single most significant obstacle is a severe and persistent implementation deficit. This is not merely a matter of procedural delays but points to a more fundamental crisis of capability within the state apparatus and accompanying corruption.

This assessment is not merely anecdotal. Several examples were introduced, and it would be unwieldy to reproduce each one of them. However, one merits attention, particularly because there is bipartisan support for climate action and green growth, yet there have been repeated extensions and relaxations of mandatory environmental regulations. Such examples neither gel well with India’s commitments in the international arena nor do they elicit confidence from citizens in government policies. Although most citizens may not be familiar with the issues surrounding climate change and biodiversity, the policy community is undoubtedly aware of and engaged with them.

Similarly, while master plans are mandatory, only 28 per cent of cities in India have followed them. Shockingly, none of them prioritise optimum focus on ecology and the environment in alignment with industry action, financial flows, or government targets. Several state governments also make announcements in their budgets that indicate transformational shifts but fail to ground them in operative frameworks. Examples abound, and if an analysis is carried out systematically, several discrepancies can be identified between the policy's intent and its implementation on the ground. There are also governance issues that afflict our urban governance. Typically, State governments implement municipal policies through their departments or city development authorities, without devolving power to elected municipal bodies.

To reduce corruption, faceless interaction between citizens/businesses and state functionaries, more governance and less government, value-based governance, strict accountability with the remedy of discharge from service, and a bonus malus model, including naming and shaming, to reward good functionaries and punish bad ones, need to be institutionalised. Here, judicial reforms are equally critical because delays and corruption only prosper.

The Federal Question: Centralisation vs. Devolution

A unanimous view also emerged on the need for greater devolution of power to the states, accompanied by enhanced flexibility. It was argued that such devolution is both an economic and administrative necessity, given the vast and growing inter-regional disparities in per capita income.

For a long time, the issue of true decentralisation has persisted because functions, finances, and functionaries have not been adequately devolved to the third tier. Still, now that new avenues of financing are available through market borrowing and Indian municipalities have started to access such markets, there is an urgent need to empower them through professional (lateral entry) bureaucratic cadres.

It was frequently reiterated that cities are the engines of growth, but the pace of city development and the quality of urban amenities have been relatively poor. A closer examination reveals widespread misclassification of urban and rural areas, which distorts and affects the process of devolution, human development, and the creation of necessary infrastructure. The focus is often on ‘urban policy’ rather than ‘urbanisation policy’, which, at its very heart, will address the continuum of growth rather than a patchwork approach.

In this regard, urban governance and development were identified as a particularly acute area of failure and one that has limited exposure to exogenous factors. This area will also yield multiple benefits, including the creation of employment opportunities.

The creation of a Deregulation Commission was also discussed as a necessary step to tackle an increasingly dishonest, overbearing and inefficient bureaucracy and to reduce or minimise the burden of regulatory cholesterol. The central idea, as espoused by the Prime Minister in that regard, is trust-based regulation. This requires a complete change in mindset – something that can be seeded in India only through capacity building, political will and alignment of incentives.

Human Capital: An Ongoing Agenda

A consistent and powerful theme was the recognition that India's most significant asset — its people — could also become its greatest liability without a massive and sustained investment in human capital. Moreover, productivity is also highly dependent on good human capital. Education was identified as a primary and urgent challenge. We have a splendid cohort of IITs, IIMs, and AIIMS, but admission into them is highly competitive. On the other hand, except for these oases of institutions, the faith in the Indian education system is largely poor. At the primary school level, particularly in rural areas, the levels are abysmal. Affluent Indians are increasingly opting out of the domestic system post high school levels (which include the abovementioned premieres), spending billions of dollars annually to secure foreign education for their children. This exodus of both talent and capital signals a profound crisis of confidence in the country's educational infrastructure. A large number of these students never return to India but find good jobs and stay abroad.

On the other hand, the biggest problem that all these institutions face is the availability of faculty. As a nation, a misplaced belief also persists, one shared by the political class, bureaucracy, and big business alike, that the creation of physical infrastructure alone equates to development. While it is a necessary foundation, actual development must equally rest on progress in human development indicators to sustain growth and competitiveness. This can result in a severe human capital shortfall in conventional and emerging technology sectors, such as AI and clean energy, among others.

Secondly, the issue of health care was also critical for sound human capital. Increasingly, the private sector has been filling the gap, while the public sector has been lagging. To address essential health issues, the Government is offering financial assistance to patients to access private facilities. However, for both education and healthcare, the government should introduce vouchers or impact bonds that private facilities can redeem based on their outcomes.

The concept of human capital was framed in broader terms than just economic inputs. In this regard, discussants lamented the overemphasis on economic and trade metrics at the expense of social dimensions such as health, education, skills and social harmony. The failure to address these softer dimensions is seen as a critical flaw in the development narrative.

The question of how to address this deficit brought the federalism debate into sharp focus as some discussants pointed out that development of human capital is essentially a state subject which other discussants countered as a cop out on the ground that Union government currently does not have effective mechanisms for perspective planning and mechanisms like National Development Council, which previously served as platforms to drive coordinated national action on critical issues like education and health, even if implementation rested with the states. There are bodies like the Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE), which is mostly dormant and ineffective. The current approach of addressing such issues through the NITI Aayog has not been the best way forward, due to a lack of capacity and politicisation.

The Agricultural Impasse: A Political Economy Failure

The state of Indian agriculture was identified as another area of deep structural crisis, rooted more in political-economic failures than in technical or resource constraints. A strong consensus emerged from the discussions that meaningful agricultural transformation must begin at home and cannot be externally imposed through the pressure of international trade agreements. The tumultuous and ultimately failed attempt to introduce the 2020 farm laws, which were passed with minimal consultation, is repeatedly cited as a cautionary tale. The path forward, it is argued, should emulate the process used for the Goods and Services Tax (GST) legislation, i.e. through the GST Council. This would involve a patient and inclusive process of political negotiation, consensus-building among states, and institutionalisation, perhaps through a dedicated Council of State Agriculture Ministers.

Technology's Double-Edged Sword: Productivity Gains Vs Short-term Job Losses

While India aspires to be a technology superpower, the dialogues revealed a significant gap between ambition and reality, characterised by a deep innovation deficit. Discussants noted that even India's largest and most successful IT companies have remarkably low R&D expenditures compared to their global counterparts. This suggests a systemic issue where the private sector is incentivised towards low-risk, high-volume services rather than high-risk, deep-tech innovation. Compounding this is the persistently low public investment in R&D, which has hovered around 0.7 percent of GDP for years, far below that of other countries, such as China, South Korea, and the US.[2]. China's R&D spending, at over four times India's share of GDP and with an economy roughly four times larger, translates into nearly twenty times India's total R&D outlay, underscoring the scale of India's innovation gap.

This led to a debate on the right model for innovation. In this context, the 'Bhabha-Sarabhai' model was invoked as an application-driven approach that starts with identifying market needs and then works its way down the value chain to develop the necessary technology. It was posited that all components of a technology stack need not be manufactured domestically. To move forward, strategic areas must be identified, as evidenced in sectors like semiconductors, which are driven by a desire for self-reliance in the tech space. The rapid advancement of technology, particularly artificial intelligence (AI), is also viewed as a double-edged sword. The risk of large-scale job displacement is a recurring theme, with experts calling for systematic up and reskilling programmes and a focus on digital literacy to forestall a potential social crisis arising from technological unemployment.

Hard Power and National Security

The discussions firmly established the inextricable link between economic development and national security. Given the recent spate of conflicts, it appears that escalated threat perception will continue, thus necessitating the revival of the industry-military complex. In this regard, a robust, indigenous defence-industrial base is essential for securing national interest in building the Indian economy by reducing import dependency. Yet, India's investment in defence R&D has been limited, constraining its ability to achieve technological self-reliance and weakening the foundation of a modern military-industrial ecosystem.

India's current military capabilities are middling and severely handicapped in modern, technology-intensive warfare, which defines 21st-century defence prowess. The dialogue acknowledged India's unique and challenging security environment, surrounded by two nuclear-armed adversaries, China and Pakistan, and a third front in Bangladesh. Furthermore, all three are communicating with each other, sharing common threat perceptions, such as those originating from India. This requires the military to be prepared for a full spectrum of conflict, from all directions, including sea, traditional trench warfare, and wars in the sky (and outer space), as well as cyber space wars, and also for continuing "grey zone" battles.

[2] https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2153547

It was also argued that perhaps the most profound security insight to emerge is the concept of a new form of ‘hybrid-insecurity’ which is premised on climate-induced mass migration from heat-oven states, creating internal instability. Social unrest fuelled by joblessness, discrimination, and inequality could only double the impact. This points to a new security paradigm where the lines between external military threats, internal social cohesion, climate stability, and technological disruption are dangerously blurred. India's security doctrine, still primarily focused on conventional border defence, is currently not adequately prepared for this complex and multifaceted threat landscape.

Towards a Coherent National Strategy: A Call for Deliberate Choice

India's primary need is for a policy process that moves beyond the comfort of ambiguous drafting and instead explicitly acknowledges divergent views, compelling policymakers to make coherent, deliberate choices. The discussion demonstrates that many of India's most persistent challenges stem from an attempt to pursue contradictory objectives simultaneously: fostering market competition while selecting national champions; seeking strategic autonomy while deepening alignment with one bloc; pushing for self-reliance while relying on global markets, technology, and capital.

The path to a Viksit Bharat is not a technical exercise of finding the correct policy for each isolated problem. It is a strategic exercise that requires a clear-eyed assessment of these fundamental trade-offs and the political courage to choose a consistent, comprehensive and actionable direction. The dialogues synthesised in this report do not provide a single map, but they put the spotlight on the terrain, highlight the crossroads, and underscore the profound choices that lie ahead. The success of India's journey to 2047 will depend less on finding perfect answers and more on the integrity and clarity with which it asks the right questions.

Judicial Reforms

This area falls outside the executive's domain but is a significant hurdle in achieving reforms. The number of pending cases in our courts exceeds 6.9 crores. This figure can be doubled to include matters before tribunals, revenue boards and district administration. Many suggestions have been made to reduce the burden and improve deliveries, but the effort is still lacking. What is worse is that the executive does not engage in a constructive dialogue with the judiciary to arrive at a common goal of implementing judicial reforms that can advance the agenda. There is a type of shyness which must be broken. After all, the judiciary is also a public institution.

Other Imperatives

Many other issues, including but not limited to those captured in this note, can be addressed to save resources that will help improve our country’s position to become a developed country by 2047, which will require a micro approach. For example, our road safety record is the worst in the world, and it costs three percent of our GDP. Drivers are responsible for 80 percent of the accidents, but there is no targeted programme to improve driver behaviour. We cannot find handypersons in our neighbourhood who can meet our domestic needs for electricians, carpenters, auto mechanics, and plumbers. The root of the problem lies in the education system,

which does not offer vocational education courses after Class 12. However, in all cases, some youngsters learn on the job, often starting as children of low-income families. The mindset of our society and youth needs to be changed to consider these profitable occupations, rather than yearning for a government job. A radical change has taken place, and our gig economy has been growing rapidly, creating new job opportunities for our youth; however, their social security is lacking.

Section II:
Key Messages

There are some key messages (read between the lines) which are listed below:

a. Level of inequality must be continuously gauged as it is a barometer which can indicate the extent and scale of tectonic shifts, whether within a country or across national/continental boundaries. While absolute equality is neither feasible nor necessary, ensuring equality of opportunity remains essential, and tracking measures such as the Gini coefficient can provide a more realistic and socially sustainable benchmark for this goal. Furthermore, policy focus must shift towards raising median incomes — a more accurate indicator of broad-based prosperity, which will then address challenges in education, skills, and infrastructure, thereby enhancing productivity and inclusion.

   Too much parity and too much disparity both lead to the slowing down of trade (internal or external) – a *raison d'etre* for economic dynamism. In turn, it creates winners and losers, who determine political sentiment, which can upend stability. The pursuit of the proper equilibrium must be a continuous process through domestic policies, while demonstrating leadership positions in the international arena and forming long-term coalitions.

b. What is often referred to as black swan moments might have been black elephants, moving slowly yet steadily, but remained in the blind spot. Therefore, there is a need to gauge trends and potential consequences continuously. The government must institute an annual exercise to decipher such trends. Suppose one examines how hegemons, who had provided global stability for a long time, started to face opposition through new groupings and institutions over a period. In that case, the message is clear – tectonic changes were in the making, but no one took them seriously. Trend deciphering requires a serious effort, but is often done in hindsight. Today, time frames capturing significant changes are much shorter; nevertheless, they leave a trail of what is to come. Therefore, the need is perspective planning and quick action. This would require breaking siloes and identifying the core cadre to provide discernible actions.

c. India cannot be seen as a fence-sitter, else it will be isolated and, by implication, unable to secure firm commitments from identified partners. Therefore, there is a need to develop clarity on what transactions India will seek in an increasingly transactional world, based on felt needs in four critical aspects: security (conventional and energy-related), capital, commodities, and technology.

d. Strategic autonomy may be challenging to exercise, not so much because of India's own choices but the actions of traditional allies. But if India must carve a place for

itself in a highly fragmented world, it must pursue a doctrinal approach based on its plural and democratic credentials. This is because historically, the doctrinal impact of nations has been the bedrock of their identity and a necessary factor in forming coalitions. In this effort, we need not advocate for autarkic steps, as this would risk losing friends who are essential for our trade, jobs, and growth.

e. With global governance bodies in abeyance, an assessment of key reforms necessary for entering into existing significant regional trade agreements should be carried out in addition to the ones for the World Trade Organisation.

f. While it is essential to put national interest first, it is also vital to have an adequate understanding of other countries to pre-empt (to the extent possible) impulses that drive actions on their part. Very little scholarship is available on this count. It will help to develop an understanding of how other countries think from their perspectives, thereby aligning cooperation or competition more effectively.

g. Mini conflicts may remain a regular feature as they move arms, goods, services, capital and related infrastructure quickly. These aspects are relevant in a current world where large economies are showing signs of cracks and chinks, and a war economy can be a quick fix. Containment, not escalation, will be in the national interest. The focus must be on creating tangible economic interdependencies with countries whose support would be critical. India's biggest strength is its vast potential market, comprising a large number of consumers. Efforts should be made to strengthen it.

h. Domestic demand must be boosted through a renewed focus on creating robust competition and expediting enterprise development. National champions and smaller actors need equal focus. State policies should be pro-markets and not pro-business. Markets comprise all three players: business, labour, and consumers. However, policy design must also be capable of recognising and correcting market failures through strategic regulation, investment in innovation, and guardrails that ensure fair competition and inclusion, thereby sustaining both efficiency and creativity.

i. The skilling ecosystem needs a relook by understanding new demand and technological changes. Measuring the employment intensity of investments and their diversity is a critical need.

j. All policy making must inevitably be consultative through mechanisms which would involve all stakeholders and not just officials. A dedicated system to review implementation processes must be institutionalised, and zero tolerance must be observed to ensure accountability and implementation.

k. Last but perhaps most crucial, focus on cities, place investment in climate action as a critical need for future proofing, and build resilient infrastructure connecting cities and strategic hubs to spread out economic growth around many clusters as opposed to a handful.

Section III:

Action Matrix

To support the arguments and discussions presented in the previous section, we provide an Action Matrix organised by theme. The aim is pragmatic: to present politically feasible measures that are administratively deliverable and consistent, translating the deliberations and findings from the preceding sections into practicable steps.

The matrix is organised around five lenses: current processes, previous mistakes, appropriate action and direction, likely opposing forces, and potential counter-arguments with rebuttals. Its purpose is to equip policymakers and implementers with a structured, problem-centred playbook: it identifies where institutional bottlenecks lie, proposes concrete next steps, anticipates resistance and suggests ways to build political and administrative coalitions.

The identified themes which are India's growth drivers, cover: Geopolitics, geoeconomics, and trade dynamics; strategic imperatives for industrial policy; enterprise development through entrepreneurship, employment, and skilling; education and health as foundations of human capital; state capacity, governance, and policy implementation; federalism and fiscal decentralisation; urban governance, infrastructure, and climate resilience; capital flows and financial deepening; agricultural reforms and rural transformation; technology, innovation, and R&D ecosystems; reforms for strategic sectors; defence sector reforms for self-reliance; utility services for efficiency, affordability, and access; and cross-cutting themes of transparency, evaluation, and political economy.

The real challenge is not choosing between these growth drivers but integrating physical, human, social, and natural capital into an **inclusive wealth framework** that sustains long-term investment and balanced development.

Action Matrix

Theme	Substance	What did not work and why	How to make it work	Likely opposing forces	Likely counter-arguments & responses
Geopolitics, Geo Economics & trade (doctrine, de-risking, FTAs, WTO, etc.)	Periodic inter-ministerial trade diplomacy; ad-hoc sectoral risk assessments; DoC negotiates FTAs, consulting relevant subject ministries, including MEA and states. WTO stagnation persists due to US intransigence, while plurilateral discussions on a few issues are ongoing, in which India neither participates nor opposes them. This has caused much anger among other members who are keen.	No clear public policy on FTAs, but an ad hoc approach; poor alignment between trade/security; FTA plans lacked reform roadmaps; interministerial turf issues; the infant industry argument; and getting all states on the same platform. On plurilateral issues at the WTO, India believes that unless the Public Stock (food) Holding Waiver and its implementation issues are addressed, no progress should be made. The issue lies in the recognition gap — if a country is innovative, whether by producing goods, progressing towards value addition, enhancing competitiveness, or improving product	Publish concise and responsive public policy and operational doctrine; boost intellectual capacity; create truly independent institutions with a cadre of specialists who do not report to knowledge-proof bureaucrats; conduct scenario exercises with multiple stakeholders; create a trade-security secretariat; three-stage FTA accession roadmap (reform assessment → stakeholder consultation → phased reforms). Targeted industry support. If India is to play the role of leader of the Global South, it cannot afford to hinder the progress of LDCs and DCs on plurilateral issues at the WTO. At least there will be some movement in the WTO. After all, even FTAs are plurilateral. There is a need to get outside the WTO regime. India should strengthen cooperative ties with the Global	Entrenched bureaucracy; Export-oriented business groups; parts of government resisting restrictions; budgetary issues; refusal to learn from good practices in other states and countries.	"Restrictions harm exports" → Target narrow, sectoral protection to preserve markets; "Public doctrine is costly" → Low cost, reduces uncertainty and builds investor confidence. The multilateral agenda under the WTO will not move forward. This is already not happening because of the USA. Perhaps, the US may withdraw from the WTO or a 'coalition of the willing' takes charge and pushes the agenda of trade reforms.

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		quality, it can position itself differently, instead of merely competing on cost The absence of a strong focus on quality reduces the potential to stand out in global markets	South through digital know-how and technology transfer to the poorest nations, and by embedding overseas aid as a key element of its economic foreign policy Furthermore, India should also look to East Asia, specifically at ASEAN, RCEP, and CPTPP, where value chains are being developed. Provide targeted industry support to enhance domestic capabilities, drive innovation, and strengthen market positioning. Promote innovation-led growth, encouraging industries to focus on value addition, competitiveness, and continuous improvement in product quality. Make quality a pivotal differentiator, positioning it as the key defence against tariffs, trade barriers, and geopolitical tensions.		
	Capacity Enhancement	While India has seen the growth of think tanks, many of which have added value through the	A dedicated Economic and Security Intelligence cadre is needed to provide timely, regular and actionable input.	Bureaucratic setups are a roadblock. Strategic	India has fared well in crises, but the same system does not respond well in business-as-usual

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		curation of dialogues, there is a gap in the regular and continuous synthesis of those inputs. There is also a dearth of scholarships in other countries. Often, the discussions are about India, but little on how to read, perceive and make sense of other countries that India deals with.	This cadre needs to be empowered and versatile, and may be formed from resources within organisations that are deeply engaged in policy and practice analysis.	aspects cannot be easily communicated to regular bureaucrats. There is a need to find an alternative channel that is direct and nimble.	situations. Today, the country faces a navigation crisis in a highly dynamic environment. Formal systems will not be able to provide good results; therefore, a nimble and dedicated Economic and Security Intelligence cadre is needed. Its task will be to provide information in an actionable way, along with relevant context. Policy makers will make decisions.
Industrial policy (effectiveness, competition, jobs)	DPIIT designs PLI; state nodal agencies implement and disbursements on claimed milestones.	Financial incentive not addressing structural problem, weak conditionality; limited transparency; rent capture; lack of convergence between trade policy and industrial policy; lacks a focus on return on investment (ROI), which is essential for evaluating the scheme's long-term impact, inverted duty structures; insufficient	Redesign PLI with measurable milestones (disbursement linked to job creation, domestic value-add, R&D); require third-party ex-post audits; sunset clauses; use challenge funds and cluster development (public infra + shared R&D); Review and refine the existing disbursement conditions to ensure transparency, accountability, and sectoral inclusivity; create harmony between trade policy and industrial policy and attack inverted duty structures; cut red	Incumbent firms, state governments favouring local businesses, and the challenges of red tape, inertia, corruption, and political economy.	"Tighter conditions deter investors" → Transparent, competitive schemes attract higher-quality investors and limit fiscal risk; "Clusters slow jobs" → Pair short-term labour incentives with longer-term missions.

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		independent verification; limited benefit for MSMEs, lack of competitiveness. Many state-level industrial policies are outdated, and not every state has proactively updated its policies, unlike Gujarat for semiconductors or Tamil Nadu for the electronics industry, leading to pace differentials across states.	tape, implement judicial reforms and improve accountability for delays; enact Competitiveness Act; and adopt National Competition Policy. Incorporate ROI considerations into the PLI framework to ensure sustainable and efficient use of public funds. Expand to benefit MSMEs and labour-intensive sectors for global value chain inclusion, and support should be temporary, not permanent, with sunset clauses to nurture infants but not entrench dwarfs. Encourage states to update and align their industrial policies, addressing pace differentials and ensuring policy coherence across regions.		
Regulatory Cholesterol	Numerous compliance requirements across central, state, and local levels with cumbersome procedures.	Multiple filings, paper-based procedures, and a lack of harmonisation between ministries/agencies create duplication and increase the cost burden of businesses. Monitoring and impact evaluation of existing regulations are	Automatic review of laws and compliance every three to five years, with validity of laws in place, effective monitoring mechanism and adopting as well as institutionalising Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA), clear service-level agreements for approvals and inspections, merging and	Bureaucratic resistance, state–centre friction, and Professional intermediaries, such as compliance consultants, CAs, and	Businesses may misuse reduced oversight, Sunset clauses will create legal uncertainty, States have different contexts; uniformity will harm federal flexibility.

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	Outdated laws and archaic provisions continue to be in effect, contributing to regulatory complexity.	not in place. Ambiguities in laws, complex language, and discretionary powers granted to officials result in a lack of trust and ineffective safeguarding or grievance redressal mechanisms for businesses. Regulatory inertia, lack of accountability, and inadequate inclusion of technology. Mindset of civil servants who profit from the disorder.	rationalising similar requirements across laws, enhancing a digital first approach, capacity building of officials, and ensuring participatory policy making. Provide bonus-malus systems to reward achievements or punish failures. Additionally, strengthen accountability systems and explore expanding institutional reform priorities, including anti-corruption and accountability mechanisms. High-Powered Commission with a clear mandate, structure, and sunset clause	lawyers, benefit from the complexities.	
Judicial Reforms	Lack of accountability, appointment and removal process of judges complicated, heavy pendency of cases, structural inefficiencies, government as primary litigator,	Collegium lacks transparency → leads to nepotism and perception of favouritism; Removal process is cumbersome → inefficient accountability; Case pendency → justice delayed; Government as litigant → high number of pending cases; Vicious litigation;	Introduce a National Judicial Service at par with the IAS, who will be better at discharging their duties as against the existing cadres; Establish a Judicial Service Commission to deal with appointments and removal of judges; Introduce the Case Management System as in foreign courts, where the judge calls lawyers of both sides to his	Judiciary protecting its autonomy/comfort; Senior judges resisting external oversight; Bar associations opposing restrictions on adjournments; Government	The Supreme Court had struck down the National Judicial Appointments Act as an encroachment on judicial independence, which was wrong. Holidays are necessary for judges and lawyers to be able to relax from their hectic schedules.

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	excessive adjournment culture, aided by the militant lawyers' community	In a large number of cases, the government actually loses in litigation. - The government often pursues cases even when the chances of winning are remote, leading to unnecessary expenditure and judicial burden Adjournments → slow justice delivery Low judge-to-population ratio and extreme dependency ratio compound delays and inefficiencies	chamber to agree to the process and clear deadlines. Implement the National Litigation Policy to reduce government litigation. Strict limits on adjournments should be enforced with financial penalties. Scrap the colonial system of holidays. Create Regional Appellate Courts and transform the Supreme Court into a constitutional court. Expand Alternative Dispute Resolution mechanisms (ADR) (mediation, arbitration, fast-track courts); Scrap the NJAC Act and enact a Judicial Services Commission which deals with appointments, removals and disciplinary matters related to judges. Increase the strength of the judiciary by appointing more judges at all levels to improve the judge-to-population ratio and reduce case pendency. Enhance case management systems through digitalisation, e-courts, and efficient scheduling to ease case load pressures.	departments reluctant to reduce litigation because of perceived fear of facing enquiries. Lawyers are opposing a new central service as it would limit their entry to judgeships.	They can always take their annual holidays, which they do. If they followed the usual working style of other organisations, then lawyers would be busy all year round. Adjournments are necessary to deal with the matters. Mainly the three-adjournment rule does not help. Usually, the court allows more adjournments at a small fee.

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			Implement continuous capacity building and training for judges and court personnel to improve efficiency and quality of judgments. Introduce an accountability mechanism to evaluate the merit of cases before proceeding with litigation, and establish a designated authority or committee responsible for making informed decisions on whether to pursue or withdraw from litigation.		
Employment & skills	Multiple central/state skilling schemes, private providers, and weak employer coordination.	The focus remains on quantity over quality, and weak monitoring leads to poor budget–outcome alignment. Fragmented certification, poor portability, limited apprenticeships, and weak employer signalling persist. Sectoral councils and employer coalitions exist, but they fail to generate large-scale job opportunities. Enrolment in skill programmes remains low; even	Create sectoral employer coalitions for curricula and apprenticeships (pilots); portable, credit-bearing certification; tie part of industrial incentives to verified job/upskilling outcomes. Co-create VET courses with industry; adopt an integrated, multidimensional approach to skill development and job creation—Standardise training frameworks and curricula for employability and industry relevance. Follow the incentive–disincentive model	Training providers are resisting standardisation and are reluctant to adapt to changes; employers are also unwilling to commit.	"Employers won't honour guarantees" → Phased payments and matched incentives tied to verified retention; "Standardisation stifles local needs" → Use modular standards to allow local adaptation.

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		certified candidates find limited, mostly gig or urban employment. Framework gaps from education entry to workforce integration restrict human capital formation. Skill development is seen as an end, not a means to dignified employment. Only 8–10% of the workforce is highly skilled, reflecting poor transition from low to high skills. The mismatch between qualifications and job opportunities persists, with both under- and overqualification: limited private investment and weak information symmetry on job roles, wages, and locations fuel attrition.	for private players and educational institutions, aligning industry incentives with measurable skill outcomes and promoting private sector participation. Extend focus beyond AI skills to include soft skills; promote sustainable, non-urban employment opportunities across various sectors—reimagine the education-to-workforce continuum for seamless integration of academic learning, vocational training, and labour market needs. Institutionalise the link between skill development and employment with dignity, reinforcing decent work as a social value. Provide adjustment training to workers who have been made redundant due to transition and other factors.		
Enterprise Development and Skilling	Fragmented labour skilling programmes by the government, which lack focus on enterprise	Informality persists due to the costly and time-consuming nature of regulations, which discourage economies of scale. This is further	Scope for review and reform to improve their effectiveness. The focus should be on aligning skilling initiatives with enterprise development needs, particularly for	Push back from existing incumbents in the ecosystem, particularly agencies	The push back can be countered through evidence.

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	development and creating an ecosystem to nurture an entrepreneurship mindset	exacerbated by information asymmetry. Enterprise skilling programmes in India are ineffective, fragmented in nature, and run in silos, draining public resources as they are disconnected from market realities. In fact, the market itself is clueless about the kind of skill requirements that will be needed.	microenterprises, to ensure better employment linkages and productivity outcomes. This can be achieved by providing incubation facilities for enterprises through enhanced access to working capital, mentorship, and hand-holding in tech upgradation. The government can support such enterprises by providing them with innovative credit support and special incentives, particularly if their employment intensity is high and sustainable. For this, the Commerce Ministry must identify sectors with potential for growth in both domestic and export markets, and then examine the value chains of these sectors to evaluate where competitiveness and human potential can go hand in hand. Existing institutions/bodies may be recalibrated for the purpose.	providing skilling.	
State capacity & implementation	Central programme design; state implementation;	Centralised design without sufficient state technical support, as needs vary across states;	Co-designing of policies tailored to state needs, pilot a central Implementation Support Unit for flagship programmes;	Perceived central interference; civil-service	"Undermines state autonomy" → Present unit as technical support; states choose

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	occasional central assistance and reviews.	diffuse accountability; limited lateral recruitment.	scale lateral recruitment and short-term specialist deputations; institutionalise lateral exit of non-performing staff, like in the Armed Forces; quarterly implementation reviews with public dashboards and named officials. Adopt the bonus-malus approach to regulate bureaucratic red tape. Have dedicated training schools for urban cadres (bureaucrats being skilled) to remove the colonial mindset and build trust and a sense of accountability. Five system fixes—stabilisation, Certification, Digitisation, Clean Procurement, enforcement, and prevention—should be focused on to reduce corruption.	resistance to lateral hires and lateral exits.	participating programmes. "Threatens bureaucracy" → Time-bound deputations with transparent selection.
Federalism & fiscal decentralisation	Annual transfers per the Finance Commission; limited municipal capital access.	Short-term, unpredictable transfers; weak municipal fiscal management; minimal outcome-linking. Implementation gaps in decentralisation; weak power devolution (73rd/74th Constitutional Amendment). Weak local	Need to localise growth for holistic national development through empowering states and extending capacity building for them to identify sectoral advantages, drivers of state-led growth, endowments, and the comparative advantage of states. Move to multi-year,	Central fiscal prudence concerns; states are wary of conditionality.	"Municipal borrowing is risky" → Pilot with credit enhancement; "Conditionality reduces flexibility" → Co-design metrics with states to preserve ownership.

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		capacity and poor awareness of rights and duties. Administrative inefficiency; weak district and panchayat roles. ULBs without tax powers, low revenue autonomy. Financial dependence	outcome-linked transfers; pilot municipal capital access with fiscal rules and capacity conditions; provide technical assistance and partial credit guarantees. True decentralisation through genuine power transfer to ULBs/Panchayats. Enhanced devolution with decision-making authority and accountability frameworks. Efficient administrative restructuring; empowered districts, resourced Panchayats. Localised development aligned with regional needs and governance capacity. Fiscal autonomy for ULBs—tax powers, revenue mechanisms. Funding–outcome linkage in state plans for transparency and impact.		
Urban governance, infrastructure & climate resilience	Central urban schemes with conditional grants; master-plan frameworks exist.	Master plans are often absent/outdated / overly rigid, with a top-down approach that ignores community and business development needs. Poor implementation and frequent violations (plans	Condition grants on updated climate and biodiversity integrated master plans; finance regional city clusters via blended finance; require community consultation and resettlement/affordable housing trusts. Streamline and automate	Local political resistance; developer opposition.	"Stricter conditions slow projects" → Technical assistance + time-bound conditionality speeds compliant projects; better planning reduces long-term risk.

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		are merely on paper) are also common. Additionally, zoning laws do not accurately reflect the reality of mixed-use in Indian cities, and there is weak enforcement of grant conditions, leading to displacement/ ecological risks. Change in Land Use (CLU) faces approval delays, manual procedures, and discretion-based decisions in many states, resulting in ineffective use of the District Mineral Fund, weak accountability, and poor interdepartmental coordination. Heat action plans are mainly unimplemented. Limited urban/climate action	CLU, and utilise GIS to showcase pre-approval and land use categories, rather than just their availability in all states. Decentralisation of nodal powers to issue NA permissions and allow online self-declaration in all the states. Incentivise green building codes and renewable-powered transport and use of digital twin cities (use of AI, real-time data, IoT sensors, satellite imagery, GIS and simulation methods) for integrating infrastructure, environment and governance systems into a single digital model—composition of an inter-departmental committee for better coordination and accountability. Strengthen local government ownership, integrate with disaster management authorities, allocate dedicated funds, and establish precise monitoring & accountability mechanisms for heat action plans to be effective. Promote capacity building among local bodies to strengthen their administrative, financial, and planning		

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			capabilities for sustainable and climate-resilient urban development.		
Capital Flows	India needs infrastructure which must be resilient and sustainable	High debt, poor governance and institutional fragmentation, lack of planning and limited capacity on using financial innovations and new tools such as green bonds, InVITS and blended finance, weak enforcement of contracts, project risks, cost-time overruns and slowed down public-private partnerships	Take-out financing to free up costly government borrowing and recycle funds for new loans. Consolidate assets of similar categories to scale up the bond market and lower the cost of capital. Promote PPPs and InVITs, especially at the state level, where most infrastructure lies—Harmonise and mandate "People First" principles in state laws for infrastructure projects. Analyse successes and failures of past projects and draw lessons for the future. Redefine quality of expenditure: move beyond capex = good, factor in outcomes. Expand PPPs with effective risk-sharing mechanisms. Enable long-term patient capital for infrastructure, rather than relying on short-term bank loans. Capital locked in gold or real estate is not being utilised. It can be recommended for utilisation rather than deepening bond markets to raise cheap, long-	The state government may offer a regulatory environment as a reason for not implementing timely innovation.	Assess opposing views and work with sectoral regulators to address them.

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			term capital or expanding consumer credit at a low interest rate to boost domestic demand. Encourage retail bond participation to enhance savings—Mobilise pension, insurance, and PF funds into corporate bonds via digital micro-investment platforms. Broaden bond market access to include MSMEs and infrastructure firms. Utilise easy-to-apply financing tools—such as trusts for roads/grids, pooled city bonds, and blended public–private climate funds—to track the quality and efficiency of spending, not just the size of the outlay.		
Human capital (education, health, social protection)	Central/state schooling & health programmes; scattered assessments; insurance schemes.	Inconsistent learning outcomes; underfunded primary healthcare; lack of interest in posting by healthcare personnel; ASHA workers paid less honorarium, which is not a salary (demotivation); weak school-to-work links—parrot learning through edutech	Scale teacher training and learning assessments; pilot school-to-work transition schemes with regional employers; strengthen primary healthcare with performance-linked financing; promote the private sector with stamps/vouchers for people with low incomes to access learning and healthcare. Utilise	Sector unions resisting performance metrics; fiscal constraint concerns.	"Assessments disincentivise teachers" → Use results for supportive remedial training; "Health reforms unaffordable" → Reallocate for primary health care and emphasise long-term savings.

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		platforms and poor trainers, combined with inadequate infrastructure. Weak penetration of insurance through Ayushmann Bharat (budget allocation and outcome gaps) and fragmented delivery, such as delay in disbursement of NHM funds, shortage of doctors in 2/3tier cities, and increase in OOPE. Fragmented design and weak integration with respect to gender budgeting, as it is treated as an add-on rather than integrated into mainstream human capital investment. Budget allocations are skewed towards welfare and subsidy schemes rather than structural, long-term measures that enhance human capital.	AI to enhance education and healthcare in remote and rural locations, while also providing the basic minimum physical facilities. State government to partner with NASSCOM, Coursera, National Programme on Technology Enhanced Learning (NPTEL) for AI, cybersecurity, entrepreneurship and blockchain skilling, promote peer-to-peer learning and community endorsement through awareness generation, lack of timely disbursement of scholarship funds, expand PMJAY to cover OPD and diagnostics and scale up HWCs to bring down OOPE, bring ASHA workers under a salaried system providing them social protection. Reprioritise allocation of funds towards structural human capital investments, taking into account gender, and strengthen gender budget cells within ministries to link budget, output and outcomes. Effective monitoring, evaluation, and a shift beyond		

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			input targets towards outcome-oriented gender budgeting are needed to actualise human capital development.		
Agriculture	Central schemes and state procurement regimes; occasional central legislation.	Process failures include poor consultation, rushed enactment, weak pilots, and opaque communication. Resource stress and fragmented reforms (2020 farm laws) have failed due to their top-down approach, leading to variations in policy implementation and digital adoption across states. Issues related to land records persist, including inaccuracies, lack of accessibility, and delays in digitisation. The readiness of digital infrastructure remains uneven, limiting the effective rollout of modern agricultural technologies and data-driven interventions.	Establish Intergovernmental Agricultural Council with state governments and farmers as members; pilot market reforms in phases (storage, interoperability, insurance) in willing states with safety nets for building trust; scale only after evaluating pilots; scale up e-NAM with logistics integration (Gati Shakti); expand cold chains, warehousing, food processing clusters, factor market reforms and crop diversification incentives, strengthen FPOs by scaling up with professional management. Explore and promote digitised agricultural practices that can directly benefit farmers through improved productivity, transparency, and access to services; Develop effective strategies for modernisation that ensure these initiatives genuinely enhance farmers' livelihoods and reduce	Farmer organisations are suspicious of reform; political actors fear a backlash; merchants are opposed to it because they would lose their captive business.	"Pilots too small" → Well-designed pilots demonstrate benefits and build trust; paired with visible short-term gains and safety nets.

Theme	Substance	What did not work and why	How to make it work	Likely opposing forces	Likely counter-arguments & responses
			disparities; Encourage state-level coordination and capacity building to ensure consistent and inclusive adoption of digital agriculture across regions.		
Technology, innovation & industrial R&D	Multiple grants and university funding; limited translational support.	Low commercialisation, fragmented funding, and weak industry–university links. No unified strategy exists linking GCCs with Start-ups, MSMEs, government labs, and academia. A large STEM workforce has limited advanced R&D skills, such as AI and ML, in biotech and semiconductors. There is an infrastructure deficit outside top premium institutions, and grant disbursals are delayed. Low commercialisation; fragmented, less funding; weak industry–university links; no unified strategy linking GCCs with start-ups, MSMEs, govt labs & academia; large STEM workforce with limited advanced R&D skills	Create mission-oriented translational funds with matched industry participation; deploy challenge grants; establish regional translational centres linked to universities/clusters; offer liberal tax incentives for verifiable investment in R&D. To be followed up with rewards for breakthrough innovations with IPR. Create PLI-type schemes for R&D and GCCs, and provide tax credits. Incentivise CSR funding for applied R&D and link IPR ownership with firm contributions. Strong integration of returning talents and improved infrastructure through the allocation of more funds. Prioritise human capital development within R&D; adopt a triple helix approach (govt–academia–industry) to boost R&D intensity and innovation; encourage greater	Academia defending basic research funds; firms reluctant to co-fund risky R&D. Existing institutions often resist change.	"Mission funds crowd out basic research" → Maintain balanced portfolio (basic + translational); "Private co-funding scarce" → Public matching and IP rules to de-risk participation.

Theme	Substance	What did not work and why	How to make it work	Likely opposing forces	Likely counter-arguments & responses
		(AI/ML, biotech, semiconductors); infrastructure deficit outside top institutions; delay in grant disbursals; lack of emphasis on human capital within regional R&D ecosystems; limited private sector participation, overdependence on central funding; absence of integrated govt–academia–industry approach; low digital literacy restricting knowledge-based economy; weak enabling conditions (poor business environment, low investment in knowledge sectors, regional crime risks); poorly trained STEM workforce	private investment to diversify funding and reduce public burden; develop a viable business environment for innovation and entrepreneurship; improve digital literacy to enhance inclusion in the innovation ecosystem; address structural barriers by ensuring safer, better governed research environments		
Strategic sectors	What is strategic to India's needs over the next few years must be carefully evaluated. Additionally,	No uniform strategic sector framework exists, as each state may have a strategic strength and a corresponding document for which a separate regulatory environment	States must be asked to prepare strategic strengths and document an adequate rationale for a unified strategic sector framework.	Capacity constraints and resort to generalisations	This process needs to be carefully nurtured by a team of experts drawn from the centre and states. Much like how FC of ISC engages with states, the expert body

Theme	Substance	What did not work and why	How to make it work	Likely opposing forces	Likely counter-arguments & responses
	Indian policies are a result of reactive rather than proactive elements, such as energy and chip storage demand, which arose after the Ukraine War.	may be needed. This needs to be properly understood for states to become powerful economic agents. A weak domestic ecosystem results in import dependence in the defence sector and lags in manufacturing capacity in semiconductors	Chart a phased roadmap with securing supply chains in the short run, building global chains in the medium run and leading frontiers in technology in the long run. To begin with, the central government can take up five priority sectors (semiconductors, defence, energy, critical minerals, biotech and pharma, then set simple 2030 targets (output, exports, jobs) and list hurdles (power costs, travel time to port, working capital, product standards) to achieve the goal		should engage with states before finalising what strategic sectors need special focus in each state.
National security & hybrid threats	Defence planning focused on conventional threats; limited civilian integration.	Siloed planning and fragmented coordination across sectors, inadequate preparedness for cyber, climate-induced and hybrid disruptions, high import dependency in critical technologies and defence components, limited R&D investment and innovation ecosystem with low private sector participation and weak technology adoption	Update doctrine to include hybrid threats; run joint civil-military exercises; align supply-chain resilience with procurement where appropriate. Reduce import and tech dependency by investing in indigenous R&D and collaborating with academia and private players to divert the brightest minds in defence R&D, expand manufacturing, including MSMEs. Expand PLI to defence and tax incentives	Security establishment cautious about transparency; ministries wary of blurred remits. Foreign companies whose interest will be adversely affected.	"Hybrid doctrine risks civil-liberty compromises" → Clear oversight and transparency mechanisms; publish strategic priorities while protecting sensitive details.

Theme	Substance	What did not work and why	How to make it work	Likely opposing forces	Likely counter-arguments & responses
		compared to global peers such as DRDO versus DARPA, inadequate infrastructure, testing and prototyping facilities, expiry of PLI support for drones and emerging defence technologies, persistent and widening cyber vulnerabilities including skills gaps, rising sophistication of cybercrime, proliferation of misinformation, trust deficits in data governance, and exposure to emerging technologies without adequate safeguards, compounded by the growing challenge of cognitive warfare and information manipulation amplified by AI and surveillance capitalism	for defence manufacturing, establish a national defence technology and innovation framework and extend the validity of defence licenses under the IDR Act of 1951. Need for a troika of military, industry and academia backed by a substantial budget strengthen cyber and cognitive capabilities through targeted education, training, and public–private partnerships; develop an integrated national framework on cybersecurity, cognitive warfare preparedness, and emerging technologies; build resilience against misinformation through digital literacy and trusted media ecosystems; invest in indigenous technologies and innovation ecosystems to enhance cyber competitiveness; ensure responsible integration of AI with transparency and accountability; and advance India's strategic posture to include cyber–cognitive readiness as a core pillar of national security		

Theme	Substance	What did not work and why	How to make it work	Likely opposing forces	Likely counter-arguments & responses
Cross-cutting: transparency, evaluation & political economy	Programmes vary in evaluation rigour, limited independent oversight, and ad-hoc communications.	Poor measurement culture, weak independent evaluation, and communication failures that fuel opposition.	Launch a National Strategy Implementation Plan with integrated technology (minimising maximum human interface) alongside an independent evaluation unit and a public outcomes dashboard. Require *ex-ante* political economy analyses and communications plans for significant reforms, and utilise rapid feedback pilots. Capacity Building of States for better implementation.	Political actors are often uneasy with scrutiny, while vested interests tend to oppose transparency.	"Dashboards invite politicisation" → Neutral metrics and independent evaluations improve accountability and limit ad-hoc narratives.
Utility Services	Non-cost reflective tariff with respect to electricity, scarcity of water and regulatory uncertainty across states	Inefficient tariff structure for electricity, forecasting and planning issues, the problem of political freebies, lower billing and collection efficiency, and non-optimal resource utilisation. Poor wastewater treatment and political water pricing. State-wise tariff variation, higher compliance for MSMEs, and frequent tariff rate changes. GST Reforms 2.0 excludes fuel charges, increases rates for power tariffs,	Greater accountability to independently appointed regulators and decentralisation of the transmission and distribution process, with a shift towards renewable electricity tariff mechanisms for disbursing subsidies. There should be more focus on in-house generation and consumption of commodities. Green power for industry through easing the ease of transmission and distribution with a shift towards renewable electricity tariff from third parties and enabling power procurement for industrial	Opposing forces in this case are the state government, DISCOMS, and Political Lobbies.	States are often reluctant to dilute control over procurement. DSCOMS is likely to oppose concession tariffs to industries, as this would worsen their deficits. States fear losing autonomy and tax revenue from petroleum products if the GST reforms are implemented in the second phase.

Theme	Substance	What did not work and why	How to make it work	Likely opposing forces	Likely counter-arguments & responses
		and applies to large vehicles.	zones. Integrated water pricing incentive on industrial water reuse, cluster-level water infrastructure, such as common effluent treatment plants for MSME clusters and PPP models for waste recycling. Single window utility dashboard for transparent tariff and grievance redressal. Need for a second round of GST reforms.		

Given the above-explained action matrix, the overarching actionable policy recommendations are as follows:

Tackle Policy Incoherence and Non-Execution: India's governance challenges stem from archaic and ambiguous laws, a colonial bureaucratic mindset, and weak accountability, which are further exacerbated by frequent transfers and understaffing in lagging states. Administrative efficiency often clashes with populist pressures, diluting the momentum of reform. The way forward is to streamline government layers, leverage digital public infrastructure, and involve the private sector to curb corruption and rent-seeking.

It is often seen that complex, ambiguous regulations disincentivise economies of scale and reduce employment opportunities. Example: Complex labour laws related to hiring women workers at night discourage employers from hiring women, even in women-centric sectors such as textiles, electronics, and food processing.

Establish Policy Coherence Units for Timely Resolution: To overcome these systemic bottlenecks, the Policy Coherence Unit, established as a Committee under the National Development Reform Commission, is situated at the level of the Chief Minister's Office (CMO) and the Prime Minister's Office (PMO). Headed by eminent retired judges, senior bureaucrats, or respected political leaders, these units would listen to all sides, facilitate dialogue among stakeholders, and resolve issues at the table. Their decisions should be binding on all departments and acceptable to courts, thereby reducing the burden of pending cases and ensuring disputes between state functionaries, businesses, and citizens are resolved administratively rather than through prolonged litigation. The PCUs should also include policy experts and industry representatives so that the approach remains pragmatic rather than bureaucratic.

Shift from a Consumption-Led to an Investment-Led export-oriented Growth Model: India needs to gradually move from a consumption-driven growth model to one that is investment-led and export-oriented. While consumption has its advantages — shielding the economy from global shocks (such as trade wars, like that between India and the US), creating a virtuous cycle between spending and production, and anchoring small businesses in local markets — one should remember that consumption powers the present, but savings and investment finance the future.

For this transition, both domestic and foreign investment are crucial. Higher FDI inflows strengthen India's foreign exchange reserves and integrate the economy into global value chains, while robust domestic investment ensures that growth does not rely excessively on foreign capital and lays the foundation for genuine self-reliance. A key step, therefore, is to raise the domestic savings rate, creating deeper pools of capital to finance infrastructure, manufacturing, and innovation-led sectors. The Union Budget has already demonstrated its intent by increasing public capital expenditure to attract private investment, bridging infrastructure gaps, enhancing logistics, and implementing successful initiatives like PM Gati Shakti.

Household savings rate can further be improved by encouraging investment in small-ticket bonds with transparent risk ratings, providing universal pension and retirement products, expanding Jan Dhan 2.0 to include savings, insurance, and micro-investment options, improving financial literacy to build trust in financial products, offering tax incentives and bonuses for long-term deposits, mutual funds and bonds, and scaling up UPI-linked micro-investment platforms to enable wider retail participation in IPOs, REITs, and InvITs.

Move from Threshold-Based to Outcome-Oriented Policies: Policy frameworks should focus on outcomes rather than thresholds. That is, it should be replaced by arbitrary size categories with performance-based measures such as productivity, job creation, emissions, and safety. This requires shifting thresholds from rigid laws to flexible rules, which can be amended more easily in response to changing needs. At the same time, laws, rules, and regulations should have defined validity periods (as in the UK, South Korea, etc.) to ensure regular review and relevance, thereby avoiding overburdening of business compliance and stagnation in policy regimes.

Adopt an Innovation-Led Policy Model: Adopting an innovation-led policy model requires embedding technology at the heart of governance to drive efficiency, transparency, and accountability. Leveraging tools such as blockchain can ensure secure, tamper-proof records and reduce corruption, while advanced data systems can improve policy design, execution, monitoring, and evaluation. Parallelly, integrating technology-based skills into the education curriculum will build a future-ready workforce, positioning India as a global tech power and enabling sustainable, innovation-driven growth.

Strengthen Budget Allocation and Monitoring Framework: In addition to the above, the government should focus on developing an overarching policy framework that ensures efficient budget allocation, transparent monitoring, and outcome-based evaluation. This will help channel resources into the most critical sectors, avoid leakages, regional imbalances and ensure that public spending translates into measurable growth, productivity, and welfare gains.

Section IV:
Conclusion

Realising the ambition of *Viksit Bharat* by 2047 will depend less on a single master plan and more on the institutional habits that translate intent into results. The central lesson is procedural: design reforms as a sequence of discrete, verifiable steps (pilot → evaluate → adapt → scale), make roles and responsibilities explicit, and attach measurable indicators to every major decision. Where political consensus is fragile, phased pilots that deliver visible, local benefits can open space for deeper change; where capacity is thin, short-term technical deputations and support units can bridge gaps without weakening local ownership.

In this broader framing, Navi Radjou's **frugal growth model** offers a practical lens. India cannot pursue US-style hypergrowth without breaching planetary limits, nor can it embrace degrowth when nearly a billion citizens still require a basic standard of living. His middle path centred on industrial symbiosis, distributed manufacturing, and regeneration of people, places, and planet, aligning with a step-by-step reform ethos that reduces uncertainty, distributes risk, and makes success replicable. Strategically adapted, such a model could anchor India's long-term industrialisation in inclusivity, competitiveness, and sustainability.

Further, implementation requires attention to five practical imperatives. **First**, institutional clarity: name the responsible agency, the delivery champion, and the public metric for each major reform so accountability is not diffused. **Second**, sequencing and conditionality: align financial incentives, legal reforms and administrative capacity in a sequence that avoids overreach and enables course correction. **Third**, monitoring and independent evaluation: build an evidence loop that feeds timely learning back into policy design rather than postponing assessment until after rollout. **Fourth**, adopt a milestone-based approach by defining clear, time-bound targets and interim checkpoints to measure progress and recalibrate actions as necessary, ensuring reforms remain on track and adaptable to changing contexts. **Fifth**, stakeholder management: embed continuous consultation and transparent communications so that reform packages are accompanied by clear compensation, safeguards and transition support for those adversely affected.

The federal dimension is central to implementability. Explicit emphasis on decentralisation and devolution across all three levels of governance—Union, State, and Local is essential to operationalise cooperative federalism and ensure accountability at every tier. Many of the action plans envisaged here must be co-designed and co-financed with states and municipalities. This requires predictable, multi-year financing, mutually agreed performance metrics and a neutral platform for resolving disputes. Alignment of interests is very essential to enable progress. Framing central support as capacity augmentation rather than control will lower political resistance and make collaboration more durable. Similarly, pairing national

missions with sub-national pilots ensures contextual adaptation while preserving comparability across states.

Finally, pragmatic realism should replace technocratic idealism. Some initiatives can be advanced quickly with modest resources and clear protocols; others demand sustained political leadership and a longer horizon. The virtue of the agenda laid out here is practical: it prescribes not only what needs to change but how to change it: through named processes, staged interventions, transparent metrics and built-in evaluation. Institutionalising these processes will make policy outcomes less dependent on individual proclivities and more on reproducible practice. If India can embed these habits of disciplined execution, it will markedly increase the likelihood that the aspirations of *Viksit Bharat* translate into durable achievements in prosperity, equity and resilience.

The central leadership must strive to create a national compact to deliver the plans outlined above and any additional plans that are feasible. The national compact must comprise all political parties, state governments, trade unions, media, academia and civil society from across the length and breadth of the country. It will not be without challenges, but it remains imperative to take India forward to become a developed country by 2047.

Important Note: The above recommendations are inclusive and not exhaustive, but not limited to an overall agenda to pursue reforms to take India forward.

Annexure 1:

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