

RESCUING INDIAN STUDENTS

India may be the only country to extricate its nationals, especially students, from foreign lands during the crisis. Currently, the government is busy working out exit plans for the students in Iran. This is despite a warning issued earlier that Indian must leave Iran as early as possible due to the impending attack being ignored by the most. Also, India's goodwill works in many cases and at times countries at war have agreed to cease the fire to give a passage to the Indians out. This happened in Ukraine and is also now happening in Iran. Tehran has opened its border to let Indian students leave the country. This is a huge privilege for all Indians. India is not an aggressive nation. We believe in territorial integrity of all nations, prefer peace and negotiations over war and conflict. India doesn't unnecessarily poke its nose in others affairs and is often the first responder to a humanitarian crisis. Sometimes, we can take abow and thank God for making us Indians!

WHERE IS THE UN?

At a time when the world is facing crisis due to multiple and unresolved wars, where is the United Nations. The US-Israel have carried out attacks on Iran, killed its supreme leader Ali Khamenai and in return Tehran has attacked several countries in the West Asia, which, it believes are supporting the USA. The US sunk an Iranian ship killing several sailors and the Un did not take note. The global body is fast losing its even false teeth. The bullying by the USA may be one reason for the global watchdog rendering itself ineffective in the times of crisis, but the roots of the problem run deeper. The UN, as it is today, is not a representative body in the UNSC where veto power is in the hands of countries with vested interests and not the good of humanity at the core of their politics.

Gen Z wishes to become job creators, not seekers

Dinesh Sood

India is observing a silent but profound career revolution. For decades, the pathway to success was linear and predictable: complete education, secure a stable job, and climb the corporate ladder. That model is now being questioned, if not dismantled, by Generation Z. Across Indian campuses, young people are increasingly choosing freelancing, side hustles, portfolio careers, and entrepreneurial experiments over traditional 9 am to 5 pm employment.

At first glance, this seems to be a quest for freedom, flexibility, and better mental health. Still beneath this shift lies a more consequential transformation: Gen Z is moving away from employment dependency toward economic self-reliance. The real opportunity and challenge for India is to ensure this generation evolves not just into job seekers navigating an uncertain labour market, but into job creators forming the country's economic future.

From career stability to career sovereignty

Gen Z's rejection of rigid career timelines is not driven solely by rebellion; economic realities and technological possibilities inform it. According to Upwork, more than 52 per cent of Gen Z professionals globally have engaged in freelance work, and nearly 39 per cent identify as "portfolio careerists," managing multiple income streams instead of relying on a single employer. Fiverr global research reinforces this shift, showing that nearly 70 per cent of Gen Z consider freelancing a viable long-term career option, 64 per cent value location independence, 62 per cent want meaningful work, and 61 per cent want control over career paths.

This generation values autonomy, purpose, and flexibility as much as income security. A 21-year-old student in a small town like Moga, Punjab, freelancing as a social media strategist, captures this mindset: he would rather earn less at first but retain control over his time and choices. Such thinking shows a broader shift from career stability to career sovereignty. However, this transition also reflects ne-



cessity. India adds nearly 12 million young people to its workforce each year, yet regulated job creation has not kept pace. The Periodic Labour Force Survey consistently shows elevated unemployment rates among youth compared to older age groups. This mismatch means conventional employment alone cannot absorb India's demographic surge. In this context, entrepreneurship and self-employment are no longer lifestyle choices; they are financial necessities.

The first step toward entrepreneurship. Freelancing and gig work are often viewed as alternatives to formal employment, but they can serve as stepping stones toward entrepreneurship. When young people freelance, they acquire critical business skills, including client acquisition, negotiation, financial management, marketing, and service delivery. These are the capabilities required to build and scale enterprises.

India's startup ecosystem provides powerful examples of what happens when young people are empowered to create rather than seek employment. Ritesh Agarwal founded OYO Rooms at 19, transforming a small idea into one of the world's largest hospitality platforms. Today, OYO supports thousands of hotel partners and employs tens of thousands directly and indirectly. Similarly, Aadit Palicha, co-founder of quick-commerce platform Zepto, built a company in his early twenties that has created thousands of jobs

across technology, logistics, and operations. Success stories are not isolated. According to Startup India, the country now has over 100,000 registered startups that have collectively generated more than 1 million direct jobs. Each startup embodies

more than innovation; it embodies employment multiplication—one entrepreneur creating opportunities for many others.

Skills, not degrees, are the new economic currency

One of Gen Z's defining characteristics lies in its emphasis on skills over credentials. Nearly 40 per cent of Gen Z respondents in global surveys believe formal degrees alone are no longer sufficient for success. Instead, digital and entrepreneurial skills such as coding, digital marketing, artificial intelligence, financial literacy, and communication are becoming the new drivers of economic mobility.

Technology has lowered barriers to entry. Today, a young person in a small town with internet access can serve clients globally, launch digital products, or build an online business. Platforms such as Shopify, YouTube, and Upwork have democratised entrepreneurship in new ways. Yet India's education system remains oriented toward producing job seekers rather than job creators. Universities still measure success through placement statistics rather than startup creation. Students are trained to conduct clear interviews, not to identify market gaps, build solutions, or manage enterprises.

The institutional and policy imperative. If India is to transform its demographic dividend into an economic dividend, funda-

mental changes are essential. Colleges must integrate entrepreneurship, financial literacy, and digital skills into mainstream curricula. Startup incubators, innovation labs, and flexible academic pathways must become the norm, not the exception. Initiatives such as Startup India, Skill India, and Digital India have established a solid foundation. But their true impact will depend on accessibility and implementation beyond major metropolitan centres. India's next generation of job creators will not emerge only from Bengaluru and Delhi, but also from smaller cities and towns where talent has long remained underutilised.

Equally important is a shift in social attitudes. Risk-taking must be encouraged, not discouraged. Failure must be seen as a learning process, not a permanent stigma. Families, educators, and policymakers have to nurture a culture that appreciates innovation and self-reliance.

An awakening moment for the future. Gen Z is not rejecting work; it is rejecting dependency. This generation is redefining careers as dynamic, self-directed journeys rather than fixed ladders. It is not seeking just employment, but agency.

India stands at a historic inflexion point. By 2030, Gen Z will form a dominant share of the workforce. If equipped only with degrees and job-seeking skills, they may face frustration and underemployment. But with entrepreneurial skills, digital capabilities, and institutional support, they can become engines of economic growth.

The responsibility is shared. Schools must nurture creative thinking and problem-solving. Universities must encourage enterprise creation alongside placements. Decision-makers must expand access to skills and startup ecosystems. Young people themselves must embrace persistent learning, adaptability, and measured risk-taking.

This is the wake-up call. Gen Z does not need to be prepared just for employment. It needs to be empowered for the enterprise. When young people choose to become job creators rather than job seekers, they do more than transform their personal destinies; they reshape the nation's economic destiny.

ENGINEERING THE FUTURE, RESPONSIBLY

ANSHUMAN SHARMA

Nature equips every species with the ability to overcome the challenges necessary for survival. Humans, however, have gone a step further by using their intelligence not only for their own survival but to reshape the planet itself. This extraordinary ability carries an equally important responsibility. Our solutions must serve larger societal and global interests.

In today's world, engineering innovations are often commercialised through patents and market systems, primarily for individual or corporate gain. Yet even profit-driven advancements frequently benefit humanity at large and eventually become accessible to wider populations. Engineering, therefore, remains one of the most powerful tools for collective progress. One such example of this impact is access to clean drinking water.

According to the WHO and UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme 2025 report, engineering solutions have enabled 74% of the global population to access safely managed drinking water services in 2024. Such achievements demonstrate how technological innovation directly improves the quality of life and raises the bar to achieve



universal access.

Nobel Laureate Professor Omar M. Yaghi has developed environmentally friendly technology capable of producing clean water in drought-prone regions using metal organic framework absorption. Such breakthroughs show how scientific ingenuity can address pressing global challenges such as water scarcity.

The United Nations observes World Engineering Day for Sustainable Development on March 4 each year. The day celebrates engineers' contributions to the UN

Sustainable Development Goals and underscores the reality that achieving these goals depends significantly on practical, cost-effective and scalable engineering solutions. The theme for this year is "Smart engineering for a sustainable future through innovation and digitalisation."

It calls for solutions that ensure food and water security, clean energy access and equitable economic growth. This serves to show that these ambitions have become urgent necessities.

In the Indian context, this vision is particularly significant. India aspires to become a developed nation in the coming decades. While the country produces a large number of engineers and is often described as a global supplier of technical talent, concerns about quality, research orientation and innovation capacity have emerged in recent years.

India must move beyond producing degree holders and instead cultivate problem solvers. Engineering education should prioritise innovation, critical thinking and indigenous research so that India specific challenges from water management, urban flooding and clean energy to urban planning and rural connectivity are addressed with homegrown solutions helping India achieve sustainable development goals by 2030 with special focus on SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure), SDG 6 (Clean Water), SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy), and SDG 13 (Climate Action). Reliance solely on adapting foreign technologies limits both self-reliance and leadership potential and does not reflect an outcome of having the largest number of engineers in the world.

If India is to realise its development ambitions and solve its complex and emerging issues like river and industrial pollution, etc., engineers will have to play a central role. By fostering a culture rooted in research, sustainability and innovation, the country can transform its demographic advantage into a developmental dividend in building the future, and that future must be sustainable, inclusive and guided by responsibility.

The new grammar of fiscal federalism

Pravin Kumar Singh

India's Finance Commissions are often viewed as technical exercises in tax sharing. Yet they are far more than accounting mechanisms. Every Commission reflects a deeper constitutional conversation about equity, efficiency, and the evolving balance between the Union and the states. The 16th Finance Commission (FC), whose recommendations cover the period 2026-31, is no exception. While the headline number, retaining states' share in central taxes at 41 per cent, suggests continuity, the report signals a subtle but important recalibration in India's fiscal federalism.

The real significance of the 16th FC lies not in dramatic structural changes but in the quiet rewriting of incentives. The Commission appears to move India away from a purely redistribution-centric model toward a framework that simultaneously rewards economic contribution, fiscal discipline, and governance performance. This shift, if interpreted correctly, may define the next phase of cooperative federalism.

Stability masking structural

change

At first glance, the Commission appears cautious. The continuation of the 41 per cent share for states in the divisible pool of taxes maintains predictability and avoids reopening contentious debates between the Centre and states.

Yet fiscal federalism is shaped less by aggregate shares than by the criteria through which those shares are distributed. Here, the 16th FC introduces notable changes. The weight assigned to income distance, the principal equalisation parameter, has been reduced, while a new weight has been given to states' contribution to national GDP. This seemingly technical adjustment marks a conceptual shift. Historically, Finance Commissions emphasised horizontal equity, ensuring that poorer states received greater support to provide comparable public services. By introducing a GDP contribution parameter, the new formula incorporates an efficiency-oriented logic: states that drive economic growth are also recognised in the distribution mechanism. In effect, India's fiscal framework is gradually evolving from pure equalisation toward incentive-compatible

federalism.

Equity versus efficiency

The tension between redistribution and growth incentives has always defined fiscal federalism. Too much emphasis on equity risks weakening incentives for revenue mobilisation and economic expansion; too much emphasis on efficiency can widen regional disparities.

The 16th FC attempts to walk this tightrope. Income distance remains the largest criterion, ensuring continued support for lower-income states. At the same time, recognising GDP contribution acknowledges that high-growth states sustain national revenue capacity.

This dual approach reflects a maturing federal economy. India today is no longer a uniformly low-income federation. States differ sharply in demographic profiles, industrialisation levels, and governance capacity. A transfer formula designed for a more homogeneous economy may no longer serve emerging realities.

The Commission's recalibration implicitly recognises this structural transformation. However, the shift also raises important political economy questions. Will richer states

view this as long-awaited recognition, or merely a modest correction? Will poorer states perceive it as a dilution of redistributive justice? The durability of the new formula will depend less on its mathematics and more on the political trust underpinning federal negotiations.

Demography and the politics of population

One of the most sensitive areas of previous Finance Commissions has been the use of population as a criterion. The 16th FC revises the demographic performance parameter, moving from fertility-rate based measurement to population growth between 1971 and 2011. This change is more than methodological. It represents an attempt to balance competing narratives: states that successfully controlled population growth seek recognition for responsible policy choices, while states experiencing higher growth argue that fiscal needs follow demographic reality.

By shifting the metric, the Commission tries to depoliticise the debate. Yet demography remains deeply embedded in India's federal politics. The question of whether fiscal transfers should reward past pol-

icy success or respond to present expenditure needs is unlikely to disappear. The new formula postpones rather than resolves this tension.

The end of fiscal cushioning. Perhaps the most under-discussed aspect of the report is what it removes. The Commission discontinues revenue deficit grants, sector-specific grants, and state-specific grants that were part of the previous framework. This signals a philosophical shift. Earlier Commissions often acted as fiscal shock absorbers, cushioning states with persistent deficits. The new approach appears to favour harder budget constraints, nudging states toward fiscal self-reliance rather than continued dependence on compensatory transfers. In public finance theory, this reflects a movement away from "soft budget constraints," where subnational governments expect rescue, toward a system where fiscal responsibility becomes a structural expectation. For states, this implies greater pressure to expand their own revenue base, rationalise expenditure, and improve efficiency.

Decentralisation with conditions. The Commission's recommendations for local bodies further illus-

trate its governance-oriented approach. Significant grants are allocated to rural and urban local governments, but access is conditional upon institutional reforms such as timely accounts publication and functioning State Finance Commissions.

Performance-linked grants and targeted components, such as urban infrastructure and wastewater management, suggest that devolution is increasingly tied to outcomes rather than entitlement. This is a notable evolution from earlier phases where transfers were primarily formula-driven and less conditional. In essence, the Commission recognises that fiscal decentralisation without administrative capacity risks inefficiency. The emphasis is now on accountable decentralisation.

Fiscal discipline as constitutional signalling. Beyond transfers, the 16th FC offers a clear fiscal roadmap. It recommends bringing the Centre's fiscal deficit down to 3.5 per cent of GDP by 2030-31, maintaining a 3 per cent deficit limit for states, and crucially ending the practice of off-budget borrowings by bringing them onto formal balance sheets.