

NATIONAL IMPERATIVE

In an increasingly complex and volatile global landscape, national security has emerged as the cornerstone of a nation's sovereignty, stability, and prosperity. For India, a country marked by diverse challenges ranging from cross-border threats to internal security concerns, strengthening national security is not merely a policy objective-it is an existential necessity. A secure nation ensures the safety of its citizens, fosters economic growth, and enhances India's stature on the global stage.

National security today encompasses a broad spectrum of dimensions-military, economic, cyber, and social. While traditional threats like terrorism, insurgency, and territorial disputes continue to demand vigilant defense preparedness, non-traditional challenges such as cyber warfare, misinformation, and economic espionage have gained prominence. The recent rise in digital threats and hybrid warfare underlines the need for a holistic security strategy that integrates technology, intelligence, and community engagement. Strengthening border management, modernizing the armed forces, and investing in advanced surveillance systems remain crucial pillars of a robust defense framework.

Equally important is the role of internal security in maintaining societal harmony and public trust. Law enforcement agencies, intelligence networks, and counter-terrorism units must work in synergy to preempt threats, ensuring rapid response and resilience. Public participation, through awareness campaigns and community policing, enhances the effectiveness of security measures. A well-informed citizenry acts as the first line of defense against subversive elements.

Economic and cyber security are increasingly intertwined with national security. Protecting critical infrastructure, securing financial networks, and safeguarding sensitive data are as vital as traditional defense preparedness. Initiatives like digital literacy, cybersecurity protocols, and public-private partnerships strengthen resilience against emerging threats.

Furthermore, national security is intrinsically linked with diplomacy and global cooperation. Strategic alliances, intelligence-sharing agreements, and adherence to international norms help preempt conflicts and bolster India's defense readiness. A proactive foreign policy complements domestic security efforts, ensuring India's interests are safeguarded on multiple fronts.

Strengthening national security requires a multi-pronged approach that combines defense modernization, internal vigilance, technological preparedness, and international collaboration. It is a shared responsibility, demanding commitment from government institutions, civil society, and citizens alike. Only through a coordinated, forward-looking strategy can India safeguard its sovereignty, protect its people, and assert its role as a responsible global power. National security is not just the duty of the state-it is the collective responsibility of the nation.

Role and Leadership of Tribal Women

■ SAVITRI THAKUR



India is a rich country with diverse cultural traditions and livelihoods, home to a scheduled tribe population exceeding 10.45 crore, constituting about 8.6% of the total population. This figure is not just a demographic statistic but represents a unique expression of India's vibrant, ancient, and multifaceted cultural heritage. This community has been a steward of natural resource conservation and has contributed to shaping India's cultural identity through its rich traditions, linguistic diversity, and original knowledge systems. Even ancient texts like the Ramayana and Mahabharata mention their valor, intelligence, and deep connection with nature.

However, for a long time, the tribal society was kept away from mainstream development. They were viewed as guardians of a living culture but not as equal partners. Especially, the leadership, skills, social insight, and community-building role of tribal women were not recognized to the extent they deserved.

Under Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi's leadership, this mindset and system have witnessed a purposeful transformation. The government has moved beyond tokenism to adopt a policy of targeted empowerment. This commitment to holistic development of tribal communities is proof that no community will be left behind in India's development journey. The mantra "SabkaSaath, SabkaVikas, SabkaVishwas, and SabkaPrayas" has become a powerful example of this inclusive vision.

This commitment is clearly reflected in budget allocations. The total budget for tribal community development increased from

Rs10,237.33 crore in 2024-25 to Rs14,925.81 crore in 2025-26, an impressive increase of 45.79%. Looking at the long-term perspective, this amount rose from Rs4,497.96 crore in 2014-15 to Rs7,411 crore in 2021-22 and now shows a growth of 231.83%. The enhanced allocation in the 2025-26 central budget for the Ministry of Tribal Affairs clearly indicates that tribal communities, especially women, are no longer mere beneficiaries but active leaders in the development journey.

Tribal women in India have been the axis of social, cultural, and economic life. They are custodians of traditional life systems related to water, forests, and land, playing an important role in community decision-making, resource management, and cultural tradition preservation. Today, this role is visible not only at the family and community level but also from governance systems to policy-making. The most powerful symbol of this change is the presence of a tribal woman, Mrs. Droupadi Murmu, as the President of India - the highest Constitutional office.

The Union government has adopted a multi-dimensional approach to institutionalize the social-cultural empowerment, economic upliftment, and leadership of tribal women, ensuring development goes beyond facility expansion to guarantee respect, recognition, and self-reliance. Under the Tribal Women Empowerment Scheme, the National Scheduled Tribes Finance and Development Corporation provides loans of up to Rs2 lakh to tribal women for self-employment and entrepreneurship at an interest rate of just 4%. This enables them to develop enterprises in handicrafts, agriculture-based activities, bamboo products, livestock, processing, and service sectors.

A special campaign, the Pradhan MantriJanjati Adivasi Nyaya MahaAbhiyan (PM-JANMAN), launched for Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs), is bringing basic amenities to these communities.

This campaign ensures development in 75 PVTG communities across 18 states and one union territory, previously isolated from mainstream progress. With an investment of around Rs24,104 crore, PM-JANMAN is bringing comprehensive improvements in housing, clean water, healthcare, nutrition, education, road connectivity, and sustainable livelihoods.

Additionally, Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS) are providing free and quality education to tribal children, creating new opportunities for skill development. Scholarship schemes have significantly reduced school dropout rates, especially among girls.

DAY-NRLM has strengthened tribal women's financial decision-making capacity, collective production, marketing, and economic self-reliance through Self-Help Groups. Meanwhile, the capable Anganwadi and Nutrition Mission has improved nutrition levels of pregnant and lactating mothers and maternal health indicators.

The Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act (PESA), 1996, empowered tribal communities living in Fifth Schedule areas with self-governance through Gram Sabhas (village assemblies). This law structurally ensures women's participation in Panchayats and Gram Sabhas. The Ministry of Tribal Affairs has developed special leadership training modules for women.

The AdiKarmyogi Campaign has emerged as a historic initiative in tribal areas. Under this campaign, more than 20 lakh change agents - a mix of female Self-Help Group members, youth, and local officials - have been trained as local leaders in governance, service delivery, and community empowerment. The campaign aims to strengthen participatory governance through "1 Lakh Tribal Villages-Vision 2030," ensuring a central role for women. The President of India, Mrs. Droupadi Murmu, has praised this campaign, stating that tribal leadership at the grass-

roots is the foundation for "Viksit Bharat @2047." Today, many tribal-majority villages have women leading village institutions as presidents, running Self-Help Groups, playing transformative roles in governance labs, and linking their communities to livelihood and development programs.

Moreover, under the "DhartiAabaJanjatiya Gram UtkarshAbhiyan" started in 2024, over Rs79,000 crore has been approved for the holistic development of more than 63,000 tribal-majority villages. A key focus of this campaign is strengthening women's direct leadership roles in village committees.

The growing participation of tribal women in India's development journey shows they are becoming not just participants but leaders of change. The current focus is on strengthening their leadership at the grassroots. To this end, leadership training facilities for women are being expanded in local communities so that more women can actively participate in administrative, economic, and social decision-making.

Connecting forest-based livelihoods and handicraft enterprises to national and international markets is a major priority to enhance both the value and respect for their work. Through Self-Help Groups and livelihood groups, women are becoming powerful agents of positive social change. Digital literacy and financial management training are being expanded to enable every woman to become self-reliant.

Access to higher education and skill development for tribal girls is continuously being strengthened so that they can confidently advance to future leadership positions. The goal is clear - empowerment of tribal women is not only a matter of social sensitivity but a strong foundation for India's democratic expansion, sustainable development, and inclusive progress.

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Viksit Bharat Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission Gramin (VB-G RAM G) Act 2025

1. What is the Viksit Bharat - Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin):VB - G RAM G Act, 2025)?

The Viksit Bharat - Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin):VB - G RAM G Act, 2025 is a major overhaul of the twenty-year-old MNREGA.

It establishes a modern statutory framework aligned with Viksit Bharat 2047, guaranteeing 125 days of wage employment per rural household whose adult-members volunteer to dounskilled manual work.

The Act aims to create both employment and durable rural infrastructure through four priority verticals:

- ▶ Water security through water-related works
- ▶ Core-rural infrastructure
- ▶ Livelihood- related infrastructure
- ▶ Special works to mitigateextreme weather events

All assets created are aggregated into the Viksit Bharat National Rural Infrastructure Stack, ensuring a unified, coordinated national development strategy.

2. How is the new Act different from MGNREGA? What makes it better?

The new Act represents a major upgrade over MGNREGA, fixing structural weaknesses while enhancing employment, transparency, planning, and accountability.

Key improvements include:

- ▶ Higher Employment Guarantee: Guarantee increases from 100 Rs 125 days, giving rural households higher income security.
- ▶ Strategic Infrastructure Focus: MGNREGA works were scattered across many categories without a robust national strategy. The new Act focuses on 4 major types of worksensuring durable assets that directly support water security, core rural infrastructure, livelihood-related infrastructure creation and climate adaptation

mate adaptation

▶ Localised, Spatially Integrated Planning: The new Act mandates Viksit Gram Panchayat Plans, prepared by panchayats themselves and integrated with national spatial systems like PM Gati-Shakti.

3. How will the new scheme benefit the rural economy?

The Act strengthens the rural economy through productive asset creation, higher incomes, and better resilience:

- ▶ Water Security: Water-related works are prioritised. Mission AmritSarovar already created/rejuvenated 68,000+ water bodies, demonstrating clear agricultural and groundwater impact.
- ▶ Core Rural Infrastructure: Roads, connectivity and foundational infrastructure boost market access and rural business activity.
- ▶ Livelihood Infrastructure: Storage, markets, and production assets support income diversification.
- ▶ Climate Resilience: Infrastructure for water harvesting, flood drainage, and soil conservation protects rural livelihoods.
- ▶ Higher Employment & Consumption: 125 guaranteed days increase household earnings, stimulating the village economy.
- ▶ Reduced Distress Migration: With more rural opportunities and durable assets, migration pressures fall.
- ▶ Digital Formalization: Digital attendance, digital payments and data-driven planning increase efficiency.

4. How will the new scheme benefit farmers?

- ▶ Farmers benefit directly through both labour availability and better agricultural infrastructure.
- ▶ **Guaranteed Labour Availability:** States may notify periods aggregating up to 60 days during peak sowing/harvesting when MGNREGA work stops. This prevents labour shortages during critical farm operations and avoids labour being diverted away to guaranteed-wage worksites.

▶ **Preventing Wage Inflation:** Stopping public works during peaks prevents artificial wage inflation that raises food production costs.

▶ **Water & Irrigation Assets:** Prioritised water works improve irrigation, ground-water and multi-season cropping potential (supported by the 68,000+ AmritSarovar water bodies achievement).

▶ **Better Connectivity & Storage:** Core and livelihood infrastructure helps farmers store produce, reduce losses, and access markets.

▶ **Climate Resilience:** Flood-drainage, water harvesting and soil conservation protect crops and reduce damage.

5. How will the new scheme benefit labourers?

Labourers gain from higher guaranteed days, better wages, strong protections, and transparent systems.

▶ **Higher Income:** 125 guaranteed days = 25% more potential earnings.

▶ **Predictable Work:** Hyperlocal Viksit Gram Panchayat Plans ensure planned, advance-mapped work availability.

▶ **Digital Payments & Protection:** Electronic wages (already 99.94% in 2024-25) continue with full biometric and Aadhaar-based verification, eliminating wage theft.

▶ **Unemployment Allowance:** If work is not given, states must pay unemployment allowance.

▶ **Asset Creation Benefits Workers Too:** Workers build and benefit from improved roads, water, and livelihood assets.

6. Why is there a need to change MGNREGA now?

- ▶ MGNREGA was built for 2005, but rural India has transformed.
- ▶ Poverty fell sharply from 25.7% (2011-12) to 4.86% (2023-24), supported by rising consumption, incomes and financial access recorded in MPCE and NABARD RECSS surveys.
- ▶ With stronger social protection, better connectivity, deeper digital access and

more diverse rural livelihoods, the old framework no longer matched today's rural economy.

▶ Given this structural change, MGNREGA's open-ended model had become outdated.

▶ The Viksit Bharat - Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin):VB - G RAM G Bill modernises the system, raising guaranteed days, refocusing priorities, and building a more accountable, targeted, and relevant employment framework for today's rural economy.

7. Why shift from demand-based to normative funding?

▶ Normative funding aligns MGNREGA with the budgeting model used for most Government of India schemes, without reducing the employment guarantee.

▶ A demand-based model leads to unpredictable allocations and mismatched budgeting. Normative funding uses objective parameters, ensuring predictable, rational planning while still guaranteeing that every eligible worker receives employment or unemployment allowance.

8. Does normative funding weaken the guarantee of 125 days?

No, the guarantee is strengthened with employment days increased to 125.

▶ Forecasting accuracy shown by FY 2024-25 when allocation matched demand perfectly

▶ States + Centre share responsibility

▶ Special relaxations allowed during disasters

▶ If work is not provided, unemployment allowance is mandatory

▶ Thus the right to guaranteed employment remains legally protected.

9. Were no attempts made to improve MNRREGA earlier?

Major improvements were made, but they could not overcome deeper structural problems.

Key gains(FY 13-14 vis a vis FY 2025-26):

▶ Women's participation: 48% Rs 56.74%

▶ Aadhaar-seeded active workers: 76 lakhs Rs 12.11crore

▶ Workers on APBS: 0 Rs 11.93crore

▶ Geo-tagged assets: 0 Rs 6.44 crore+

▶ e-payments: 37% Rs 99.99%

▶ Individual assets: 17.6% Rs 62.96%

Despite these advances, misappropriation continued, digital attendance was bypassed, and assets often failed to match expenditure.

The scale and persistence of these issues showed that MNREGA's architecture had reached its limits, making a new, modernised Viksit Bharat - Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin):VB - G RAM G Bill necessary.

10. What were the problems with MNREGA that necessitated a change?

While many attempts were made to improve its functioning, major systemic failures persisted:

▶ Investigations in 19 districts of West Bengal found non-existent works, rule violations, and fund misuse, leading to a freeze.

▶ Monitoring across 23 states in FY 2025-26 revealed works "not found or not commensurate with expenditure," machine use where labour was required, and large-scale bypassing of NMMS attendance.

▶ In 2024-25, misappropriation totalled ₹193.67 crore across states. Only 7.61% of households completed 100 days in the post-pandemic period.

▶ These entrenched issues such as leakages, weak verification, and poor compliance required a new framework, not minor tweaks. The GRG Act creates a clean, digitally governed, accountable, and infrastructure-focused system.

11. What transparency and social protection measures are built into new Act?

▶ AI-based fraud detection

▶ Central + State Steering Committees for oversight

▶ Focus on 4 key verticals for rural

development

▶ Enhanced monitoring role for Panchayats

▶ GPS/mobile-based monitoring

▶ real-time MIS dashboards

▶ weekly public disclosures

▶ stronger social audits (twice a year for every GP)

12. Why shift from a central sector to a centrally sponsored scheme?

Because rural employment is inherently local.

▶ States now share cost & responsibility

▶ Better incentives to prevent misuse

▶ Plans tailored to regional conditions through Gram Panchayat Plans

▶ Centre retains standards, while states execute with accountability

▶ This partnership model improves efficiency and reduces misuse.

13. Will this burden states financially?

No. The structure is balanced and sensitive to state capacity.

▶ **Standard ratio:** 60:40 (Centre: State)

▶ **North-east &Himalayanstates/UT:** 90:10

▶ **UTs without legislature:** 100% funded by Central Funds

▶ States already paid 25% materials & 50% admin earlier

▶ Predictable normative allocation aids budgeting

▶ States can request extra support during disasters

▶ Better oversight reduces long-term losses from misappropriation

14. Why is a 60-day no-work period mandated, and what happens to workers then?

▶ It ensures labour availability during sowing/harvest

▶ Prevents sharp wage inflation that raises food prices

▶ Workers naturally shift to agriculture, which pays higher seasonal wages

▶ 60 days is aggregated, not continuous

▶ Workers still get 125 guaranteed days in the remaining ~300 days

▶ Thus farmers and labourers both benefit.

■ BAIRAJ CHAWALGAMI

Consumers, in the abstract imagination of economic theory, are exalted as the sovereigns of the marketplace-the ultimate arbiters whose preferences, choices, and purchasing power dictate the rhythm and direction of commerce. They are ceremonially crowned as kings, whose approval bestows legitimacy upon enterprises and whose rejection consigns products to oblivion. Yet this regal imagery often collapses when confronted with the harsher realities of the contemporary business world, where consumers, far from being venerated monarchs, frequently find themselves marginalized, disregarded, or subtly manipulated. The dissonance between theoretical reverence and practical neglect underscores the paradox that defines consumer existence in modern economies. While textbooks extol the supremacy of consumer choice, the lived experience of many consumers is marked by asymmetries of information, opaque practices, and an unsettling vulnerability to exploitation.

Nevertheless, it would be erroneous to assume that the interests of consumers can be perpetually sidelined without consequence. Consumer welfare constitutes the very fulcrum upon which modern business pivots. Enterprises may momentarily prosper by obfuscation or unfair practices, but such gains are invariably ephemeral. Sustainable success in commerce is inseparably linked to consumer trust, satisfaction, and confidence. When consumers feel deceived or undervalued, the repercussions ripple through markets, tarnishing reputations, eroding loyalty, and ultimately imperiling profitability. Thus, even from a purely pragmatic standpoint, the consumer remains indispensable, not merely as a buyer but as the moral and economic axis of the business ecosystem. In this context, awareness of consumer rights emerges as an imperative rather than a mere option. The modern

consumer must not be a passive recipient of goods and services but an informed, vigilant, and discerning participant in economic transactions. Knowledge of consumer rights empowers individuals to question, to challenge, and to seek redress when confronted with injustice. Without such awareness, the consumer's notional sovereignty remains illusory, reduced to a rhetorical flourish devoid of substance. Consumer education, therefore, is not simply an adjunct to economic development; it is a foundational pillar of equitable and ethical commerce.

Over the decades, there has been a profound transformation in the landscape of consumer protection. Legislative frameworks, judicial pronouncements, and institutional mechanisms have progressively evolved to address the complexities of modern markets. Consumers today are entitled to a constellation of rights designed to safeguard their interests-rights that encompass safety, information, choice, and redressal. These rights are not abstract ideals but concrete entitlements, intended to ensure that consumers are neither endangered by defective products nor deceived by misleading claims. The right to information seeks to dismantle the imbalance between sellers and buyers by mandating transparency, while the right to choice preserves the plurality and competitiveness of markets. Equally significant is the right to redressal, which provides consumers with avenues to seek justice and compensation when wronged. In an era defined by rapid technological advancement and digital proliferation, consumer protection has acquired new dimensions. The expansion of e-commerce, digital payments, and online marketplaces has undoubtedly enhanced convenience and accessibility, but it has also introduced novel vulnerabilities. Dark patterns, data misuse, hidden charges, and algorithmic manipulation have emerged as subtle yet potent threats to consumer autonomy.

Recognizing these challenges, contemporary consumer protection efforts have begun to emphasize digital safety and fairness, ensuring that technological progress does not come at the cost of consumer rights. The introduction of innovative platforms and applications aimed at consumer grievance redressal and awareness reflects an acknowledgment of the evolving nature of exploitation and the need for equally dynamic safeguards.

The responsibility of fostering consumer awareness does not rest solely with individuals. Governments, both at the central and state levels, along with non-governmental organizations and civil society institutions, play a pivotal role in disseminating knowledge and cultivating consumer consciousness. Through campaigns, educational initiatives, and regulatory oversight, these entities strive to illuminate the benefits as well as the limitations of goods and services. Such efforts are instrumental in enabling consumers to make judicious decisions, grounded not in impulse or persuasion but in informed evaluation. When consumers understand the implications of their choices, they are better equipped to resist manipulation and assert their rights with confidence. Within this broader framework, the annual observance of National Consumers Day assumes profound significance. Celebrated across the nation on the twenty-fourth of December, the day serves as both a commemoration and a call to action. It marks the historic enactment of the Consumer Protection Act of 1986, a landmark legislation that institutionalized consumer rights and established mechanisms for their enforcement. The Act represented a decisive shift in the balance of power, formally recognizing consumers as stakeholders entitled to protection and respect. The President's assent to this legislation symbolized the state's commitment to shielding consumers from exploitation and ensuring fairness in trade practices.

National Consumers Day is not merely a ceremonial observance characterized by rhetoric and fanfare; it is an occasion imbued with pedagogical and ethical purpose. It seeks to awaken consumers to their rights and responsibilities, reminding them that empowerment is inseparable from awareness. At the same time, it serves as a moral reminder to businesses of their obligations toward fairness, transparency, and accountability. By foregrounding issues such as defective goods, misleading advertisements, and unfair trade practices, the day underscores the enduring relevance of consumer protection in an ever-evolving marketplace.

It is important to distinguish this national observance from World Consumer Rights Day, which is celebrated globally on the fifteenth of March. While both occasions share a common ethos of consumer empowerment, National Consumers Day is uniquely anchored in the Indian legislative and institutional context. It reflects the country's specific journey toward consumer justice and the ongoing efforts to adapt protective frameworks to contemporary challenges. Ultimately, the true essence of National Consumers Day lies in its capacity to inspire a culture of informed consumption and ethical commerce. When consumers are educated and vigilant, markets become more transparent, competition becomes more genuine, and businesses are compelled to align profit with probity. The celebration of this day thus transcends symbolism; it is a reaffirmation of the principle that economic progress must be humane, inclusive, and just. In recognizing the consumer not merely as a buyer but as a rights-bearing citizen, National Consumers Day reinforces the foundational truth that the health of any economy is measured not solely by growth indices or corporate profits, but by the dignity, security, and satisfaction of those it ultimately serves.