

## Daily Editorial Analysis 16 July 2025

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### The U.S. Established and Extinguished Multilateralism

#### Context:

- The United States, under Donald Trump, is seen as a symbol of a global transformation where unilateralism is replacing multilateralism.
- The U.S. has sidelined the United Nations and weakened the collective power of the Global South by focusing on strategic, commerce-driven bilateral deals that fragment the global system.
- This power imbalance has become so significant that even the July 2025 BRICS Summit did not oppose it.
- The 31-page BRICS Declaration with 126 outcomes failed to address the erosion of multilateralism or emphasize South-South cooperation.
- Unilateral tariffs are now used as tools to force individual countries into making concessions, rather than fostering global consensus.

### The U.S. Shift and Global Power Flux

- The United States under Donald Trump recognizes it can no longer define global frameworks like it did in the mid-20th century.
- Its priority now is national self-sufficiency and containing China's economic influence.
- Over the past 25 years, interconnected trade, financial sanctions, and spheres of influence have become the main tools of global power, replacing multilateral institutions.
- This has left many nations, including India, unsure of how to adapt.

### India's Opportunity Amid the End of Multilateralism

- India, with its growing population and economic potential, must accept that multilateralism is fading.
- To assert its global influence, especially in leading the Global South, India must focus on national prosperity and South-South cooperation rather than relying on UN voting blocs.
- Recent setbacks like losing the UNESCO post to Pakistan highlight the need for India to exercise '**strategic autonomy**' — balancing between global powers while clearly standing up for its own core interests.

### Looking East: Trade and Infrastructure Priorities

- For a self-reliant India (Atmanirbhar Bharat), the focus should shift from the West to the East. Aligning trade agreements with ASEAN countries is key.

- Any loss of exports to the U.S., such as in the steel sector, can be counterbalanced through large-scale domestic infrastructure development — expressways, high-speed rail, data centres, and world-class universities.
- India must aim for growth similar in scale to China's 2013 infrastructure investments, which fueled its rapid development.

## **India and the Fourth Industrial Revolution**

- India's true strength lies in its emerging leadership in the fourth industrial revolution.
- India has surpassed the U.K. and Germany in the number of generative AI patents, demonstrating its capacity for innovation and self-driven growth.

## **Modern Military and Global Leadership**

- Military strategies worldwide now emphasize air defence, satellites, drones, and cyber capabilities rather than traditional ground forces.
- India is now positioned to lead globally in all these domains, allowing it to reduce reliance on expensive military imports while gaining flexibility in foreign policy and economic growth through defence technology spin-offs.

## **Reframing Borders and Building Trust**

- India is also rethinking its historical border disputes. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh's call for India and China to move past old conflicts has been positively noted by China.
- Diplomatic engagement, as seen with Pakistan over the Indus Waters Treaty, could extend to resolving border issues in eastern Ladakh and Jammu & Kashmir.
- India's strategic wisdom lies in realizing that these issues won't be resolved militarily, and long-term growth depends on diplomatic settlement.

## **Revitalising the Global South Through BRICS 2026**

- The BRICS Summit in India in 2026 offers a key moment to realign the Global South's priorities.
- Instead of relying on outdated multilateral bargaining through groups like G-77 to extract concessions from the G-7, the focus should now shift to mutual growth within the South.
- This can be achieved by redesigning tariffs and value chains to channel exports towards rising consumption in developing countries—ensuring affordability while supporting local industries.
- Though it represents a major shift, it mirrors the scale of change multilateralism brought in the 1950s.

## **Gurugram's Urban Crisis - Flooded Streets and the Collapse of Publicness**

### **Context:**

- The article highlights the **deeper socio-psychological and governance failures** that underlie urban crises in Indian cities like Gurugram.
- **Repeated flooding and poor civic infrastructure** in cities like Gurugram reveal not just technical gaps but a deep-rooted neglect of public welfare and inclusive urban planning.
- The article **moves beyond blaming privatisation** to examine the persistence of caste-based rural mindsets, even in elite urban spaces.

## The Visible Crisis - Flooded Dreams of an “International City”:

- **Recurring urban flooding:** Gurugram, known as the “**Millennium City**” and host to **Fortune 500** companies, faces annual urban flooding, power outages, and infrastructural failure during the monsoons.
- **Contradiction in urban aspirations:** Despite high real estate prices and expectations of global standards, basic civic amenities fail to keep pace.

## Root Cause - Not Infrastructure, but Mental Attitudes:

- **Persistence of ruralism in urban spaces:** Gurugram’s planning reflects the continuation of village-level caste-centric attitudes where **public good is secondary to private benefit**.
- **Lack of publicness:** There’s a deep absence of the concept of shared public spaces or responsibilities, leading to **rampant individualism, encroachments, and misuse of resources**.

## Historical Continuity of Privatisation and Exclusion:

- **DLF and origins of private urbanism:** The first “licence” for private development was issued to the Delhi Land and Finance (DLF) corporation in 1981, under the Haryana Development & Regulation of Urban Areas Act of 1975 in the village of Chakkarpur in Gurgaon district.
- **Village attitudes, urban forms:** The transition from rural to urban did not change social dynamics; instead, modernity was layered over regressive structures, masking the exclusionary basis of public life.

## Planning without Public Welfare:

- **Land rationalisation and appropriation:** Tools like chakbandi and kilabandi are often misused to consolidate land for private gain, including illegal appropriation of panchayat land.
- **Digital technology as a facilitator of misuse:** GIS-based mapping and digitisation, meant for transparency, are subverted with the help of officials to benefit private interests.

## The Myth of “Smart” Cities:

- **Technological fixes vs. civic values:** CCTV cameras and command centres cannot replace the missing value of publicness in urban planning.
- **False modernity:** Gated communities and luxury enclaves thrive at the cost of civic life beyond their walls. These are urban manifestations of **rural exclusivity**.

## Way Forward - Rebuilding the Idea of the Public:

- **Public consciousness as the foundation:** True urban development demands a mental shift towards **collective responsibility**, not just new roads or tech solutions.
- **Urban citizenship over rural attitudes:** The mindset must evolve from “looking after your own” to civic participation and accountability in shared urban life.

## Gurugram’s Urban Crisis - Flooded Streets and the Collapse of Publicness FAQs

**Q1.** How does the absence of ‘publicness’ affect urban planning and infrastructure in Indian cities like Gurugram?

**Ans.** The lack of a sense of public good leads to unplanned development, encroachments, and infrastructural failures such as flooding and power outages.

**Q2.** In what ways do traditional rural caste-based mentalities shape modern urban governance and public life?

**Ans.** Urban spaces continue to reflect exclusionary caste-based behaviours, prioritising private and community interests over inclusive civic planning and shared infrastructure.

**Q3.** What is the role of land rationalisation practices like chakbandi and kilabandi in urban expansion?

**Ans.** Though meant to streamline land use, these processes are often manipulated to convert public or panchayat lands into private assets, undermining equitable urban development.

**Q4.** Why is the Smart Cities Mission inadequate without addressing underlying socio-psychological issues in city planning?

**Ans.** Technological interventions like surveillance and digital mapping are ineffective unless accompanied by a civic culture that values public welfare and collective responsibility.

**Q5.** How does the historical trajectory of private urban development in Gurugram reflect deeper issues of governance and public accountability?

**Ans.** The city’s development, rooted in early privatisation without strong regulatory oversight, reveals a systemic neglect of public interest in favour of elite-driven spatial growth.

**Source:** **IE**

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## The Issue with Criminalising All Adolescent Relationships

### Context

- The **Supreme Court of India’s 2025 sentencing judgment** in Re: Right to Privacy of Adolescents represents a rare and **nuanced moment in Indian jurisprudence**, where the judiciary confronts the

limitations of a well-intentioned but rigid legal framework.

- This case, involving a 14-year-old girl and her 25-year-old partner from rural West Bengal, underscores the tension between the letter of the law under the **Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act** and the complex social realities of adolescent sexuality, consent, and agency.
- Through its **extraordinary use of Article 142 of the Constitution**, the Court sought not only to deliver justice in a singular case but also to initiate **a broader conversation about systemic failures, adolescent rights**, and the need for legal reform.

## The Case at Hand and Supreme Court's Evolving Stance

### • The Case at Hand

- The **criminal case was initially set into motion by the girl's mother**, and it followed a familiar trajectory: the young girl was institutionalised, rescued, and restored to her family, only to flee again due to surveillance and stigma.
- The **couple married and had a child before the girl turned 18**, after which the man was arrested and convicted under POCSO's stringent provisions, receiving a 20-year sentence.
- **Calcutta High Court reversed the conviction in 2022**, citing the socio-economic context and the absence of exploitative intent.
- However, **judgement's problematic language**, particularly in framing adolescent female sexuality as something to be controlled, revealed **deeply entrenched societal biases**.

### • The Supreme Court's Evolving Stance

- Following public outcry over the High Court's language, the **Supreme Court** intervened Suo-Motu, reflecting both the seriousness of the case and the national attention it garnered.
- While **the Court restored the man's conviction**, it ultimately **refrained from imposing a sentence**.
- In an unprecedented move, **it constituted an expert committee to assess the desires and well-being of the woman**, now an adult.
- The Court concluded that **true justice lay in not sentencing the man**, as the **burden of punishment would fall most heavily on the young woman**, the very person the law sought to protect.
- **Her trauma, as documented by the expert panel, stemmed not from the relationship, but from the cascade of institutional actions** taken in its aftermath: the police investigation, court proceedings, and years-long effort to reunite with her partner.

## Broader Implications of the Case

### • Questioning the Blanket Criminalisation under POCSO

- This case has amplified a crucial but long-suppressed debate: **Does the POCSO Act, in its current form, do justice to the complexities of adolescent agency and sexuality?**
- Empirical studies reveal that a significant percentage of POCSO cases, over **24% in Assam, Maharashtra, and West Bengal**, involve consensual romantic relationships, with the majority of victims refusing to testify against the accused.

- In such cases, the **law inadvertently criminalises normative adolescent behaviour**, undermining the very objective of protection.
- The **age of consent**, which was **raised from 16 to 18 in 2012**, plays a pivotal role in this dynamic.
- While intended to protect minors from exploitation, **it creates a legal vacuum where all sexual acts involving individuals below 18** are deemed exploitative, regardless of the nature of the relationship or consent.

- **Agency, Consent, and Structural Injustice**

- A critical theme that emerges from this case is the **tension between legal definitions of consent and lived experiences of agency**.
- The law, as currently framed, is unable to recognise the possibility that adolescents might engage in sexual relationships as a form of limited agency, **especially in patriarchal, resource-constrained environments**.
- The Supreme Court's rejection of the Calcutta High Court's claim that the law renders girls voiceless reveals a **paternalistic blind spot**, where young people are denied the capacity to articulate and assert their own interests.
- That said, it is equally important to acknowledge the **contextual limitations of consent** in such cases.
- The **girl's consent may have been flawed**, shaped by poverty, limited opportunities, and entrenched social norms like child marriage.
- However, **criminalising such relationships fails to address these underlying conditions**.
- Instead, it leads to **further marginalisation and trauma**, especially for adolescent girls who are already navigating precarious personal and social circumstances.

## Conclusion

- The Re: Right to Privacy of Adolescents case **stands as a landmark**, not because it offered a perfect solution, but because it exposed the **fault lines between law and lived experience**.
- It **reminds us that laws meant to protect can also harm** when they fail to engage with the complexity of human relationships and adolescent development.
- **As India grapples with questions of consent, protection, and justice**, this judgment may well be remembered as the spark that pushed the nation toward a **more compassionate, evidence-based, and rights-respecting legal system** for its youth.

## The Issue with Criminalising All Adolescent Relationships FAQs

**Q1.** What was the central issue in Re: Right to Privacy of Adolescents?

**Ans.** The central issue was whether a consensual relationship between a 14-year-old girl and a 25-year-old man should be criminalised under the POCSO Act.

**Q2.** Why did the Supreme Court refrain from sentencing the accused?

**Ans.** The Supreme Court refrained from sentencing the accused because it found that punishing him would further harm the young woman, who had already suffered emotionally and financially while fighting for his release.

**Q3.** What flaw in the POCSO Act does the case highlight?

**Ans.** The case highlights the flaw in the POCSO Act that criminalises all sexual activity involving minors, without considering consent, context, or the evolving capacities of adolescents.

**Q4.** How did the legal system fail the girl in this case?

**Ans.** The legal system failed the girl by subjecting her to institutionalisation, social stigma, abandonment by her family, and a prolonged legal battle that took a severe toll on her well-being.

**Q5.** What reforms did the Supreme Court recommend?

**Ans.** The Supreme Court recommended reforms such as comprehensive sexuality education, life-skills training, emergency assistance, counselling services, and improved data collection on adolescent relationships and interventions

**Source:** **The Hindu**

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