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EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

Global Crises Demand More than 'Citizen Sacrifice': The Case for Structural Reform Over Behavioural Nationalism

 **THE HINDU**

28 May 2026

POLITY**ECONOMY****GS2****GS3**

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INTERVIEW ANGLE

"When the State exhorts citizens to "tighten belts" during crises — fuel hikes, gold restraint, food austerity — at what point does this become a substitute for the structural reform the State itself should be delivering?"

THE HINDU

| Lead Editorial | May 28, 2026

Governments increasingly lean on

PATRIOTIC APPEALS AND "BEHAVIOURAL NATIONALISM"

— asking citizens for restraint and sacrifice — during economic and geopolitical crises. The editorial argues this messaging is **no substitute for structural reform**. The State's duty is to build resilient institutions across **healthcare, education, innovation and climate adaptation**, and to strengthen democratic dialogue and public trust — not to externalise responsibility through moral suasion.

THE ARGUMENT IN ONE LINE

"Citizen sacrifice" framings shift the burden of state failure onto households; resilient democracies measure themselves by the quality of institutions they build, not the patriotism they can mobilise.

THE “BEHAVIOURAL NATIONALISM” PATTERN

| EPISODE | ASK OF CITIZENS | WHAT WAS AVOIDED |
|--|---|---|
| Demonetisation (Nov 2016) | Tolerate cash shortage, queue patience | Structural anti-corruption + black-money reform |
| COVID-19 lockdown 1.0 (Mar 2020) | Stay home; migrant workers improvise | Pre-built quarantine + migrant-welfare architecture |
| Fuel price spikes (2021-2022; 2026) | “Patience” with hikes; “sacrifice” for the nation | Pricing-architecture reform; SPR Phase II completion; transition acceleration |
| PM’s gold-restraint call (April 2026) | Limit gold purchases to ease CAD | Trade deficit reform; gold-monetisation deepening |
| Heatwave summers (2024-26) | Stay indoors; reduce activity | Heat Action Plans + cooling-rights infrastructure |
| Crop-failure / monsoon volatility | Farmer resilience | PMFBY coverage gaps; MSP credibility |
| Air pollution winters (Delhi-NCR) | Reduce outdoor activity; “do your part” | Cross-state air-quality governance; stubble alternatives |

The pattern is not unique to India — it’s a global democratic tendency. But India’s scale + heterogeneity makes the **gap between citizen sacrifice and state delivery** particularly stark.

WHY THIS MATTERS

1. Externalising Risk

Behavioural appeals **transfer the cost of policy failure** to citizens. When the State cannot stabilise pump prices, it asks for “patience”; when health infrastructure cannot absorb a surge, it asks for “compliance”; when air quality cannot be managed, it asks for “vigilance”.

2. The Erosion of Accountability

The longer the “sacrifice” narrative runs, the harder it becomes to evaluate policy on outcomes. **“We are doing our best; you must do yours”** is an unfalsifiable framing.

3. Trust Decay

Edelman Trust Barometer 2025 showed Indian trust in government among the highest globally (~76%) – but trust in institutions to deliver on long-term challenges (climate, jobs, healthcare) shows fissures across age and income groups.

4. The Democratic Bargain

Democracies promise **institutional reliability**, not just popular mobilisation. The editorial’s frame: when crisis becomes the default state, behavioural nationalism becomes the default policy – and structural reform recedes.

THE FIVE DOMAINS WHERE STRUCTURAL REFORM BEATS SACRIFICE

1. Healthcare

| SACRIFICE ASK | STRUCTURAL ALTERNATIVE |
|--|---|
| “Wear masks; isolate; comply” (pandemic) | Public health expenditure to 2.5% of GDP (NHP 2017 target); PMJAY coverage deepening to outpatient and chronic care |
| “Tolerate ASHA shortages” | Permanent ASHA cadre with social security |
| “Avoid antibiotics misuse” | National Antimicrobial Resistance Action Plan + regulated dispensing |

India’s public health spend is **~1.9% of GDP** (FY25 estimate) – well below the 2.5% NHP 2017 target. Structural reform is still pending.

2. Education

| SACRIFICE ASK | STRUCTURAL ALTERNATIVE |
|--|--|
| “Parents to support learning at home” | NEP 2020 implementation with teacher recruitment + PM SHRI scale-up |
| “Students to be resilient” through board reforms | NIPUN Bharat Mission with grade-3 FLN delivery |
| “Patience with NEET-NTA glitches” | Independent testing authority + transparency reform |

3. Innovation

| SACRIFICE ASK | STRUCTURAL ALTERNATIVE |
|---|---|
| “Brain-gain rhetoric” without ecosystem | ANRF (₹50,000 crore) with predictable basic-science grants |
| “Vocal for Local” | PLI extension + Compound Semiconductor Mission (post-ISM) |
| “Atmanirbhar” mood | Deep-tech VC tax architecture + IP framework |

4. Climate Adaptation

| SACRIFICE ASK | STRUCTURAL ALTERNATIVE |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| “Heatwave behavioural advisories” | National Cooling Action Plan + Heat Action Plans in all districts |
| “Reduce AC use” | Grid-scale storage + green hydrogen scale-up |
| “Plant trees” (CSR-funded) | Forest Rights Act compliance + agroforestry mainstream |

5. Democratic Dialogue

| SACRIFICE ASK | STRUCTURAL ALTERNATIVE |
|----------------------------------|--|
| “Trust the government” | Time-bound RTI responses + GDP-data integrity |
| “Patience with delayed services” | Citizen-charter enforcement + statutory grievance redress |
| “Vote and forget” | Parliamentary standing committees + functioning question hour |

THE EDITORIAL’S SPECIFIC CLAIM

The editorial does not deny that citizens have responsibilities. Its claim: **the balance** between “what the State delivers” and “what citizens are asked to sacrifice” is **structurally tilted** in India’s recent crisis-governance pattern, and this is **politically convenient but institutionally corrosive**.

COMPARATIVE ANCHOR

| COUNTRY | SACRIFICE FRAMING | STRUCTURAL DELIVERY |
|------------------------------|--|---|
| Singapore | Lee Kuan Yew’s “tighten the belt” rhetoric | But HDB housing, MOM labour reform, MOH health delivered |
| South Korea | IMF 1997 “gold collection” mobilisation | But chaebol reform + IT-investment surge followed |
| Germany | Energiewende citizen support | But Erneuerbare-Energien-Gesetz (EEG) + grid investment delivered |
| India (recent crises) | Repeated behavioural asks | Structural delivery slower; pending |

WIDER SIGNIFICANCE

- **State-society contract** — democracies fail when the contract becomes one-way.
- **Fiscal-political economy** — sacrifice rhetoric postpones the budgetary work of structural reform.
- **Climate-age governance** — climate crises are recurring; behavioural fixes alone are insufficient.
- **Democratic legitimacy** — long-term legitimacy depends on delivery, not just mobilisation.

COUNTER-ARGUMENTS

| COUNTER | SUBSTANCE |
|-------------------------|--|
| Collective-action logic | Some crises (climate, pandemics) genuinely require citizen behaviour change |
| State capacity gap | India’s state capacity is genuinely constrained; behavioural appeals are a second-best |
| Cultural fit | Sacrifice narrative resonates in Indian moral economy (Gandhi, swadeshi) — not always negative |
| Speed | Behavioural change is faster than institutional reform |

WAY FORWARD

- **Make-it-binding** — convert citizen-sacrifice appeals into time-bound state-delivery promises (e.g., “fuel hike + SPR Phase II completion by 2027”).

- **Independent audit** — CAG-style audits of citizen-charter compliance.
- **Statutory grievance redress** — Citizen's Charter Bill (long-pending) deserves passage.
- **Annual State of Institutions report** — institutional-health benchmarking.
- **Parliamentary scrutiny** — fewer ordinances, more standing-committee deliberation.

UPSC RELEVANCE

GS Paper 2 — Polity & Governance:

- Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.
- Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population.
- Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector.

GS Paper 3 — Indian Economy:

- Inclusive growth and issues arising from it.
- Public finance; fiscal-political economy.

Analytical hooks for Mains:

- State capacity and democratic legitimacy.
- Behavioural nationalism vs structural reform — distinguishing.
- Citizen-state contract in crisis governance.

FACTS CORNER

Public health expenditure target (NHP 2017): 2.5% of GDP; current ~1.9% (FY25 est.).

NEP 2020 target: 6% of GDP on education; current ~4.6%.

Edelman Trust Barometer 2025: India trust in government among the highest globally (~76%).

Citizen's Charter Bill (proposed): Pending; Second ARC (2008) recommended.

Citizen's Charters Programme: Launched 1997.

PMJAY (Ayushman Bharat): 2018; covers ~55 crore beneficiaries (top 40% of population by deprivation).

NEP 2020 / NIPUN Bharat Mission (July 2021): FLN by Grade 3 target.

ANRF (Anusandhan National Research Foundation): Established 2023; ₹50,000 crore corpus.

National Cooling Action Plan: Launched March 2019.

Editorial source: *The Hindu*, May 28, 2026 | Cross-link: *Daily May 28 — Right to Trauma Care under Article 21*

Source: Global Crises Demand More than 'Citizen Sacrifice': The Case for Structural Reform Over Behavioural Nationalism — Ujyari.com | Free UPSC & State PCS Editorial Analysis

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