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India's Post-LWE Future, From Red Sun to New Dawn

Context

- The trajectory of **Left-Wing Extremism (LWE)** in India marks a transition from entrenched conflict to emerging stability.
- Districts such as West Midnapore and Simdega once reflected deprivation, insecurity, and limited state presence.
- Today, figures like Salima Tete and Mamta Hansda symbolise **a shift toward opportunity and national integration**.
- Their journeys from remote, conflict-affected regions to representing India underscore the transformative power of sustained intervention.
- Yet, the deeper challenge lies in ensuring that peace evolves into durable and inclusive development.

The Arc of Conflict and Security Gains

- In 2009, PM Manmohan Singh identified LWE as India's most serious internal security threat, a concern reinforced by the 2010 Dantewada attack.

- Prolonged violence eroded **state legitimacy**, disrupted governance, and created an environment of **fear, instability, and institutional breakdown**.
- By 2026, Home Minister Amit Shah declared the country free of Maoist insurgency, marking a significant security victory.
- This achievement reflects **political commitment, inter-state coordination, and strategic operations**.
- However, security gains alone cannot ensure long-term peace; they merely open the path for governance to establish trust, credibility, and stability.

Beyond Security: The Imperative of Governance Credibility

- The transition from conflict to peace depends on building **governance credibility** in historically neglected regions.
- These areas have long suffered from a **resource curse**, where natural wealth coexists with poverty.
- Initiatives such as Jungle Mahal, Saranda, and Bastar demonstrate a shift toward **area-based** planning and sustained reconstruction.
- A community-centred approach is essential, focusing on forest economies, agroforestry, local enterprises, and eco-tourism.
- Strengthening local value chains and ensuring fair procurement can generate livelihood security.
- The emphasis must be on **inclusive growth, local ownership, and equitable distribution** of resources.
- Development, in this context, is not merely economic expansion but the restoration of **dignity and agency**.

The Human Dimension: Reclaiming Citizenship

- At the heart of the LWE landscape lies the experience of the Adivasi citizen, often positioned between state forces and insurgents.
- This condition reflects a deeper crisis of citizenship, where constitutional rights remain inadequately realised.
- The everyday reality includes **displacement, exclusion**, and limited access to **basic services**.
- Reclaiming citizenship requires recognising individuals as **rights-bearing stakeholders** rather than passive recipients.
- The focus must shift toward human dignity, social justice, and empathetic governance. Peace is not simply the absence of violence but the presence of trust, recognition, and participation.

A Framework for Post-LWE Transformation

- Sustainable transformation requires rebuilding relationships between the state and citizens, an idea aligned with the work of John Paul Lederach.
- Conflict reflects deeper fractures that demand institutional repair, trust-building, and fairness.
- The proposed AIEEEE framework, accountability, innovation, evidence, equity, empathy, and efficiency, offers a structured approach.
- Effective implementation depends on policy convergence, institutional coordination, and last-mile delivery.
- Strengthening **justice systems**, ensuring **humane policing**, improving **grievance redressal**, and addressing **undertrial burdens** are essential for building **public confidence**.

Youth, Aspiration, and the Role of Opportunity

- Youth represent a critical driver of transformation. Sports have demonstrated their role in fostering discipline, confidence, and identity, but broader opportunities are necessary.
- Expanding **education access**, **skill development**, and **employment pathways** aligned with local economies can sustain progress.
- Encouraging women-led enterprises, enhancing residential schooling, and supporting entrepreneurship can create long-term social mobility.
- Channelling aspiration into productive avenues reduces vulnerability to conflict and strengthens **community resilience**.

Conclusion

- The shift from **counter-insurgency** to **inclusive governance** requires a commitment to **cooperative federalism** and sustained engagement.
- The ultimate measure of success lies not in the absence of violence but in the presence of justice, opportunity, and institutional trust. Building **structural confidence** in governance is both an administrative and psychological task.
- A humane and consistent state presence can transform these regions into spaces of **belonging**, **participation**, and **shared progress**.

India's Post-LWE Future, From Red Sun to New Dawn FAQs

Q1. What marked the turning point in India's fight against LWE?

Ans. The declaration by Amit Shah in 2026 that India is free of Maoist insurgency marked a major turning point.

Q2. Why are security gains alone insufficient in LWE regions?

Ans. Security gains are insufficient because lasting peace requires governance that builds trust, delivers services, and ensures development.

Q3. What is meant by governance credibility in post-LWE regions?

Ans. Governance credibility means consistent state presence, reliable service delivery, and policies that ensure dignity and inclusion for citizens.

Q4. How does the AIEEEE framework support transformation?

Ans. The AIEEEE framework supports transformation by promoting accountability, equity, empathy, and efficient delivery of policies.

Q5. Why is youth development important in post-LWE areas?

Ans. Youth development is important because education, skills, and opportunities help prevent conflict and promote long-term stability.

Source: **The Hindu**

Beyond Trade Deals to Building a New Architecture

Context

- In early 2026, India concluded major agreements with the European Union and the United States.
- The India-EU Free Trade Agreement, described as the **mother of all deals**, and the U.S. pact, seen as a strategic reset, reflect India's rising global economic stature.
- Yet these successes also reveal a deeper shift: the global trading system is fragmenting, with **politics**, not **efficiency**, increasingly determining outcomes.

The Erosion of Rules-Based Globalisation

- For decades, global trade functioned on comparative advantage, efficiency, and open markets, supported by international institutions that ensured fairness.
- Countries specialised and traded freely, enabling India's **pharmaceutical industry** and South Korea's technological rise.
- Today, this framework is weakening. Access to **critical goods** such as **semiconductors**, **rare earth minerals**, and **medical supplies** is shaped by **geopolitics** rather than market logic.
- The decline of **rules-based trade** has reduced trust and increased uncertainty.

Weaponisation of Economic Interdependence

- Major powers now use trade as a strategic tool. China has restricted exports during disputes, exposing India's reliance on **Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients (APIs)**.
- This dependence extends to electronics, solar panels, and supply chains, making economic ties vulnerable.
- Similarly, the United States has imposed **tariffs** to influence policy decisions, demonstrating that even partnerships are conditional.
- Such actions show how **economic interdependence** has become a mechanism of leverage, not stability. Countries can no longer rely on predictable trade relationships.

Shrinking Strategic Space for India

- India's traditional strategy of **strategic autonomy**, balancing relations among major powers, has weakened.
- Russia's role as a counterweight has declined due to sanctions, reduced technological access, and growing dependence on China.
- This has narrowed India's policy space. Reliance on either the U.S. or China for **critical supply chains** carries significant risks.
- While recent agreements provide short-term gains, they do not address long-term vulnerabilities in an increasingly fragmented system.

The Case for Sectoral Plurilateralism

- A shift toward sectoral plurilateralism offers a viable alternative.

- This approach involves forming focused partnerships among select countries in specific sectors rather than relying on large, broad alliances.
- Such arrangements enable countries to develop **shared standards**, build **capabilities**, and create **mutual interdependence** on balanced terms.
- Historical precedent supports this model. The 1951 European Coal and Steel Community linked industries among six nations, reducing conflict and building trust through practical cooperation.
- This eventually evolved into the European Union. The lesson is clear: functional cooperation can precede deeper integration.

Leveraging India's Strengths

- India possesses significant assets that can underpin such partnerships. Its **digital public** infrastructure, including UPI, Aadhaar, and DigiLocker, demonstrates scalable innovation.
- Collaborative efforts to build open-source systems could provide alternatives to China's surveillance model and U.S. big tech dominance.
- In **artificial intelligence (AI)**, opportunities for collaboration are substantial. The United States leads in foundation models, while China builds parallel systems.
- However, countries like France, Japan, and the UAE offer strengths in research, manufacturing, and investment capital.
- Combined with India's **engineering talent** and **large market**, these partnerships could create competitive and inclusive AI ecosystems for emerging economies.
- Establishing early **technical standards** would ensure long-term influence.

From Tactical Wins to Strategic Vision

- Bilateral agreements are tactical wins, but they remain vulnerable to political shifts. A broader strategy requires building durable systems of cooperation.
- Sector-specific partnerships in areas such as **space**, **digital infrastructure**, and **AI** can provide this foundation.
- These collaborations must have the authority to set **binding standards** and regulate participation, ensuring stability and credibility.
- Such partnerships transform national capabilities into sustained influence rather than temporary bargaining tools.
- They also reduce dependence on dominant powers while enhancing resilience.

Conclusion

- The global trade environment is undergoing a structural transformation marked by **fragmentation**, **uncertainty**, and rising **geopolitical competition**.
- India's recent trade agreements highlight both opportunity and vulnerability. To navigate this landscape, India must move beyond reactive diplomacy.
- By embracing sectoral plurilateralism, India can strengthen its position, mitigate risks, and shape emerging global systems.

- Building partnerships with **middle powers** enables it to participate in defining rules rather than merely adapting to them.
- This shift, from managing relationships to creating frameworks, will determine India's role in the evolving world order.

Beyond Trade Deals to Building a New Architecture FAQs

Q1. Why are recent trade agreements not enough for India?

Ans. They are short-term gains and remain vulnerable to political changes.

Q2. What is weakening in the global trade system?

Ans. The rules-based system is weakening due to rising geopolitical influence.

Q3. Why is economic interdependence risky today?

Ans. It allows powerful countries to use trade as leverage for political goals.

Q4. What is sectoral plurilateralism?

Ans. It is a strategy of forming small, focused partnerships in specific sectors.

Q5. How can India strengthen its global position?

Ans. India can build strategic partnerships and set shared standards in key sectors.

Source: **The Hindu**

Indian Railway Track Modernisation - Building a Safer, Faster Network

Context

- Indian Railways is one of the largest rail networks in the world, operating **over 25,000 trains** daily, serving 20 million passengers and transporting critical commodities — coal, iron ore, steel, cement, and grains — across 1,37,000 km of tracks.
The track is the very foundation of this system. Therefore, its integrity directly determines passenger safety, freight efficiency, and network reliability.
- Recognising this, Indian Railways launched a **comprehensive** track modernisation **programme** over a decade ago, and the results today are measurable and significant.

Key Modernisation Initiatives

- **Track renewal and structural upgrades**
 - Since 2014, approximately 55,000 km of tracks have been renewed, improving safety, ride quality and reducing maintenance frequency.
 - Around 44,000 track km of long rail panels (260 m each) have been laid — fewer joints mean smoother, safer movement.

- Over 80,000 track km of stronger 60-kg rails now support heavier axle loads and higher speeds.

- **Advanced inspection and flaw detection**

- Ultrasonic Flaw Detection (**USFD**) testing has been conducted over 36.2 lakh track km and 2.25 crore welds, identifying hidden internal cracks invisible to the naked eye.
- This has resulted in a **90% reduction** in rail and weld failures — a paradigm shift from reactive maintenance to preventive safety management.
- Complementary technologies now deployed include –
 - Phased-array testing for flash-butt welds.
 - Magnetic-particle inspection for new welds.
 - GPS-enabled Oscillation Monitoring Systems (**OMS**) for real-time ride quality measurement and precise location tracking of track defects.
- **Mechanised maintenance:**
 - The track machine fleet has nearly doubled — from 748 machines in 2014 to 1,785 in 2026 — enabling faster tamping, ballast cleaning and rail grinding.
 - Deep **screening** of **ballast** (the crushed stone bed providing drainage, vibration absorption, and track stability) has been completed across over 1 lakh track km. Rail grinding for surface defect removal has similarly covered over 1 lakh km.
 - Mechanisation is critical given that maintenance windows between trains are shrinking as traffic volumes grow.
- **Supporting safety infrastructure:**
 - 17,500 km of safety fencing installed, especially on sections where speeds exceed 110 kmph, to prevent trespassing by humans and cattle.
 - 36,000 thick-web switches and 7,500 weldable CMS crossings at points and crossings for durability and smoother passage.
 - Wider, heavier sleepers for thermal stability, especially during summer.
 - H-beam sleepers on girder bridges and long welded rails through yards.
- **Digital integration:** A web-enabled Track Management System (**TMS**) consolidates data from USFD testing, ride quality readings and track geometry measurements onto a single platform, enabling data-driven prioritisation and timely interventions.

Outcomes and Impact

- **Increase in speed potential:** Networks capable of higher speeds, for example, track fit for over 130 kmph rose from 6% to 23% (between 2014-15 and 2025-26), and track fit for over 110 kmph rose from 40% to 80%.
- **Improved safety outcomes:** Consequential train accidents reduced from 135 (2014-15) to 16 (2025-26), and accident rate per million train km improved from 0.11 to 0.01 – a 90% improvement.

- **Impact:** These improvements enabled semi-high-speed services like the Vande Bharat Express, reduced journey times, improved punctuality and boosted freight reliability.

Challenges:

- Shrinking maintenance windows as train frequency increases, leaving less time for track upkeep between services.
- The scale of the network (over 1,37,000 km) makes uniform upgradation a **logistical challenge**.
- The ballast degradation is a continuous process requiring sustained mechanised intervention.
- **Balancing** speed upgradation with structural and signalling system readiness.
- Last-mile **safety risks** such as trespassing, unmanned level crossings, and human error persist.

Way Forward

- Continued **expansion** of the track machine fleet and USFD coverage across the remaining network.
- **Scaling** up preventive and predictive maintenance using AI-integrated TMS data.
- Extending high-speed-capable track (≥ 130 kmph) to enable broader deployment of Vande Bharat and future high-speed corridors.
- **Strengthening** safety fencing and level crossing elimination on high-density routes.
- **Upgrading** bridges and girder infrastructure in parallel with track renewal.
- Investment in **human capital** — training maintenance staff in operating and interpreting data from modern machines.

Conclusion

- India's railway track modernisation over the past decade represents one of the most significant infrastructure **transformations** in the country's recent history.
- This story is instructive not merely as a sectoral achievement but as a model of how sustained institutional investment, technological adoption and policy continuity can produce systemic change in a public utility of national importance.
- The task ahead is to **consolidate these gains**, extend them to the entire network, and align track capacity with India's broader ambitions in high-speed and freight rail.

Indian Railway Track Modernisation FAQs

Q1. What is the significance of track modernisation of Indian Railways?

Ans. It enhances rail safety, enables higher speeds, reduces accidents, improves punctuality, and increases freight efficiency.

Q2. How has technology transformed maintenance practices in Indian Railways?

Ans. Technologies like Ultrasonic Flaw Detection, have shifted maintenance from reactive repairs to preventive and data-driven management.

Q3. What is the role of infrastructure upgrades in supporting services like Vande Bharat Express?

Ans. Stronger rails, long welded tracks, improved switches, and speed-capable corridors have enabled smoother and safer operations.

Q4. What are the major challenges in sustaining railway infrastructure modernisation in India?

Ans. Key challenges include rising traffic load, aging legacy infrastructure, climate risks, funding constraints, etc.

Q5. Why is railway modernisation crucial for India's economic growth?

Ans. Efficient railways reduce logistics costs, improve connectivity, facilitate passenger mobility, and strengthen regional integration.

Source: IE

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