



### A watershed moment in India's defence posture

Operation Sindoor commenced at 1:05 a.m. on May 7, 2025, with a surgical, high-intensity destruction of selected terrorist infrastructure. This strike was a direct and decisive response to the cowardly Pahalgam carnage orchestrated by cross-border terrorists on April 22, 2025. This operation represents a paradigm shift in India's politico-military mindset and doctrine, marking a watershed moment in its approach to national security.

#### New era Indian doctrine

India's historical posture of "reactive restraint" provided a strong rationale for a "dossier approach", in which military inaction was often portrayed as extraordinary restraint and was frequently encouraged and lauded by the West. "What if" loops about attacking terror targets in a nuclear-armed adversary provided the final blow to India's decision-makers. Post-Operation Sindoor, the "zero tolerance" policy declared by Prime Minister Narendra Modi was pivoted further and reinforced, whereby any act of cross-border terrorism would be considered an "act of war".

This reflects a leadership that possesses both the strategic resolve to act and the absolute confidence in the armed forces to deliver retribution. Despite the political risks, this extraordinary resolve to tackle terror head on – and the refusal to submit to nuclear blackmail and external pressure drew new red lines.

Operation Sindoor defined a new chapter in India's defence evolution too. While on transition to integration and restructuring, this Operation tested the ground realities of the three services – the Indian Air Force (IAF), the Indian Navy and the Indian Army. Post Pahalgam, the forces were tuned to expect a clear-cut political directive for action, which came in an unambiguous form and was perhaps stronger than what the services had anticipated. The services were given a free hand.

The resultant Indian strikes on nine terrorist targets were exceptionally well-integrated across the three services, achieving total success despite a fully alert Pakistan. The choice of Bahawalpur, and Muridke in Pakistan as targets was unthinkable. Pakistan and the world woke up to realities of the "new normal". Pictures and videos of the massive destruction at these terror hubs, and the sheer scale and success of the strikes, were stunning.

The highly calibrated and intelligent Indian response over the next two days was executed well, calmly but firmly. Pakistan clearly misread



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India's resolve. On May 9 and 10, when the Pakistan Air Force attempted to strike some of India's critical high-value assets, the Indian Air Force countered it in near real time with waves of airstrikes hitting II bases across Pakistan, including Nur Khan, Sargodha, Murid and Bholari. The level of precise targeting and extent of damage achieved could not have been imagined by Pakistan. The global defence analytical community acknowledges this as one of the most defining and concise actions against a nuclear-armed nation.

#### Military audaciousness at its best

This total, integrated and calibrated response, characterised by masterful control of the escalation ladder, reflects the seamless synergy between India's civil and military institutions. In my opinion, India's achievements could not have been better. After 88 hours of Operation Sindoor, by noon on May 10, Pakistan was reeling from massive destruction at II bases by the IAF. Karachi was nervously monitoring Indian naval deployments poised for action, while aggressive Indian Army operations along the Line of Control and the International Border had rendered drone attacks unviable. A robust, networked air-defence system, including the S-400 missile system had completely denied airspace not only over Indian territory but also deep inside Pakistan. Pakistan had no choice but to rush and request a ceasefire.

Given the dynamics and complications of escalation control under a nuclear overhang, India's Chief of Defence Staff and the Service Chiefs deserve high praise for the ferocious targeting on May 10 and the brilliant seizing of the escalation opportunity to coerce a termination. This was military audaciousness at its very best.

The Indian armed forces responded in full measure to the political mandate, leaving no doubt regarding the nation's capacity for rapid, high-impact operation. The sheer scale and speed of India's action on May 10 was watched with awe across the country.

The announcement of the ceasefire was too sudden for the public at large. You cannot blame the people asking for more. One cannot view these developments with emotion. Having achieved all objectives and the scope of action on May 10, the termination decision was perfectly timed.

Operation Sindoor's ongoing status carries a powerful strategic signal. Undoubtedly, the

primary signal is for terrorists to remain in hiding and for their backers to desist. The message also extends to the Pakistani citizenry – a stark and constant reminder of the reckless involvement of part of their military leadership. In the age of global digital transparency and expert strategic analysis, the truth of these events cannot be shielded from their people for long. They must now confront the realities of a military regime camouflaged by a political facade and "regime" change should be on their minds.

#### Accelerate indigenous defence growth

Ongoing operations have implications for India as well. The defence forces would need to maintain a high state of readiness to act. After the opening round of Operation Sindoor, the expectations are high. I am sure the services are working proactively to deliver. An equally important implication is for the defence industry to ramp up in real terms to achieve Atmanirbharta. The focus must be to "Innovate, Design, and Manufacture" at scale.

The government has focused hugely on reforms to energise the public and private industry in defence, aerospace, space, cyber and Artificial Intelligence domains. The stellar performance of indigenous systems during Operation Sindoor has invigorated India's innovation and startup ecosystem. I

have always maintained that the real responsibility for being the "agent of change" rests with the Defence Research and Development Organisation laboratories, Defence Public Sector Undertakings, and, to some extent, even on large industry players already in the system. They no longer have the option to delay and must immediately focus on truly integrating the entire private sector, including micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) and startups, into an indigenous ecosystem through a "whole-of-nation" approach. There is an urgent need to capitalise on this golden period of governance and reforms, and the unpredictable geopolitical environment only reinforces the need to double down on true Atmanirbharta.

Ultimately, the "Modi redlines" regarding cross-border terrorism are permanent. This new normal is irreversible and will define India's strategic mindset for the foreseeable future. The nation demands nothing less, and the populace would stand firmly behind the architects and executors of India's national security. My salute to everyone involved in the success of Operation Sindoor.



India's strategic doctrine has evolved sharply after Operation Sindoor

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## GS Paper II – Governance

### The elephant in India's data room

As another session of Parliament has ended, a familiar pattern was visible on the floor of the House. Members of Parliament who rose to ask questions, performing one of Parliament's most important accountability functions. Yet, a large share of these questions have followed/follow a predictable format, such as asking how many schools have functional toilets, how many pensions were disbursed in a given year, or how many beneficiaries received a particular scheme.

While these questions address important public concerns, the information they seek should ideally and already exist in the public domain in a clear, standardised, and easily accessible format.

An analysis of the parliamentary questions asked during the 17th Lok Sabha (2019-24) on youth employment found that a large share sought such basic facts. This reflects a far deeper reality that India's data system is fragmented and lacks interoperability. The elephant in the room, rarely acknowledged in such debates, is data standardisation, without which even the most ambitious policy visions risk being built on shifting sands.

#### Anatomy of the problem

In the National Data and Analytics Platform vision document released by NITI Aayog, it was observed that India's data ecosystem remains incoherent, with Ministries and government departments failing to use shared standards for common indicators and even defining basic attributes such as time period and region inconsistently. India today generates more data than ever before, yet abundance does not equate to usability. Data collected by individual Ministries for their own programmes often cannot be integrated seamlessly, making consolidation a laborious and error-prone task.

According to a NITI Aayog report released in June 2025, welfare programme databases often list the same beneficiary multiple times, leading



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India must ensure data standardisation for better governance outcomes

to fiscal leakages that inflate spending by 4%-7% annually. Recent government data clean-ups highlight the potential savings from addressing such inefficiencies. Notably, deleting 17.1 million ineligible names from the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN) scheme was expected to save ₹90 billion in FY2024, while removing 35 million bogus LPG connections could save ₹210 billion over two years, and eliminating 16 million fake ration cards may save around ₹100 billion annually.

These inefficiencies have significant policy implications. In the health sector, for instance, studies show that childhood tuberculosis cases are recorded separately in the Health Management Information System, the disease surveillance network, and immunisation registries, often resulting in the same patient being counted multiple times. Such duplication creates conflicting estimates, often leaving decision-makers uncertain and leading some to disregard data altogether in favour of anecdote or political expediency.

Beyond policy implications, these weaknesses also carry perception and economic costs. In the Global Innovation Index 2024, India had missing data for two indicators and outdated data for eight, with several relying on figures more than a year old.

Without coordinated methodologies, such indices both mask real performance and expose gaps in inter-agency coordination. In economic terms, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development estimates that improving public-sector data availability and sharing could add up to 1.5% of GDP, rising to 2.5% if private-sector data is included. In other words, the cost of poor data governance lies not only in misinformed decisions but also in squandered economic potential.

#### Common standard for data

The solution to the inefficiencies can be seen under the National Data Governance Framework

Policy (NDGFP), where the proposed India Data Management Office (IDMO) has the potential to be the keystone of reform by developing and enforcing common rules, standards, guidelines and protocols for data across all Ministries and States. However, the IDMO needs to be empowered with real authority to set binding standards, audit compliance, and resolve disputes over definitions and methodologies across Ministries. Otherwise, the inefficiencies will persist.

In addition, alignment with global statistical frameworks such as the UN's System of National Accounts for economic indicators, and harmonising them within a National Statistical Standards Manual could unify definitions and practices nationwide.

Most of all, India's open data platform, "data.gov.in", should be scaled up into a centralised, schema-consistent repository that serves both public availability of information and internal needs. Ministries must upload datasets in standardised formats regularly, enabling parliamentarians to access real-time, district-level figures.

#### As a benchmark

Finally, institutionalising accountability will be key to sustaining progress. NITI Aayog's Data Governance Quality Index should be an annual benchmark, tied to performance reviews and incentives for Ministries and States, as healthy competition on data quality can drive change as powerfully as economic competition.

Data standardisation is often minimised as a technical exercise, but it is in fact the grammar of governance that a nation aspiring to become a \$5 trillion economy needs to get right. Addressing the elephant in the data room means committing to the standards, systems and stewardship that will make India's data fit for purpose, and fit for the future.

*The views expressed are personal*



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## GS Paper II – Governance

### Census enumerator ID can be verified through QR code

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Census enumerators have been given identity cards with QR codes to enable residents to verify authenticity, says Lalit Jain, Director of Census Operations (DCO), Haryana, amid resistance from several high-end gated societies to grant access to enumerators.

In an interview with *The Hindu* on Friday, Mr. Jain said, "We understand that there may be some apprehension in their [residents] minds that maybe people [enumerators] are not genuine. Now, we have introduced the scan code enabled identity cards. Any person who has any doubt about the authenticity of our enumerator can scan the code on the ID card for verification."

On December 2, 2025, the Union Ministry of Home Affairs informed Parliament that according to Section 8(2) of the Census Act, 1948, every resident is "legally bound" to answer Census-related questions to the best of

her/his knowledge or belief.

"We have requested the presidents of the RWA (residents welfare associations) to allow us to enter, because Census ultimately is a nation building exercise, and it is to the benefit of everybody that we enumerate and we get to know the basic data about our population," Mr. Jain said.

#### Allaying concerns

He added that "stranger anxiety" and apprehension about sharing personal data could be the reasons behind the resistance.

"Data we are asking for is not something which is very, very personal. We are just asking people whether they have drinking water supply in their homes, whether they have toilets. And secondly, they need not worry because whatever data they give is secure with us. We will not share this data with anybody. Moreover, this data will not lead to any documentation, and it cannot be used against you," he said.

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## GS Paper III – Environment

# Calcutta HC rejects Centre's objections to pleas against Great Nicobar project

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NEW DELHI

The Calcutta High Court has overruled the Union government's preliminary objections to a batch of petitions alleging that it violated the Forest Rights Act while obtaining consent for its ₹92,000-crore Great Nicobar Island project.

In an order made public on Friday, a Bench of Chief Justice Sujoy Paul and Justice Partha Sarathi Sen dismissed the Centre's argument that Meena Gupta, the petitioner in the case, did not have the *locus standi* to approach the court in this matter. It directed the case to be listed for final hearing on June 23.

Ms. Gupta is a retired IAS officer who has served as Secretary to both the Tribal Affairs and Environment Ministries.

Over the last two years, she has filed a series of petitions challenging the Gram Sabha resolutions



The Centre plans to build a transshipment port, an airport, and a township on the Great Nicobar island. GETTY IMAGES

consenting to the diversion of forest land for the mega-infrastructure project under the 2006 Forest Rights Act (FRA); the constitution of a sub-divisional level committee under the same law; and the notifications reducing the buffer zones for both the Campbell Bay and Galathea Bay National Parks. The petitions also question the validity of a certificate issued by the Andaman and Nicobar Islands administration

claiming that all rights under the FRA have been identified and settled.

On Wednesday, Additional Solicitor General of India Ashok Kumar Chakraborty argued that Ms. Gupta did not have authorisation from the tribal population of Great Nicobar Island to file the petition, adding that the petition was not maintainable because her place of residence was in Hyderabad. The court ruled that in this case, it was "clear that the petitioner has sufficient interest in the matter", and that "she is espousing the cause of the vulnerable tribal community".

### 'National importance'

The Centre argued that the project was of "great national importance" and that "such project of national importance cannot be called in question in a [public interest litigation] PIL petition". The Bench responded by saying, "So

far, argument regarding the cost and importance of project is concerned, at this stage we are not inclined to enter into the merits of the case. A project involving huge expenditure must proceed in accordance with governing laws holding the field and it is not beyond the scope of judicial review on permissible parameters."

The ASG further argued that the petitions should not be maintainable because multiple petitions were filed for prayers that could have been made in the same petition, further positing that the National Green Tribunal had already heard and ruled on this issue, and hence the principle of *res judicata* would apply. The court dismissed both arguments, ruling that the petitions and issues before the High Court were distinct not only from each other but also from the issue decided by the NGT earlier this year.

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