

PERPETRATORS OF SERIOUS HARM

The trafficking of narcotics is not merely a criminal enterprise; it is a corrosive force that eats away at the moral, social, and economic fabric of society. Those who traffic drugs are perpetrators of serious and lasting harm, fueling addiction, crime, and despair while undermining public health, national security, and the future of entire generations. Treating narcotics trafficking as a routine law-and-order issue grossly understates the magnitude of its impact.

At the heart of the narcotics trade lies human suffering. Drug traffickers profit from addiction, exploiting vulnerability for financial gain. Each packet sold represents a potential life derailed—students dropping out of school, families pushed into emotional and financial ruin, and communities burdened with rising crime and insecurity. Addiction does not affect individuals alone; it ripples outward, breaking trust within families and eroding social cohesion. Traffickers, fully aware of these consequences, continue their operations with calculated indifference.

The link between narcotics and crime is undeniable. Drug trafficking fuels organized crime networks, money laundering, arms smuggling, and violence. In many regions, it finances extremist and anti-national activities, posing a direct threat to internal security. The easy money involved in the drug trade attracts youth, luring them away from education and honest livelihoods into cycles of crime that are difficult to escape. This not only weakens the workforce but also creates a generation vulnerable to exploitation by criminal syndicates.

Equally alarming is the strain narcotics place on public health systems. Addiction leads to long-term physical and mental health issues, increasing the burden on already stretched medical infrastructure. Governments are forced to divert precious resources to treatment, rehabilitation, and law enforcement—funds that could otherwise be invested in education, development, and social welfare. In this sense, narcotics trafficking is an economic crime as much as it is a moral one.

While law enforcement agencies continue to crack down on traffickers, arrests and seizures alone are not enough. A sustained and coordinated approach is required, combining strict enforcement with preventive strategies. This includes strengthening border controls, improving intelligence sharing, and ensuring swift and certain punishment for offenders. At the same time, demand reduction must be prioritized through awareness campaigns, school-based education, and accessible rehabilitation services that treat addiction as a health issue rather than solely a criminal one.

India’s Regulatory Revolution: How 2025 Made Ease of Doing Business a Habit!

In the early 2010s, doing business in India felt like a hurdle race where the hurdles were raised mid-sprint. Do you know India once ranked an abysmal 184 out of 190 countries just to get a construction permit?

Do you know it took 186 days, over six months of bureaucratic purgatory, not to build anything, not to create jobs, but merely to get permission? This was not accidental. It was the cumulative weight of decades of regulatory excess, inherited controls, and a deep mistrust of enterprise.

Undoing that damage did not happen overnight. It took 11 years of sustained, often unglamorous reform to dismantle what had been layered over generations.

But 2025 stands apart.

This year, India moved from easing business to freeing business. If 1991 was the year of liberalisation, then 2025 is the year of deregulation. If 1991 gave India its "animal spirits," 2025 has finally given those spirits a cage-free environment.

Breaking the "Dwarf" Cycle

For decades, Indian firms stayed small by design. Not because of weak ambition, but because growth triggered punishment. Hiring the 10th, 20th, or 100th worker often meant crossing invisible regulatory tripwires buried inside nearly 29 central labour laws. Expansion brought scrutiny, inspectors, and legal risk. The rational response was to remain a "dwarf."

That psychology finally broke in 2025.

The government raised the turnover threshold for "small companies" tenfold to Rs 100 crore, decisively removing the incentive to artificially cap growth. At the same time, dozens of overlapping labour statutes were consolidated into four simplified labour codes, replacing uncertainty with clarity.

The message was unmistakable: Scale will

no longer be penalised. Growth will no longer be suspect.

Cutting the Compliance Cord

Similarly, for years, India's manufacturing ambition was constrained not by a lack of skill or scale, but by an overgrown compliance regime. Quality Control Orders (QCOs), originally intended to protect standards, had expanded into a dense web of mandatory certifications covering finished goods as well as critical manufacturing inputs.

The result was paradoxical & detrimental. Manufacturers were encouraged to "Make in India," yet forced to import inputs only from QCO-compliant sources, often at higher costs and longer lead times. Exports became costlier, not because Indian firms were inefficient, but because compliance had become embedded in the supply chain itself.

Recognising this distortion, the government undertook a sweeping review of QCOs. Mandatory compliance was removed for 76 product categories, and over 200 additional categories were identified for deregulation. What once took decades of incremental rollback was executed at scale, and at speed. Within a single year, India accelerated a deregulation process that earlier moved in cautious, fragmented steps.

The message was clear: manufacturing should happen in India, not paperwork.

This momentum is being reinforced by the Export Promotion Mission (EPM), a six-year initiative with an outlay of Rs25,060 crore, including Rs20,000 crore in expanded export credit guarantees for MSMEs and first-time exporters.

This deregulation were not just ministry activities but all hands in mission with RBI and SEBI too following suit with significant deregulation.

For years, raising capital meant wading

through dense paperwork where the signal got lost in the noise. SEBI's recent reforms simplify offer documents, cutting through the clutter so investors can focus on what truly matters. Capital markets are finally being designed to reward clarity, not compliance gymnastics.

Meanwhile, the RBI has taken a scalpel to decades of overlapping instructions. By consolidating nearly 9,000 circulars into 238 Master Directions across 11 categories and 30 functional areas, it is turning a sprawling, confusing archive into a single, readable framework. Compliance is now cheaper, faster, and far less ambiguous.

Global Integration: 3 Major FTAs in Just 1 Year

Ease of Doing Business is meaningless if businesses have nowhere to sell. By securing three major Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) with the UK, Oman, and New Zealand in 2025, India effectively lowered the "cost of entry" into global markets.

For instance, the India-Oman CEPA included a specific provision for "Tiered Rules of Origin," which simplified certification and granted immediate zero-duty access for Indian petroleum products and jewellery. With New Zealand, there is Zero Duty market access on 100% of India's exports.

The Port "Logjam" vs. Maritime Velocity

In 2013-14, ships spent nearly four days idle at Indian ports. Every stalled vessel was capital frozen, trade delayed, and competitiveness eroded. By 2025, average turnaround time fell to less than one day.

This year, parliament replaced maritime laws dating back to 1908 and 1925 with five modern statutes covering bills of lading, coastal shipping, carriage of goods by sea, merchant shipping, and ports governance.

By replacing colonial-era laws from 1908

and 1925, these reforms have modernized maritime governance, reduced disputes, and lowered logistics costs, positioning India to fully leverage its blue economy with 21st-century standards.

The Quietest but Strongest Proof: Active Companies in India Nearly Double in 2025

In March 2014, India had 9.52 lakh active companies. By March 2025, that number rose to 18.51 lakh.

This near-doubling did not come from a single incentive or scheme. It came from predictability. From fewer choke points. From rules that stopped punishing success. When businesses multiply quietly, it usually means the system has stopped getting in the way.

Slaying the "Inspector Raj" with Jan Vishwas:

Jan Vishwas mattered, but not as a slogan.

Through Jan Vishwas 1.0 and 2.0, over 200 minor technical offences were decriminalised and hundreds of obsolete provisions removed. The deeper impact was cultural: a paperwork lapse was no longer treated as a criminal act.

More importantly, deregulation did not remain confined to Delhi.

Seven NDA-governed states have already decriminalised over 1,000 provisions, ensuring that reform reaches the point where businesses actually operate, factory floors, warehouses, ports, and district offices.

This is where 2025 truly stands apart.

The Centre did not deregulate alone. It pulled the entire system with it. 2025 will be remembered not for a single reform, but for a shift in governance philosophy.

Ease of Doing Business is no longer an index India chases. It is now a habit the system practises.

Possibilities under Viksit Bharat Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin): Experience and Learnings from MGNREGS

■ SAROJ MAHAPATRA

India's livelihood landscape is highly diverse and complex, shaped by varied agro-climatic conditions and unequal access to natural, human, and economic resources, knowledge, technology, and markets. Nearly 70 percent of rural households depend on agriculture, with 83 percent being small and marginal farmers. There is a huge scope of improvements in productivity enhancement, access to resources, irrigation and rural infrastructure, and market access constrain incomes, calling for targeted investments and participatory approaches to build resilient livelihoods. Launched in 2005, MGNREGS guaranteed the right to work by providing at least 100 days of assured wage employment per household annually, while creating durable assets for livelihood security. Through Gram Panchayat-centred participatory planning, it has demonstrated the model of "Today's Wages - Tomorrow's Livelihoods". Large-scale asset creation under MGNREGS, particularly through landscape-based, community-led natural resource management, has strengthened productive assets, livelihood and income security, and household capabilities. The High Impact Mega Watershed Project in Chhattisgarh demonstrated sustainable pathways to enhance smallholder incomes while conserving land and water resources. In Western Odisha, the Migration Project reduced distress migration by providing an additional 200 days of wage employment (from the state's budget) and strengthening local livelihoods through land and water development. Jharkhand's Birsra Harit Gram Yojana transformed landscapes through plantation-based interventions led by Gram Panchayats and women's collec-

tives. More recently, Madhya Pradesh created over 85,000 farm ponds under the Jal Ganga Samvardhan Abhiyan, improving water security for smallholder farmers.

The major learnings of these initiatives are:

- lives and livelihoods of people transform when community is involved in scientific and participatory planning processes;
- with enhanced technical capacities;
- integrating GIS tools and water budgeting;
- for large-scale creation of land and water conservation assets which would lead to livelihood intensification and diversification;
- targeted investments with strong convergence with line departments to realize Gram Panchayat-led plans.

Community-led planning strengthens ownership, natural resources, skills, and aspirations of small and marginal farmers, enabling diversified and sustainable livelihoods.

Over the past two decades, MGNREGS has provided assured wage employment to rural households while demonstrating pathways to convert short-term wages into sustainable livelihoods. As rural youth increasingly aspire to annual incomes of Rs 2.5 lakhs or more, the way forward lies in strengthening resilient livelihoods, promoting climate-resilience and water security, developing rural growth centres, and fostering entrepreneurship.

Possibilities under Viksit Bharat - Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin)

This proposed programme aims to strengthen the rural economy by securing household income, increasing employment days, and building durable liveli-

hood assets. There are possibilities to improve water availability, strengthening livelihoods, and creating rural infrastructure that can withstand climate vagaries and extreme weather. A key feature of this initiative is the convergence of several government flagship programmes to ensure a unified and inclusive approach to rural development, aligned with the vision of Viksit Bharat @ 2047.

Water security is the key component of the programme. With a need-based approach, the programme promotes community-centric planning that addresses the needs of the smallholder farmers. The Viksit Gram Panchayat Plan, will serve as a bottom-up planning unit under the principle of 'One Gram Panchayat, One Plan', leveraging the provision of 125 working days as per this programme, and helping identify local needs, use available skills, unlock livelihood opportunities, and cater to the aspirations of rural people. CSOs and experts can play an important role in developing the capacities of the Gram Panchayat functionaries leading to a more transparent planning process. Ensuring water security at the Gram Panchayat level is essential for strengthening the rural economy, protecting local ecosystems, and fostering community ownership through participatory planning, especially with the involvement of women-led community institutions and schemes under Deen Dayal Antyodaya Yojana - National Rural Livelihoods Mission.

Livelihood security will be ensured when the assets will be effectively utilised to generate sustained income opportunities. Gram Panchayat and women collectives will play a crucial role in livelihood strengthening through sustainable production systems, climate resilient prac-

tices, improved technologies, cluster based livelihoods, local entrepreneurship and robust convergence. Moreover, as a statutory guarantee, it allows up to 25 additional days of wage employment beyond the existing 100 days, with a provision of weekly payment, providing a financial safety net. The Ministry of Rural development, Government of India has already launched SamaveshiAjeevika Yojana to support the livelihoods of extremely vulnerable households.

The mission also supports the development of livelihood-related rural infrastructure such as storage godowns, small cold storage, solar processing units etc. to reduce production risks and improve resilience to climate variability. At the same time, a strong focus on digitising systems and processes is expected to improve transparency, efficiency, and service delivery.

The emphasis on women, water, and wealth is designed to strengthen the rural economy while promoting social equity and ecological balance. The women-led SHGs, Cluster-Level Federations, and Gram Panchayats can play a critical role in identifying and including the vulnerable households, particularly the women members, in the planning processes for transforming their lives and livelihoods and strengthening the local economy.

This saturation and convergence-based, technology-enabled, inclusive and progressive bill, providing 125 days of wage employment, focuses on strengthening resilience, and expanding livelihood opportunities in rural India. It seeks to make rural areas places of dignity, opportunity, and aspiration, in line with the vision of Viksit Bharat @ 2047.

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National Mega Mediation Conference at Goa

■ A. K. SAWHNEY, ADVOCATE

A National Mega Mediation Conference held recently at Goa has emerged as a significant milestone in India's justice delivery system. The participation of the Hon'ble Chief Justice of India, Justice Surya Kant, and the Hon'ble Chief Justice of the Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh High Court, Justice Arun Palli, underscores the growing institutional emphasis on mediation as an effective alternative dispute resolution mechanism.

The theme and deliberations of the conference clearly reflected the urgent need to rethink how disputes are resolved in India. For long, I have consistently maintained the view that "Mediation is a choice, while litigation is a compulsion." The alarming pendency of cases in Indian courts—running into crores—has pushed the justice system to the brink. Justice delayed is justice denied, and today, countless litigants have been waiting for decades for final resolution. Such a scenario demands immediate, practical, and people-centric solutions.

India's civilizational ethos has always promoted amicable resolution of disputes. Our culture teaches dialogue, compromise, and mutual understanding rather than prolonged confrontation. Mediation aligns naturally with this tradition. It not only helps reduce judicial burden but also offers disputing parties a win-win outcome, preserving relationships, dignity, and peace. Unlike litigation, which often leaves one party defeated and embittered, mediation allows both sides to walk away with satisfaction and closure.

However, mediation is not a casual or mechanical process. It involves high stakes—prestige, self-respect, emotions, property, and money. Therefore, mediation must be conducted with utmost care, seriousness, sensitivity, and legal acumen. Only experienced and mature legal minds can understand the underlying complexities of disputes and guide parties toward meaningful settlement. An inexperienced, insensitive, or poorly trained mediator can aggravate the conflict rather than resolve it, igniting further disputes instead of extinguishing them.

It is my considered view that senior advocates—particularly those with over 40 years of practice or who have crossed the age of 65—should be actively involved in mediation. Their life experience, courtroom exposure, and deep understanding of human behavior equip them to handle sensitive disputes with dignity, patience, and persuasive wisdom. Such seasoned professionals command respect from parties and can navigate deadlocks with tact and grace.

It must also be acknowledged that advocates do not run charitable institutions. Time is the most valuable asset for a lawyer, and mediation requires substantial investment of time, effort, and intellectual engagement. Advocates are key stakeholders in the justice system and shoulder immense responsibility. Therefore, mediation must be properly institutionalized, and reasonable mediation fees—akin to arbitrators' fees—should be fixed by courts, either payable by the parties or supported through a structured framework. Without financial viability, mediation cannot sustain or attract competent professionals.

The Hon'ble Chief Justice of India has shown keen interest in early disposal of cases and in strengthening mediation as a core component of justice delivery. It is hoped that under his leadership, constructive suggestions will be considered and expert senior lawyers will be formally integrated into the mediation ecosystem.

In this context, the contribution of Justice Arun Palli deserves special mention. In the recent past, he successfully organized the first Mega North Zone Mediation Conference at Srinagar, which yielded encouraging and tangible results. This initiative demonstrated how institutional commitment and visionary leadership can translate mediation from theory into effective practice.

The Goa conference marks another decisive step forward. If mediation is nurtured with expertise, dignity, and proper incentives, it can transform India's justice landscape—reducing pendency, restoring faith, and delivering timely justice to the people.

When Public Parks Turn into Dumping Grounds: A Citizen's Concern

■ POOJA RANI

Public parks are meant to be spaces for health, cleanliness, and community well-being. Unfortunately, many such spaces are slowly losing their purpose due to irresponsible behavior, lack of civic sense, and misplaced beliefs. I regularly go for a morning walk and exercise at an open gym park located near the main road, close to a popular eating point. While the park serves as a healthy space in the early hours, the situation changes completely at night. Late-night visitors often treat the area like an open drinking spot, leaving behind liquor tins, disposable plates, chutney packets, and plastic waste. Over time, the place has unofficially come to be treated as a sotala (temporary dumping spot).

As a responsible citizen, I have personally cleaned the park on several Sundays, collecting polythene and scattered waste and disposing of it properly. However, the most disturbing issue goes beyond casual littering. A resident living near the park regularly throws waste right at the entrance



of the park. After observing this behavior for many days, I politely asked him why he was dumping garbage there. His response was surprising and alarming. He claimed that what he was throwing were "flowers, not garbage."

This brings us to an important social and religious misconception. In our culture, flowers are considered sacred when used

respectfully - during worship or disposed of in an eco-friendly manner. But once flowers are wrapped in polythene and thrown into public places, mixed with plastic waste, they lose all religious significance and become plain garbage. No religion teaches us to pollute public spaces in the name of devotion.

Despite the availability of

municipal garbage vehicles, such waste is dumped daily in the park. When requested to hand it over properly to the municipal vehicle, the individual reacted aggressively, telling me to "do your exercise and leave," along with indirect threats. This kind of behavior discourages citizens who try to protect public property. Public parks are shared community assets. No

individual has the right to misuse them - whether the waste is plastic, food leftovers, liquor tins, or flowers.

A Call for Action

The authorities must take concrete steps to address this growing issue. Regular monitoring of public parks, clear "No Dumping" signboards, installation of CCTV cameras at vulnerable points, and strict fines for habitual offenders are urgently needed. Separate bins for biodegradable and non-biodegradable waste should be placed, and awareness drives must be conducted to educate people about responsible disposal, including religious waste.

Municipal staff should ensure that nearby residents hand over waste directly to garbage vehicles instead of dumping it in parks. Most importantly, citizens who raise concerns should be supported, not threatened. Cleanliness, civic sense, and true religious values go hand in hand. Protecting public spaces is not just the duty of the municipality - it reflects the moral and social health of our society.