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AI's Next Test — Reaching India's Informal Women Worker

Context

- India's aspiration for **Viksit Bharat by 2047** depends not only on economic growth but also on the equitable distribution of technological gains.
- Artificial Intelligence (AI) is transforming agriculture, healthcare, finance, logistics and other sectors.
- Its impact, however, will depend on who designs these systems, whose data trains them and which languages they support.
- Without inclusive design, **AI could reinforce existing inequalities**; with gender-responsive governance, it can become a powerful tool of economic empowerment.

AI and the Gendered Nature of India's Workforce

- Around 82% of working women in India are engaged in informal employment, including agriculture, domestic services, home-based production and micro-enterprises.
- Their **limited access to finance, technology**, skills and social protection makes them vulnerable to technological disruption but also creates significant opportunities for AI-led inclusion.

- The India AI Governance Guidelines identify fairness and equity as core principles.
- **These must translate into practical outcomes** by ensuring that AI systems account for gender, language, caste, disability, location and occupational status.
- AI should be designed, tested and governed to prevent stereotypes, **discrimination and digital exclusion**.

AI in Agriculture and Informal Work

- Agriculture offers major possibilities for women through precision agriculture, crop-health monitoring, input optimisation, weather information and market access.
- With 76.9% of rural women engaged in agriculture, women constitute a crucial constituency for agricultural AI.
- The 2024 **deployment of Farmer.Chat** across 12 States reported improved quality of life among 61% of women users, with engagement two to three times higher than among men.
- This suggests that AI can achieve strong adoption when designed around regional languages, literacy levels, mobility constraints and livelihood realities.
- **AI must therefore move beyond serving large farmers** and become an instrument of empowerment for women cultivators, smallholders and informal workers.

Gender-Responsive AI Governance

- **Gender Impact Assessments**
 - AI systems influencing employment, credit, welfare and safety should undergo proportionate gender impact assessments.
 - These should examine **variations by sex, geography, caste**, disability and work status and ensure accessible grievance mechanisms in regional languages.
 - Algorithmic **transparency and explainability are vital** for building trust among marginalised communities.
- **Gender-Responsive Budgeting**
 - AI investments should be evaluated through Gender Responsive Budgeting.
 - **Policymakers should identify which women will benefit**, which barrier is being addressed, how outcomes will be measured and what resources will support corrective action.
 - This shifts attention from technological deployment to measurable social outcomes.

AI Literacy as Public Infrastructure

- Access to AI tools is insufficient without the ability to use them effectively. Women in informal work often face constraints involving time, literacy and livelihood demands.
- AI literacy should therefore be integrated into **DAY-NRLM, DDU-GKY and Skill India**, with Mission Shakti's Sakhi network providing trusted community-level support.
- Success should be measured through outcomes: whether women can access entitlements, navigate digital platforms, improve productivity or move towards better-paid employment.
- AI literacy must consequently be treated as **public infrastructure for economic participation**.

The Way Forward

- **Digital Safety and Women's Economic Participation**

- Deepfakes, online harassment and non-consensual imagery can discourage women from participating in digital economic spaces.
- **Digital safety is therefore an economic necessity**, not merely a cybersecurity concern.
- The IT (Amendment) Rules, 2021 provide grievance mechanisms for harmful content, while proposed MeitY measures on labelling AI-generated synthetic content can strengthen safeguards.
- Effective implementation requires accessible, survivor-centred remedies, especially in regional languages.
- Recommendations from the National Commission for Women's review of cyber laws also warrant coordinated inter-ministerial action.

- **Building AI Prosperity for All**

- India has developed significant AI capabilities through the **IndiaAI Mission, BHASHINI and AI Governance Guidelines**, supported by partnerships across sectors.
- The India AI Impact Summit 2026 further reflects the growth of India's AI ecosystem.
- The challenge now is to ensure that AI-enabled productivity gains reach the base of the economic pyramid, including women farmers, home-based workers, self-help group members and platform workers.
- **Inclusion must be embedded in procurement, AI design**, training, safety frameworks and impact measurement.

- **From AI Access to AI Empowerment**

- The goal should be to move from digital access to meaningful economic empowerment.
- **Women must not merely consume AI services** but use them to improve incomes, productivity, financial independence and access to public services.
- They should also participate as designers, entrepreneurs, workers and decision-makers within the AI ecosystem.

Conclusion

- AI can either deepen structural inequalities or become an instrument of inclusive development.
- **India's success will depend on gender-responsive governance**, AI literacy, digital safety and equitable productivity gains.
- By 2047, AI success should not be measured merely by investment, deployment or technological capability.
- Its real measure should be **whether women at the margins of the formal economy gain productive, safe and meaningful access** to AI-enabled opportunities.

AI's Next Test — Reaching India's Informal Women Worker FAQs

Q1. What is essential for achieving Viksit Bharat by 2047 through AI?

Ans. Equitable distribution of AI-driven productivity gains is essential for achieving Viksit Bharat by 2047.

Q2. Why is gender-responsive AI governance important?

Ans. It prevents bias, discrimination and digital exclusion against women.

Q3. How can AI benefit women in agriculture?

Ans. AI can improve crop management, input optimisation, market access and agricultural productivity.

Q4. Why is AI literacy important for women?

Ans. AI literacy enables women to access services, improve livelihoods and obtain better economic opportunities.

Q5. What should be the ultimate measure of India's AI success?

Ans. AI success should be measured by whether marginalised women gain safe, productive and meaningful access to opportunities.

Source: **The Hindu**

Tribunal Reforms Bill 2026 - Strengthening India's Institutional Architecture for Viksit Bharat

Context

- The Tribunal Reforms Bill, 2026 seeks to **modernise** India's tribunal system by improving appointments, governance, transparency, service conditions, independence and efficiency without altering the substantive jurisdiction of tribunals.
- It is part of India's broader **institutional reform** agenda aimed at supporting Viksit Bharat @2047, enhancing the ease of doing business, and strengthening the rule of law.

Why Tribunal Reforms Matter

- A rapidly expanding economy requires institutions capable of resolving disputes **efficiently** and **credibly**.
- Tribunals provide specialised adjudication in sectors such as taxation, company law, securities, environment, and service matters.
- **Timely** dispute resolution enhances investor confidence, facilitates capital circulation, protects employment, and improves the overall business environment.
- Thus, ease of justice and ease of doing business are closely **interconnected**.

Constitutional Basis of Tribunals

- The Constitution provides for tribunals through –
 - **Article 323A** – Administrative Tribunals dealing primarily with service matters.
 - **Article 323B** – Tribunals for specified subjects such as taxation, industrial disputes, land reforms and elections.
- These provisions (added via **42nd Constitutional Amendment in 1976**) recognise the need for specialised dispute resolution mechanisms alongside constitutional courts.

Evolution of Tribunal Reforms

- India's tribunal ecosystem gradually expanded across different ministries, resulting in –
 - Multiple administrative structures.
 - Diverse appointment procedures.
 - **Lack of uniform governance.**
 - Variations in service conditions.
- To rationalise the system, the Government initiated reforms, such as,
 - In 2015, the tribunal restructuring process began.
 - The Finance Act, 2017 merged similar tribunals; reducing the number from **26 to 19**.
 - The Tribunal Rules, 2017 and 2020 standardised administrative procedures.
 - The Tribunals Reforms Ordinance, 2021 and the Tribunals Reforms Act, 2021 further reduced tribunals from **19 to 16**.
- However, several provisions relating to appointments and tenure were **struck down** by the Supreme Court for violating the principles of judicial independence and separation of powers.

Judicial Developments

- Important judicial pronouncements (including the Rojer Mathew case, the Madras Bar Association case) have consistently held that tribunal members' appointments, tenure and service conditions must preserve –
 - Judicial independence
 - Institutional autonomy
 - **Separation of powers**
- The Tribunal Reforms Bill, 2026 seeks to align the tribunal framework with these constitutional principles.

Key Features of the Tribunal Reforms Bill, 2026

- **Establishment of National Tribunals Commission (NTC):**
 - The Bill proposes the creation of a NTC as the central governance body for tribunals.
 - **Composition:** Former Supreme Court Judge or former Chief Justice of a High Court as the **chairperson**, and two judicial and two technical members.
- **Uniform governance framework:**
 - The NTC will oversee 16 tribunals under a common administrative structure, ensuring standardised governance, better coordination, institutional accountability, and administrative efficiency.
- **Transparent and merit-based appointments:**
 - The Bill introduces structured selection procedures, merit-based appointments, greater transparency, and independent institutional oversight.
- **Dedicated NTC secretariat:**
 - A permanent Secretariat is proposed to support uniform administration, efficient functioning, and better coordination among tribunals.
- **No change in jurisdiction:**

- The Bill does not alter the substantive jurisdiction of existing tribunals. Each tribunal will continue exercising powers assigned under its parent legislation, while administrative governance becomes more streamlined.

Significance for Governance and Economy:

- The Bill contributes to –
 - Institutional reforms supporting Viksit Bharat.
 - **Greater legal certainty and regulatory predictability.**
 - Faster dispute resolution.
 - Enhanced investor confidence.
 - Improved Ease of Doing Business.
 - Strengthening the rule of law.
 - Better governance through independent and efficient adjudicatory institutions.
- It complements broader structural reforms such as –
 - Goods and Services Tax (GST)
 - Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC)
 - **Jan Vishwas initiative**
 - Digital India
- Together, these reforms aim to build a modern, transparent and efficient governance ecosystem.

Challenges and Concerns

- Ensuring the functional independence of the NTC from executive influence.
- Maintaining a balanced representation of judicial and technical expertise.
- Preventing delays in appointments and vacancies.
- Adequate financial and administrative **autonomy** for tribunals.
- Effective **implementation** across diverse tribunal structures.

Conclusion

- The Tribunal Reforms Bill, 2026 marks a significant step in strengthening India's institutional framework by improving tribunal governance while preserving judicial independence.
- Successful implementation can enhance ease of justice, reinforce the rule of law, and create a more predictable legal environment that supports investment, economic growth and the vision of Viksit Bharat @2047.

Tribunal Reforms Bill 2026 FAQs

Q1. What is the significance of the Tribunal Reforms Bill, 2026?

Ans. The Bill enhances tribunal governance through transparent appointments, the National Tribunals Commission (NTC), etc.

Q2. What is the constitutional basis of tribunals and the need for their reform?

Ans. Articles 323A and 323B provide for specialised tribunals; reforms were needed to address fragmented governance.

Q3. What is the proposed National Tribunals Commission (NTC)?

Ans. The NTC will provide a common governance framework for 16 tribunals through merit-based appointments, etc.

Q4. What is the role of the Supreme Court in shaping tribunal reforms in India?

Ans. The Court reinforced judicial independence, separation of powers, and fair service conditions for tribunal members.

Q5. Why are institutional reforms as critical as economic reforms for achieving Viksit Bharat @2047?

Ans. Efficient and independent tribunals strengthen the rule of law, ensure speedy dispute resolution, etc.

Source: **IE**

The Mecca Pact and the Rise of Strategic Hedging

Context

- Saudi Arabia, Türkiye and Pakistan signed a mutual defence agreement in Mecca on August 7, declaring that an attack on one member will be treated as an **attack on all three**.
- Beyond this collective-defence clause, the pact signals a deeper shift: three major Muslim-world states are recalibrating their reliance on external security guarantors, particularly the United States.
- Against this backdrop, this article examines what the pact reveals about changing regional calculations and what it means for India.

Complementary Strengths, Different Motivations

- The three partners bring distinct capabilities to the table.
 - **Saudi Arabia** offers financial resources, energy power and political influence across the Arab and Islamic worlds.
 - **Türkiye** contributes the strongest conventional military among Muslim West Asian states and an expanding indigenous defence industry.
 - **Pakistan** brings a large professional military and, most significantly, nuclear weapons — meaning any adversary attacking one member must now factor in Pakistan's nuclear capability, even without a formal nuclear guarantee.
- Each state has its **own rationale** for joining.
 - Saudi Arabia seeks **strategic insurance** after the 2019 attacks on its oil installations and its ongoing confrontation with Iran exposed the risks of depending on a single guarantor.

- Türkiye views the pact through the lens of **strategic autonomy**, with President Erdoğan seeking to convert Türkiye from a NATO flank state into an independent power centre, extending Ankara's influence into the Gulf and South Asia.
- For Pakistan, the agreement widens its strategic horizons beyond its India-centric posture and converts its military strength into greater geopolitical leverage.

Not Quite Anti-American, Not Quite an Alliance

- It would be premature to call the pact an **anti-American realignment**.
- Saudi Arabia still depends heavily on American military technology, Türkiye remains a NATO member, and Pakistan has no interest in confronting Washington given its currently warm ties with the Trump administration.
- The more accurate description is **strategic hedging** — regional powers supplementing, not replacing, external security guarantees.
- However, when multiple major states hedge simultaneously, their combined actions can still reshape the regional order.

Reading the Regional Reactions

- The pact's implications vary by country.
- Despite **Saudi-Iran rivalry**, both Türkiye and Pakistan share borders with Iran and have strong incentives to avoid confrontation with Tehran, given their own restive border minorities.
- Israel is likely to view the development with greater unease, since its traditional strategic advantage has rested on the **political and military fragmentation of the Muslim world**.
 - A combination of Saudi finance, Turkish military strength and Pakistani nuclear capability alters that calculus, even without an explicit anti-Israel intent.
- For Washington, the pact poses a paradox: the US has long urged regional partners to take more responsibility for their own defence, but greater self-reliance also means reduced American leverage over them.

What It Means for India

- India has built strong relations with Saudi Arabia over two decades, and Riyadh has significant economic and strategic stakes in maintaining that relationship — so India should not read the pact as automatically anti-India.
- Türkiye is more complicated, given its consistent support for Pakistan's position on Kashmir and past arms transfers used against India.
- New Delhi should seek **explicit assurance from Riyadh** that the pact will not apply to any India-Pakistan confrontation, while avoiding the temptation to view the entire alignment purely through a Pakistan-centric lens.

Conclusion

- The Mecca Pact signals a historic shift — West Asian security, long guaranteed by outside powers, may now be shaped increasingly by regional actors themselves.
- India must engage this transformation with measured attention, neither alarm nor indifference, safeguarding its strategic interests through calibrated diplomacy.

The Mecca Pact and the Rise of Strategic Hedging FAQs

Q1. What is the Mecca Pact?

Ans: The Mecca Pact is a mutual defence agreement between Saudi Arabia, Türkiye and Pakistan, treating an attack on one member as an attack on all.

Q2. What does strategic hedging mean in the context of the Mecca Pact?

Ans: Strategic hedging means regional powers supplement, rather than replace, external security guarantees while developing alternative partnerships to reduce dependence on a single guarantor.

Q3. Why did Saudi Arabia join the Mecca Pact?

Ans: Saudi Arabia seeks strategic insurance after attacks on its oil installations and tensions with Iran exposed the risks of relying on one security guarantor.

Q4. Why is the Mecca Pact not considered an anti-American alliance?

Ans: Saudi Arabia remains dependent on US military technology, Türkiye remains a NATO member, and Pakistan maintains warm relations with Washington.

Q5. What does the Mecca Pact mean for India?

Ans: India should avoid assuming the pact is anti-India while seeking assurances from Riyadh and maintaining calibrated diplomacy amid Türkiye's support for Pakistan.

Source: **TH**

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