

STATE OF THE STATES NEWSLETTER

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REDEFINING DIPLOMACY, ONE STATE
AT A TIME

EDITOR'S NOTE

In recent years, paradiplomacy—where subnational governments directly engage in international relations—has gained traction in India, allowing states like Gujarat, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala to forge foreign ties, attract investment, and participate in global networks on trade, climate, and public health. This decentralized approach is reshaping India's diplomatic landscape by enhancing economic profiles, fostering cultural exchange, and promoting development while complementing national objectives.

Therefore, to explore this exciting new world of international relations, the issue delves into the various dimensions of paradiplomacy within India—its origins, current dynamics, and future prospects. We explore how Indian states are leveraging paradiplomacy to foster new models and ideals for development and federalism.

We hope this edition provides a valuable perspective on the evolving landscape of paradiplomacy in India and encourages further dialogue on its implications for the country's global engagement.

DISTRICTS AS EXPORT ENGINES: CENTRE EXPANDS DEH INITIATIVE

The Government of India has broadened the Districts as Export Hubs (DEH) through establishment of institutional mechanisms such as the State Export Promotion Committees (SEPCs) and District Export Promotion Committees (DEPCs) which have been established across 36 States and Union Territories in order to help in coordination and implementation of the DEH initiative. This initiative has been carried out in order to increase export production at the district level and encourage a balanced regional development. It identifies key products and services that are unique to each district across sectors like agriculture, manufacturing, handicrafts and GI goods which allows for more focused and context-specific export strategies.



District Export Action Plans have been drafted for 590 districts in which 249 are already notified and have been reflecting steady progress towards the decentralised export planning. Further, DEH initiative focuses on having a district driven approach to empower the Ministry of Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises (MSME's) and prioritises farmers and local producers thereby working to reduce export barriers, increase awareness and strengthen the market linkage especially through digital platforms and outreach initiatives. Overall, the DEH initiative aims to position districts as active contributors to India's export growth and global trade presence.

Source : <https://www.ibef.org/news/government-expands-deh-initiative-to-boost-district-level-export-competitiveness>

RISING MIGRATION AND COST BARRIERS SHAPE KERALA'S 2026 ELECTION LANDSCAPE

High airfares have become a key barrier to NRI participation in the 2026 Kerala Assembly elections which will determine whether the ruling Left Democratic Front, led by Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan can maintain their third consecutive term which no other government in Kerala has managed before. With many Gulf-based expatriates paying around roughly ₹ 2.3 lakh which is Dh9000 to return just to vote, this year's turnout is predicted to be dampening.

Migration has become central to defining the issues of the 2026 campaign as tens of thousands of Keralites work abroad. A personal account of a returnee Roy George, highlights how the huge salary gap between Kerala and foreign countries leads to outward migration of people despite strong emotional ties to the State. Political actors including Prime Minister Narendra Modi who addressed the NDA rally, pledged that opportunities of jobs would be built in Kerala so that people would not have to migrate. Further, the LDF has promised employment for all graduates who have completed their study in the States.

Experts argue that migration is more about wage disparities than lack of opportunity. With over 23 to 25 lakh Keralites abroad, the focus should change from “brain drain” to “brain gain” which means creating policies that attract all the skilled migrants back. Migration is already reshaping the Kerala politics and social fabric, leaving many homes occupied by the elderly as the younger generation continue to settle abroad to have a better standard of living.

Source:<https://www.google.com/amp/s/english.bombaysamachar.com/india-news/kerala-expats-shell-out-%E2%2582%25B92-3-lakh-for-flight-tickets-to-vote-in-april-9-assembly-elections/>



PUNJAB EXPORTERS PROPOSE RICE-FOR-OIL BARTER DEAL WITH IRAN TO COUNTER GEOPOLITICAL TRADE DISRUPTIONS

The Punjab Rice Millers Exporters Association has formally requested the Indian government to establish a barter trade agreement with Iran to mitigate severe financial losses caused by geopolitical instability in West Asia. Under this proposed arrangement, Indian Basmati rice would be exchanged directly for Iranian crude oil, with transactions settled in Indian rupees to bypass conventional banking hurdles and international sanctions. This move is seen as a strategic solution to revive traditional trade ties while addressing India's energy security needs, especially since Basmati exports grew by 11 percent to 5.39 million tonnes during the April to January period of 2025-26.

Currently, the export sector faces a massive crisis as the conflict involving the US, Israel, and Iran has disrupted shipments and increased costs. Exporters argue that a barter mechanism would not only clear excess Basmati stocks before the upcoming sowing season but also protect farmers from crashing domestic prices.

Beyond the trade deal, association director Ashok Sethi has urged the Centre to provide relief measures such as bank interest waivers and financial subsidies to offset war-related losses. By utilizing a rupee-based payment system through designated banks, India could stabilize its agricultural exports and secure affordable fuel without relying on the volatile global banking network. Such a shift toward local currency trade and commodity swapping underscores India's move toward strategic autonomy by asserting its economic interests despite Western-led sanction regimes.

Source:<https://www.google.com/amp/s/www.thehindubusinessline.com/economy/agri-business/indias-punjab-exporters-propose-barter-deal-between-basmati-rice-and-irans-crude-oil-to-offset-war-losses/article70811412.ece/amp/>



MEET THE TEAM



**Professor Tridivesh
Singh Maini**

Prof. Tridivesh Singh Maini, currently Assistant Professor, has been a faculty member of the Jindal School of International Affairs (JSIA) since August 2014. He was also a Public Policy Scholar with The Hindu Centre for Politics and Public Policy, Chennai (November 2013-March 2014), and an Asia Society India-Pakistan Regional Young Leaders Initiative (IPRYLI) Fellow (2013-2014). His research interests include — India's ties with its extended neighbourhood (with a focus on Gulf and Iran), Geo-economics in South Asia, The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the role of India's states in the country's external relations.



Sonakshi Garg

Sonakshi Garg is a Third - year law student at Jindal Global Law School. She is one of the hosts of The Interlinked Podcast and a leads the Conversations in Developmental Studies (CIDS). She is deeply passionate about the subjects of History, Psychology and Gender Studies and is an International Relations enthusiast.



Hansin Kapoor

Hansin Kapoor is a final-year Criminology student at Jindal Global Law School who believes that crime, law, and power are best understood far beyond police files and courtrooms. A columnist for Nickered and Dimed, he writes on history and culture as well as international relations and public policy, tracing how ideas, institutions, and interests collide to shape societies. His work has been published in Aazad.com and other media platforms, where he engages with questions of justice, governance, and global change through a sharp, interdisciplinary lens.



The author of this piece is a second-year BA LLB (Hons.) student at Jindal Global Law School. Her research interests lie in public policy, global politics and the way legal systems intersect with political and social issues.

Rianne Michael

