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Presidential Opinion Versus the Federal Structure

Context

- In the political life of any nation, there are defining moments when institutions must act as guardians of **foundational principles**. India faces such a moment today.
- The recent Supreme Court opinion on the **16th Presidential reference** concerning the powers of Governors and the President has reshaped the delicate federal compact envisioned by the Constitution.
- This shift risks transforming States into subordinate entities and accelerating the consolidation of power within the Union government, thereby striking at the heart of **democratic governance**.

Federalism as the Backbone of India's Constitutional Design

- Federalism forms a core element of India's constitutional architecture.
- Although often described **as quasi-federal**, the constitutional scheme clearly distributes powers between the Union and the States, granting full autonomy to States in areas listed under the State List, such as law and order and land.
- The Union was envisioned as **first among equals**, not a superior political sovereign.
- This constitutional balance is endangered when State legislation can be indefinitely stalled or overridden by Governors and, in turn, by the President.
- When elected legislatures pass laws only to have them delayed, returned, or reserved without clear timelines, democratic will is subordinated to **unelected functionaries**.
- Such an arrangement undermines the equality of partners within the federation and reduces State autonomy to a mere formality.

The Crisis of Gubernatorial Power

- The controversy centres on the undefined and **unchecked powers exercised by Governors** in withholding assent to bills.
- Allowing Governors, who are appointed by the Union government and often politically aligned with the ruling party at the Centre, to delay or obstruct legislation distorts democratic norms.
- Without constitutionally mandated timelines, their role effectively becomes that of an **unelected veto-holder**, capable of stalling laws indefinitely.
- Constitutional values of fairness, reasonableness, and non-arbitrariness require that all state action be bounded by clear limits.

- The absence of such limits for Governors contradicts the spirit of these principles.
- **Judicial review**, another element of the Constitution's basic structure, demands that all exercises of authority, including those of Governors and the President, be subject to scrutiny.
- Insulating their decisions or delays from judicial oversight erodes accountability and departs from long-standing constitutional doctrine.
- The Court's endorsement of a limited direction framework risks conferring **vast discretionary power on Governors** without adequate checks.
- Allowing important State legislation to be kept pending for extended periods creates a de facto pocket veto, leaving States vulnerable to political interference and forcing them into repeated litigation merely to secure constitutional compliance.

A Pattern of Centralisation: Contextualising the Shift

- This dilution of federal principles gains deeper significance when viewed against broader patterns of centralisation in recent years. Multiple actions by the Union government have strained the federal equilibrium.
- **First**, the refusal to compensate producing States for GST losses undermined their fiscal stability.
- **Second**, the use of cess collections, whose proceeds the Centre is not obligated to share—has effectively reduced the revenue available for devolution.
- **Third**, the Centre has failed to fully implement Finance Commission recommendations, weakening predictable fiscal transfers.
- **Fourth**, centrally sponsored schemes increasingly require States to contribute up to half the funding, placing heavy pressure on already-stressed State finances.
- **Fifth**, financial allocations have been used as political tools, with selective transfers tied to electoral or partisan considerations.
- **Sixth**, investigative agencies such as the CBI, ED, and Income Tax Department have been deployed in ways that destabilise Opposition-led State governments.
- Finally, increasing gubernatorial interference in legislative processes completes this pattern of central dominance.
- Together, these actions mark a profound distortion of the federal structure, risking a future in which the Union government wields unrestrained authority while States function as administrative outposts rather than sovereign constitutional units.

Implications of Centralisation: Democracy at Stake

- The conflict between elected representatives and unelected authorities lies at the **centre of the crisis**.
- Allowing Governors or the President to override, delay, or neutralise the decisions of State Assemblies undermines **democratic legitimacy**.
- Federalism itself is a democratic safeguard: it disperses power to prevent centralised arbitrariness.
- When this safeguard weakens, the system becomes **vulnerable to authoritarian tendencies**.

Conclusion

- If the erosion of federalism continues unchecked, the balance of power will tilt decisively toward the Union, placing democracy in jeopardy.
- It is crucial that **constitutional institutions correct course** and reaffirm the foundational principles that sustain India's unity and diversity.
- **Preserving federalism is essential** for preserving India itself.

Presidential Opinion Versus the Federal Structure FAQs

Q1. What core constitutional principle is currently at risk?

Ans. Federalism is the core constitutional principle currently at risk.

Q2. Why is unchecked gubernatorial power considered dangerous?

Ans. Unchecked gubernatorial power is dangerous because it allows unelected officials to obstruct the decisions of elected State legislatures.

Q3. How is the relationship between the Union and the States described?

Ans. The Union and the States are described as equal partners, with the Union being only "first among equals."

Q4. What broader political trend contributes to the weakening of federalism?

Ans. Increasing centralisation by the Union government contributes to the weakening of federalism.

Q5. What is essential for safeguarding Indian democracy?

Ans. Preserving federalism is essential for safeguarding Indian democracy.

Source: **The Hindu**

The INO that wasn't and the JUNO that is

Context

- The completion of China's **Jiangmen Underground Neutrino Observatory (JUNO)** marks a major milestone in global particle physics, but for India it carries a **bittersweet resonance**.
- While China releases its first scientific results, the **India-based Neutrino Observatory (INO)** remains stalled.
- The contrast between the two projects reveals differing national trajectories in **Big Science**, shaped by public trust, administrative foresight, and political conditions.

The Promise of Underground Neutrino Experiments

- Neutrinos are among the **most elusive particles** in the universe.
- Their ability to pass through matter almost entirely unhindered requires **immense underground detectors** shielded from background noise.
- Both JUNO and INO were designed to study **neutrino oscillations** and determine the **neutrino mass ordering**, one of the most important open questions in modern physics.

- While JUNO has reached completion after a delay, INO's progress has stagnated.
- JUNO's success reflects **sustained national commitment**, whereas INO illustrates how scientific potential can be derailed by **administrative missteps** and **sociopolitical conflict**.

The Stalling of INO

- INO's ambitious 50-kilotonne detector demanded installation **inside a mountain** in Theni, Tamil Nadu, using natural rock as shielding.
- However, the combination of **large-scale excavation**, involvement of the **Department of Atomic Energy**, and political mobilisation sparked local fears.
- The project suffered from:
 - Insufficient early community engagement
 - Unanticipated environmental and social sensitivities
 - Bureaucratic delays and litigation
- These failures coincided with China's rapid progress, reducing INO's ability to attract **international collaboration and funding**.

JUNO's Advancement

- JUNO's first scientific papers showcase its **technological sophistication** and a **broad global collaboration** involving many countries.
- The absence of Indian researchers is striking, considering India's longstanding contributions to **neutrino physics**.
- JUNO has already produced a **high-precision measurement of θ_{12}** , one of the key parameters governing neutrino oscillations.
- This places JUNO in a strong position to determine the **neutrino mass hierarchy** and explore **physics beyond the Standard Model**.
- As JUNO spokesperson **Yifang Wang** stated, the project is poised for **transformative discoveries**.

Consequences of Missing the Moment

- INO's stagnation shows that in frontier science, **missing one opportunity can mean missing an entire generation of discovery**. The next major questions in neutrino physics will require:
 - More specialised technology
 - Greater international cooperation
 - Larger financial commitments
- Without renewed investment in scientific infrastructure, India risks losing its place in the global pursuit of **fundamental physics**.
- Yet optimism persists. India's young scientists are **skilled, creative, and ambitious**. What they need is a supporting system that matches their potential, administratively, politically, and socially.

The Way Forward: Rethinking Readiness for Big Science

- Large-scale scientific initiatives rely not only on **technical expertise** but also on the **ecosystems around them**. Successful Big Science requires:
- Regulatory clarity
- Environmental responsibility
- Transparent communication
- Community participation
- Citing **resource constraints** often masks deeper issues. India already operates major observatories and conservation projects, showing that capability is not the problem, **coordination and planning**

Conclusion

- The stories of JUNO and INO highlight how nations shape their scientific futures.
- China's persistence has led to a **world-leading neutrino experiment**, while India's project remains entangled in avoidable obstacles.
- Recovering from this setback demands that India strengthen **public engagement, long-term planning, and administrative agility**.
- India's scientific talent is undeniable but the challenge now is ensuring that national systems, **political, bureaucratic, social, and infrastructural**, rise to support that talent so the country can participate fully in the next era of **fundamental scientific discovery**.

The INO That Wasn't and the JUNO That Is FAQs

Q1. Why was the INO detector planned inside a mountain in Tamil Nadu?

Ans. It was planned inside a mountain because the rock would provide natural shielding for the massive neutrino detector.

Q2. What caused major delays in the progress of the INO project?

Ans. Major delays were caused by political controversy, local community fears, and administrative missteps.

Q3. What major scientific goal do both JUNO and INO aim to achieve?

Ans. Both aim to determine the ordering of neutrino masses through precise studies of neutrino oscillations.

Q4. What significant achievement has JUNO already reported?

Ans. JUNO has reported a highly precise measurement of the neutrino oscillation parameter θ_{12} .

Q5. Why is India's absence from JUNO's international team notable?

Ans. It is notable because India has a long history in neutrino research and expected to contribute significantly to such global projects.

Source: **The Hindu**

Reversing India's Brain Drain - A Strategic Push to Repatriate Star Faculty

Context

- The Government of India is considering **a new scheme** to attract “star faculty” and researchers of Indian origin back to the country.
- This comes at a time when the **US academic environment** is witnessing rising political interference, prompting globally mobile scholars to explore more stable and autonomous research ecosystems.
- The initiative aims to strengthen India’s R&D ecosystem, boost STEM capacity, and enhance India’s position as a **global knowledge economy**.

Need for the Scheme

- **Emerging global opportunity**
 - Increasing political intervention, threats to university autonomy and academic freedom in the US.
 - Global academic talent actively seeking stable and supportive research environments.
- **Addressing India’s long-standing “Brain Drain”**
 - Chronic outflow of Indian-origin scientists, especially in STEM.
 - Critical need to strengthen national innovation capacity and build world-class research institutions.
- **Strategic focus areas**
 - Initial emphasis on priority STEM sectors essential for national capability building.

Key Features of the Proposed Scheme

- **Set-up grant:** Substantial financial assistance for star faculty to build labs, teams, and research ecosystems in premier institutions. Supports operational autonomy and smoother onboarding.
- **Creating a seamless experience:** Returning academics require far more than monetary incentives—intellectual freedom, cultural alignment, and ease of doing research are crucial.

Challenges

- **Salary and compensation gaps**
 - Indian full professors earn approximately \$40,000/year, significantly lower than the US (\$130,000–\$200,000/year) and China (~\$100,000/year).
 - India, unlikely to match global salary benchmarks, must compensate with intellectual, cultural and research ecosystem returns.
- **Administrative and structural barriers**
 - Bureaucratic hurdles in logistics, procurement, funding flows, recruitment.

- Previous programmes (e.g., **VAJRA Faculty Programme**) suffered from procedural delays, funding uncertainty, and fragmented short-term engagement mechanisms.

- **Lack of institutional preparedness**

- Many public institutions lack experience in onboarding international faculty.
- Persistent hierarchical structures, limited interdisciplinary collaboration, and inadequate academic freedom.

- **Personal and social ecosystem gaps**

- Challenges in spousal employment, housing, schooling for children, and lack of well-defined tenure-track pathways.

- **Competition from other countries**

- India must undertake deeper reforms to stay competitive with –
 - **Europe** – Strengthening academic freedom
 - **China** – Aggressive recruitment and high funding
 - **Taiwan** – Rapid internationalisation of universities

- **Limited scope of proposed institutions**

- Reports suggest the scheme may be confined to a small set of public research institutes, ignoring the rising research capacity of Central-State-Private universities.

Institutional Reforms Needed

- **Administrative autonomy and red carpet mandate:** Ensure seamless procurement, funding flows, hiring processes, lab setup. Use expanded autonomy for non-government procurement.
- **Clear tenure-track and career security:** Move beyond fragmented fellowship-type programs. Establish explicit tenure-track conversion pathways.
- **Strong protection of academic freedom:** High-level government assurance of autonomy, non-interference, freedom from excessive monitoring, essential to attract global researchers.
- **Intellectual Property (IP) clarity:** Standardised and clear IP ownership policies, especially for scientific research.
- **Building a supportive social ecosystem:** Institutional support for spousal employment, housing facilities, quality schooling.
- **Cultural transformation:** Shift from rigid hierarchies to interdisciplinary collaboration; merit-based advancement; open, critical inquiry; and integration of international pedagogic practices.
- **Broadening institutional participation:** Include capable central, state, and private universities to maximise the scheme's impact.

Conclusion

- The proposal to repatriate Indian-origin star faculty is a timely intervention that aligns with India's ambition to become a global research and innovation hub.
- However, success will depend not on grants alone but on the depth of structural, administrative, and cultural reforms undertaken by India's premier institutions.
- If implemented holistically, the initiative could reverse the country's brain drain, catalyse a world-class research ecosystem, and position India as **a global leader in knowledge production.**
- The moment is strategic, and India must seize it.

Reversing India's Brain Drain FAQs

Q1. What is the relevance of India's proposed "star faculty repatriation scheme"?

Ans. The scheme leverages declining academic freedom in the US to attract Indian-origin scholars back to India.

Q2. What challenges may hinder the successful implementation of India's star faculty repatriation initiative?

Ans. Bureaucratic delays, lack of institutional autonomy, weak tenure pathways, and inadequate support systems.

Q3. How can India bridge the compensation gap between domestic and international academic positions?

Ans. By offering strong intellectual autonomy, supportive research environments, cultural incentives, and long-term career security.

Q4. Why did previous programmes have limited success?

Ans. Initiatives like the VAJRA Faculty Programme failed due to procedural delays and short-term engagements.

Q5. What is the importance of broad-based institutional participation?

Ans. Including central, state, and private universities maximises research impact and reflects India's diversified and evolving higher education landscape.

Source: IE

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