



Secure Synopsis compilation for June-2025

General Studies-2

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Indian Constitution—historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments, significant provisions and basic structure.

Q. "The Indian Constitution has not just governed India but held it together". Analyse how it has fostered unity in diversity. Examine how its flexible federal design has supported this cohesion. Suggest reforms for strengthening institutional coordination. (15 M)

Introduction

The genius of the Indian Constitution lies not merely in legal governance but in its **ability to integrate diverse identities into a common constitutional framework**, sustaining unity amid deep plurality.

Body

How the Constitution has fostered unity in diversity

1. **Single citizenship and territorial integrity**: It provides one citizenship for all, ensuring a pan-Indian identity.
 - o Eg: **Article 1** defines India as a **Union of States**, and **Article 5** guarantees single citizenship.

2. **Cultural and linguistic accommodation**: It safeguards minority rights while recognising regional languages and customs.
 - Eg: **Eighth Schedule** lists **22 official languages**; **Articles 29-30** protect cultural and educational rights.
3. **Democratic decentralisation**: Allows regional representation while anchoring unity through universal adult franchise.
 - Eg: **Article 40 and 73rd/74th Amendments** institutionalised **Panchayati Raj and urban local bodies**, empowering local diversity.
4. **Judicial protection of pluralism**: Courts have upheld constitutional values in the face of sectarian challenges.
 - Eg: **S.R. Bommai case (1994)** held **secularism as a basic feature**, rejecting religious interference by states.
5. **Symbolic and institutional inclusion**: Reservation, official languages, and federal institutions reflect social and regional diversity.
 - Eg: **Article 15(4) and 16(4)** enabled affirmative action for SC/ST/OBCs; **National Integration Council** formed in 1961.

Role of flexible federal design in supporting cohesion

1. **Strong Centre with cooperative features**: Centralised powers in emergencies but shared governance in normalcy.
 - Eg: **Article 356 (President's Rule)** allows unity in crises; **Article 263** allows **Inter-State Council** for cooperation.
2. **Asymmetric federalism**: Special provisions allow accommodation of regional peculiarities.
 - Eg: **Article 371-A to 371-J** grant special status to **Nagaland, Mizoram, Telangana** etc., fostering regional inclusion.
3. **Concurrent list flexibility**: Both Centre and states legislate on common subjects for uniformity and adaptability.
 - Eg: **Seventh Schedule List III** includes education, forests, and trade, encouraging **policy alignment**.
4. **Financial redistribution and planning**: Federal grants and Finance Commission devolution foster balanced regional growth.
 - Eg: **15th Finance Commission (2021–26)** recommended **vertical devolution of 41%** to states from central taxes.
5. **Judicial federal balancing**: The Supreme Court has mediated disputes between Centre and states without eroding unity.
 - Eg: **Karnataka vs Union of India (1977)** reaffirmed that **federalism is part of the basic structure**.

Reforms to strengthen institutional coordination

1. **Revitalise the Inter-State Council**: Make it a permanent, empowered body with regular sessions and decision-tracking.
 - Eg: **Punchhi Commission (2010)** recommended regularisation of **Inter-State Council** for Centre-State dialogue.

2. **Institutionalise fiscal federal forums**: Enhance cooperation through GST Council–like models for other sectors.
 - Eg: **GST Council (Art 279A)** has successfully managed **multi-party negotiations on taxation**.
3. **Strengthen zonal councils**: Expand their role beyond security to include health, education, and migration coordination.
 - Eg: **Eastern Zonal Council (2024)** resolved **interstate migration issue** post-COVID in Bihar-Jharkhand region.
4. **Integrated digital governance platforms**: Create shared policy dashboards and grievance platforms for collaborative governance.
 - Eg: **Aspirational Districts Programme** uses **real-time data sharing** across levels of government.
5. **Enforce model conduct codes across institutions**: Set accountability norms for centre-state institutional functioning.
 - Eg: **Second ARC (2008)** recommended a uniform **ethics framework for inter-governmental relations**.

Conclusion

The Constitution is not just a legal document but **India's integrative force**. In an era of rising identity assertions, unity through institutional harmony and cooperative federalism must be its evolving legacy.

Q. India's free speech framework is eroding under the pressure of majoritarian sensitivity. Evaluate this claim in the context of the Fundamental Right to Freedom of Speech and Expression. Discuss key constitutional case laws. Suggest a model to protect vulnerable voices while maintaining public order. (15 M)

Introduction

India's civilisational ethos embraced dissent, but recent trends show a shift where public outrage is weaponised to suppress lawful speech, threatening the spirit of **free expression**.

Body

Free speech under pressure of majoritarian sensitivity

1. **Rise of offence-based FIR culture**: Complaints are increasingly filed for "hurting sentiments" with little legal basis.
 - Eg: In 2025, **Kamal Haasan** was criticised by the **Karnataka High Court** for comments on Tamil-Kannada language origins, citing public sentiment.
2. **Targeting of reformist speech**: Even academic or reformist remarks face backlash.
 - Eg: A **professor from Ashoka University** was trolled and chastised for his opinion on **Operation Sindoor** in April 2025.
3. **Precedent-defying judicial trends**: Recent rulings have sidelined prior SC standards in favour of vague social sentiment.
 - Eg: **Calcutta High Court**, in May 2025, denied bail to **influencer Sharmishta Panoli** for an alleged hate post, ignoring Shreya Singhal standards.
4. **Silencing of artistic or satirical speech**: Content creators face action for non-violent expression.

5. **Blurred lines between law and outrage**: Mob opinion often guides administrative action, not legal merit.
 - **Eg: Nupur Sharma (2022)** faced widespread legal and social backlash for a remark, though no incitement to violence was proven.

Key case laws on free speech interpretation

1. **Shreya Singhal v. Union of India (2015)**: Struck down **Section 66A of IT Act**, ruling that mere annoyance or offence cannot be criminalised.
 - **Eg:** It affirmed that **“offensive” speech is constitutionally protected**, unless it incites violence or threatens public order.
2. **S. Rangarajan v. P. Jagjivan Ram (1989)**: Emphasised that **freedom of expression cannot be suppressed** just because it might hurt the sentiments of some.
 - **Eg:** SC held that unless there is **a clear and present danger**, censorship is unjustified.
3. **Kedar Nath Singh v. State of Bihar (1962)**: Upheld sedition law but limited it to **incitement to violence or rebellion**, not mere criticism.
 - **Eg:** SC differentiated between **vigorous criticism of the government** and incitement to violence.
4. **Bijoe Emmanuel v. State of Kerala (1986)**: Upheld individual freedom in expression of belief during national anthem.
 - **Eg:** SC ruled that **personal belief** cannot be punished merely because it offends majority sentiment.
5. **Indibily Creative v. Union of India (2019)**: SC rejected calls to ban the Netflix show “Leila,” reiterating **creative liberty** in fiction.
 - **Eg:** Court affirmed that **artistic content** enjoys freedom unless it promotes violence or hatred.

A model to protect free speech and public order

1. **Codify ‘offence’ threshold in speech laws**: Ensure clarity on what qualifies as actionable offence under law.
 - **Eg: Law Commission Report 267** recommended narrowing hate speech to speech that causes **imminent threat to public order**.
2. **Judicial consistency and precedent adherence**: Courts must refer to **binding precedent** to avoid arbitrary outcomes.
 - **Eg:** Emphasise strict compliance with **Shreya Singhal and Rangarajan judgments**.
3. **Independent speech grievance panels**: Establish **non-partisan redressal boards** for handling speech-related complaints before FIRs.
 - **Eg:** The **UK’s Ofcom model** ensures proportionate response to speech complaints in public media.
4. **Training for law enforcement**: Police must be sensitised to **constitutional safeguards** before filing speech-related FIRs.
 - **Eg:** The **2023 MHA advisory** directed states to avoid misuse of IPC sections in expression-related complaints.
5. **Protection for vulnerable and dissenting voices**: Legal aid and institutional support for minorities, journalists, and artists.

- **Eg: UNESCO's 2023 report** recommended **national frameworks** to support defenders of artistic and academic freedom.

Conclusion

India must reaffirm **constitutional morality over mob morality**. Free expression, even if provocative, is the bedrock of reason, reform, and democratic resilience.

General Studies-2

Q. Anti-terror laws like UAPA, designed for national security, risk becoming tools of political repression. Evaluate the constitutional concerns and judicial responses in this context. (10 M)

Introduction

India's anti-terror laws like UAPA aim to address national security threats, but their misuse raises serious concerns over erosion of constitutional rights, particularly free speech and personal liberty.

Body

Constitutional concerns arising from UAPA misuse

1. **Violation of free speech and protest rights**: UAPA is often invoked to suppress dissent, affecting Article 19(1)(a) and 19(1)(b).
 - **Eg: Anand Teltumbde and Mahesh Raut (Bhima Koregaon case)** detained for expressing critical views.
2. **Presumption of guilt and stringent bail provisions**: Section 43D(5) restricts bail, reversing presumption of innocence under Article 21.
 - **Eg: Umar Khalid and Sharjeel Imam** remain in pre-trial detention since 2020.
3. **Chilling effect on civil society**: Frequent targeting of journalists, students, NGOs creates fear, deterring legitimate activism.
 - **Eg: Prabir Purkayastha and Amit Chakravarty (NewsClick case, 2023)** arrested under UAPA for alleged foreign funding.
4. **Excessive pre-trial detention**: Prolonged custody without trial amounts to punishment without conviction, violating Article 22.
 - **Eg: Fahad Shah (Kashmiri journalist)** released after nearly 600 days in custody.
5. **Undermining habeas corpus protection**: Growing use of preventive detention dilutes judicial oversight and remedy under Article 32.
 - **Eg: Delhi HC bail order to Devangana Kalita, Natasha Narwal (2021)** emphasized that "protest cannot be equated with terrorism".

Judicial responses to UAPA misuse

1. **Reinforcement of free speech**: Courts occasionally uphold constitutional rights to limit arbitrary application.
 - **Eg: Supreme Court in Zubair Case (2022)** ruled that criticism of the government is not terrorism.
2. **Evolving bail jurisprudence**: Judiciary scrutinizes procedural lapses while cautiously granting bail.
 - **Eg: Disha Ravi case (2021, SC)** emphasized dissent as essential for democracy.

3. **Limited constitutional scrutiny**: Courts often avoid directly examining UAPA's constitutional validity.
 - **Eg: Supreme Court habeas corpus dismissals (2024-25)** reflect judicial restraint in reviewing UAPA's core provisions.
4. **Need for institutional safeguards**: Committees have stressed the need for stronger oversight on investigative powers.
 - **Eg: Law Commission 268th Report (2017); Criminal Justice Reforms (2020)** recommended independent oversight bodies.

Conclusion

Recalibrating UAPA's framework through stronger judicial review, legal safeguards, and institutional accountability is critical to prevent its misuse while preserving India's constitutional democracy.

Q4. "For India's vulnerable citizens, the Constitution is a lifeline and a quiet revolution". Examine this characterization in light of constitutional guarantees. Analyse how far Indian democracy has internalized this spirit. (15 M)

Introduction

The Indian Constitution serves not merely as a legal document but as a transformative instrument, seeking to dismantle entrenched structures of exclusion while enabling marginalized citizens to participate as dignified equals in the nation's progress.

Body

The Constitution as a lifeline and a quiet revolution

1. **Acknowledgement of structural inequities**: The Constitution confronts historical injustices of caste, gender, and poverty instead of ignoring them.
 - **Eg: Article 17 abolishes untouchability**, directly challenging caste hierarchies.
2. **Transformation into active citizenship**: It redefines vulnerable groups as rights-holders with constitutional remedies.
 - **Eg: Article 32 empowers citizens to directly approach the Supreme Court for enforcement of rights.**
3. **Democratic authorship by the marginalized**: Representation of SCs, STs, women and minorities in the Constituent Assembly ensured inclusive constitution-making.
 - **Eg: Hansa Mehta and Dakshayani Velayudhan** contributed to debates on gender and caste equality.
4. **Redistribution of opportunity**: The State is empowered to take affirmative action for educational and employment access.
 - **Eg: Article 15(4)** enables special provisions for socially and educationally backward classes.
5. **Peaceful constitutional revolution**: It allows power shifts through legal reform rather than violent upheaval.
 - **Eg: CJI B.R. Gavai's elevation (2023)** as India's second Dalit Chief Justice symbolizes social mobility.

Constitutional guarantees operationalizing this vision

1. **Fundamental Rights as justiciable safeguards:** Articles 14-18 guarantee equality, non-discrimination, and protection of dignity.
 - Eg: **Indian Young Lawyers Association v. State of Kerala (2018)** upheld women's right to temple entry.
2. **Directive Principles shaping state action:** Articles 38 and 46 mandate promotion of social justice and protection of weaker sections.
 - Eg: **National Food Security Act, 2013** fulfills the right to food for marginalized households.
3. **Reservation system institutionalizing representation:** Constitutional quotas ensure participation of vulnerable groups in governance structures.
 - Eg: **103rd Constitutional Amendment Act (2019)** introduced EWS reservations, expanding inclusion beyond caste.
4. **Dedicated constitutional institutions for oversight:** Statutory commissions monitor the enforcement of safeguards and address grievances.
 - Eg: **NCSC's 2023 report** flagged high pendency in SC atrocity cases in certain states.
5. **Special provisions for vulnerable regions:** The Constitution provides targeted measures for socio-economically backward regions and communities.
 - Eg: **Fifth and Sixth Schedule protections** for tribal areas in North-East and central India.

Extent of internalization in Indian democracy

1. **Improved political empowerment:** Legislative reservations have enhanced marginalized representation in law-making bodies.
 - Eg: **106th Constitutional Amendment Act (2023)** ensures 33% reservation for women in legislatures.
2. **Judicial expansion of rights:** Courts have widened the scope of fundamental rights to include privacy, dignity, and autonomy.
 - Eg: **Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India (2018)** decriminalized homosexuality, recognizing LGBTQ+ dignity.
3. **Continuing caste and gender-based violence:** Social prejudices continue to fuel atrocities and exclusion.
 - Eg: **NCRB 2023 data** recorded over **50,000 atrocities against SCs/STs**, indicating persistent vulnerabilities.
4. **Economic disparity remains entrenched:** Despite welfare measures, marginalized groups face disproportionate poverty levels.
 - Eg: **UNDP-Oxford Global MPI 2023** found **16% Indians multidimensionally poor**, heavily concentrated among SCs/STs/OBCs.
5. **Implementation and accountability gaps:** Corruption, bureaucratic apathy, and weak grievance redressal blunt the constitutional vision.
 - Eg: **CAG 2023 report** exposed underutilization of **SC/ST sub-plan funds** in multiple states.

Conclusion

India's Constitution laid the foundation for a profound social transformation. Yet, completing this silent revolution demands unwavering constitutional morality, effective governance, and sustained societal commitment to genuine inclusion.

Q. Discuss the limits of constitutional silence in ensuring non-partisan behaviour of constitutional functionaries. Evaluate how this impacts democratic accountability. (10 M)

Introduction

Constitutional silences reflect the framers' faith in conventions and democratic ethos. However, rising political partisanship has exposed the limits of such silences in ensuring neutrality of constitutional functionaries.

Body

Limits of constitutional silence in ensuring non-partisan behaviour

1. **Lack of explicit neutrality clauses:** The Constitution does not mandate Governors, Speakers or Election Commissioners to act independently.
 - **Eg: Article 163** leaves Governor's discretion vaguely defined, leading to misuse in states like **Maharashtra 2019 (SC, 2020 Shiv Sena case)**.
2. **Absence of enforceable conventions:** Unlike UK, India lacks well-established conventions to guide functionaries' non-partisan conduct.
 - **Eg: Madhya Pradesh 2020 political crisis** where Speaker's delay in floor test raised neutrality concerns.
3. **Wide discretionary powers without accountability:** Discretionary powers under constitutional provisions remain loosely defined.
 - **Eg: Article 356** misuse leading to repeated imposition of President's Rule before **S.R. Bommai case (1994 SC ruling)** imposed judicial checks.
4. **No transparent appointment process:** Political executives dominate appointments, reducing functional autonomy.
 - **Eg: Election Commission appointments controversy (2023), SC in Anoop Baranwal vs Union of India** recommended independent selection committee.
5. **Judicial reluctance in some cases:** Courts sometimes invoke 'non-justiciability', allowing executive discretion unchecked.
 - **Eg: Rameshwar Prasad case (2006)** on premature dissolution of Bihar Assembly initially saw delayed intervention.

Impact on democratic accountability

1. **Erosion of public trust in institutions:** Perceived bias undermines faith in neutrality of key constitutional bodies.
 - **Eg: West Bengal Governor vs State tussles (2022)** reflected increasing politicisation.
2. **Disruption of federal balance:** Misuse of constitutional offices distorts Centre-State relations.
 - **Eg: Tamil Nadu Governor delaying bills (SC hearing 2024)** strained federal functioning.
3. **Skewed electoral competition:** Partiality by constitutional functionaries compromises level playing field in elections.

- **Eg: Use of state machinery during 2024 Lok Sabha elections** raised concerns on EC independence (ADR reports).
4. **Weakening of institutional checks:** Lack of neutrality disrupts inter-institutional accountability.
 - **Eg: Speaker's role in delaying anti-defection proceedings** (Manipur defection case 2020).
 5. **Reduced legitimacy of democratic processes:** Frequent allegations of bias affect overall democratic credibility.
 - **Eg: Delays in appointment of Lokpal till 2019** questioned commitment to institutional integrity (Transparency International report).

Conclusion

Constitutional silences require a robust political culture, but where conventions erode, legal reforms must fill the void. Strengthening independent appointments, clearer norms, and proactive judicial oversight are essential to protect democratic accountability.

Functions and responsibilities of the Union and the States, issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure, devolution of powers and finances up to local levels and challenges therein.

Q. In the absence of State support, courts often prescribe welfare remedies. Analyse the role of judiciary in addressing social protection failures. Evaluate if this undermines executive accountability. (15 M)

Introduction

India's judiciary, through its rights-based interpretation of justice, has increasingly stepped into welfare delivery gaps—most recently seen in the **2025 POCSO judgment** under **Article 142**, reflecting its moral guardianship amid State failure.

Body

Role of judiciary in addressing social protection failures

1. **Enforcing fundamental rights under Article 21:** Courts act decisively when executive apathy violates life and dignity.
 - **Eg: Mohini Jain v. State of Karnataka (1992)** held the **right to education** is part of **Article 21**.
2. **Delivering complete justice via Article 142:** SC bypasses statutory rigidity to ensure immediate, holistic relief.
 - **Eg: In the 2025 POCSO case**, the SC exempted the accused and ordered welfare relief for the victim.
3. **Issuing guidelines in absence of legislation:** Courts fill legislative voids in urgent social contexts.
 - **Eg: Vishakha v. State of Rajasthan (1997)** laid down **sexual harassment guidelines** before Parliament enacted a law.

4. **Monitoring scheme implementation**: Judiciary enforces accountability for underperforming welfare schemes.
 - **Eg: PUCL v. Union of India (2001)** led to Supreme Court oversight over **PDS and midday meal schemes**.

Does this undermine executive accountability?

Yes, it undermines accountability

1. **Blurs separation of powers**: Repeated interventions erode executive policy autonomy under **Articles 73–74**.
 - **Eg: State of Tamil Nadu v. K. Balu (2017)** liquor ban seen as encroachment into State policy domain.
2. **Reduces incentive for reform**: Reliance on courts delays proactive institutional corrections.
 - **Eg: Despite SC oversight, MC Mehta cases** saw minimal systemic improvement in pollution governance.
3. **Weakens political accountability**: Citizens bypass legislative pressure, turning to courts for relief.
 - **Eg: NHRC Report (2024)** shows lack of public pressure despite vacant **State Human Rights Commissions**.
4. **Judiciary gets overburdened**: Courts assume administrative roles, diverting from core functions.
 - **Eg: In Swaraj Abhiyan v. Union of India (2016)**, SC monitored drought relief due to executive inertia.

No, it strengthens accountability

1. **Acts as constitutional check on inertia**: Judiciary safeguards basic rights when governance collapses.
 - **Eg: 2025 POCSO case** exposed total breakdown of victim protection by both family and State.
2. **Bridges protection gaps in emergencies**: Courts offer time-sensitive welfare where the State lags.
 - **Eg: In PUCL (2001)**, SC ensured distribution of food grains during starvation crises.
3. **Upholds dignity and rights of the vulnerable**: Court-ordered support is grounded in social justice.
 - **Eg: Shakti Vahini v. Union of India (2018)** mandated preventive measures against honour killings.
4. **Fulfils constitutional promises of equity**: Judiciary enables **Directive Principles** when State delays.
 - **Eg: Bandhua Mukti Morcha (1984)** recognised **bonded labour** as a rights violation needing proactive protection.

Way forward

1. **Codify judicial limits under Article 142**: Draft a statutory framework for "complete justice" to avoid overreach.
 - **Eg: Law Commission** could propose structured guidelines on judicial discretion in welfare matters.
2. **Reform executive delivery institutions**: Fill critical vacancies, digitise monitoring, and ensure grievance redressal.

- **Eg:** Rollout **DBT + Social Audit Act** integration across welfare schemes.
- 3. **Enable judicial–executive coordination forums:** Promote structured compliance reviews while maintaining independence.
 - **Eg:** Suggested by **Punchhi Commission (2010)** for inter-institutional federal coordination.
- 4. **Strengthen statutory watchdogs:** Empower **NHRC, SCPCR, NCPCR** with better staffing, budget, and autonomy.
 - **Eg:** **NHRC Annual Report (2024)** noted poor State compliance due to lack of deterrent capacity.

Conclusion

Judicial interventions in welfare reflect the conscience of the Constitution, but enduring justice demands a **restoration of executive capability** and **institutional synergy**, not judicial substitution.

Q. The 74th Amendment sought to institutionalise urban decentralisation. Critically analyse why this objective remains only partially fulfilled. Examine recent trends in state-level interventions. Suggest pathways for effective urban federalism. (15 M)

Introduction

India is witnessing rapid urbanisation, yet its governance architecture has not evolved in pace with this transformation. The 74th Amendment sought to create empowered, democratic urban local bodies, but its objectives remain far from realised due to systemic, political, and fiscal barriers.

Body

Why the objective of urban decentralisation remains partially fulfilled

1. **Lack of fiscal autonomy:** Despite constitutional intent, ULBs remain financially dependent on state and central grants, unable to raise sufficient own revenues to plan and execute priorities independently.
 - **Eg:** As per **RBI Report on Municipal Finances 2022**, ULBs contribute merely **0.6% of national GDP**, and property tax collections in India stand at just **0.2% of GDP**, far below global benchmarks.
2. **Weak functional devolution:** Many critical functions listed in the **12th Schedule** remain with state departments or parastatal agencies, severely limiting municipal control over urban services.
 - **Eg:** **CAG Report 2023** highlighted that in **Maharashtra** and **Punjab**, core functions like **water supply, sewerage, and urban planning** are still largely managed by state-level boards rather than elected ULBs.
3. **Absence of empowered political leadership:** Most cities lack directly elected, empowered mayors with full executive authority and clear accountability to citizens.
 - **Eg:** **Delhi, Mumbai, and Chennai** continue with ceremonial mayors, with executive powers vested in state-appointed commissioners, violating the spirit of democratic local governance.
4. **State government dominance through discretionary powers:** States often exercise excessive administrative and legislative control, undermining the autonomy of ULBs.
 - **Eg:** The creation of **Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA), 2025**, chaired by the Chief Minister, has sidelined the BBMP, reducing the role of elected councillors.

5. **Institutional and capacity deficits**: ULBs often lack professional staff, planning expertise, and systems to manage modern urban challenges.
 - **Eg**: According to **MoHUA 2023 Report**, **over 70% of ULBs** in India lack even one full-time qualified urban planner, resulting in ad-hoc and poorly coordinated urban development.

Recent trends in state-level interventions

1. **Creation of supra-municipal bodies**: States are forming umbrella authorities or metropolitan bodies that bypass ULBs, consolidating power under state executives.
 - **Eg**: **GBA in Karnataka (2025)** is the latest example, replicating similar models like **HMDA in Hyderabad** and **MMRDA in Mumbai**.
2. **Use of SPVs to bypass elected bodies**: Under centrally sponsored missions, states are setting up SPVs to implement projects, weakening the role of municipal institutions.
 - **Eg**: Under **Smart Cities Mission**, as of **March 2024**, **SPVs** have been used in **97 cities**, with CEOs often being state-appointed officers, not accountable to local citizens.
3. **Shift towards project-based, discretionary funding**: New funding models like **Urban Challenge Fund** favour metros and Tier-1 cities and promote state-driven projects, side-lining ULBs' own priorities.
 - **Eg**: The **₹1 lakh crore Urban Challenge Fund 2025**, backed by the ADB's \$10 billion programme, focuses largely on **metro systems** and **rapid transit corridors**, with little space for participatory budgeting.
4. **Politicisation of ULBs through appointment and control**: States often delay elections, interfere in appointments, or use nomination powers to influence ULBs.
 - **Eg**: **Chandigarh MC elections in 2024** saw significant delays over **nomination disputes** between state-appointed administrators and elected representatives.
5. **Limited functional autonomy over land and planning**: Key areas like land use regulation, transport, and environmental planning are still managed by parastatals or state-level agencies.
 - **Eg**: In **Delhi**, the **DDA** continues to control land-use planning and building norms, even under **Delhi Master Plan 2041**, bypassing the elected **Municipal Corporation of Delhi**.

Pathways for effective urban federalism

1. **Enhance fiscal autonomy**: ULBs must be allowed greater own-revenue generation and receive predictable formula-based fiscal transfers.
 - **Eg**: The **15th Finance Commission (2020-25)** recommended **₹1.21 lakh crore** in tied and untied grants, which should be made unconditional to enhance local flexibility.
2. **Full implementation of 12th Schedule**: All 18 functions should be legislatively devolved with clear accountability.
 - **Eg**: **Second ARC on Local Governance (2007)** strongly recommended that functional devolution must be mandatory, not left to state discretion.
3. **Empowerment of mayors and councillors**: Major cities should have directly elected mayors with fixed tenure, executive authority, and transparent oversight.
 - **Eg**: **Fourth Delhi Finance Commission (2021)** proposed greater executive powers to the Mayor to enable accountable governance in Delhi.
4. **Statutory Metropolitan Planning Committees**: Article **243ZE** provides for MPCs with representation from elected bodies, which should be activated in all metros.

- **Eg: Kolkata MPC** is still weak and consultative; reforms could learn from **London's Greater London Authority**, which integrates planning and elected accountability.
5. **Creation of Indian Urban Service:** A specialised cadre of professional urban administrators and planners should be institutionalised to strengthen municipal governance.
- **Eg: The NITI Aayog Urban India 2047 Vision Document (2023)** recommends building an **Indian Urban Service** akin to IAS or IFS for technical capacity.

Conclusion

Urban India's future depends on genuine democratic decentralisation, empowered and accountable local governments, and professionalised capacity — only then can Indian cities meet the aspirations of their citizens in the 21st century.

Separation of powers between various organs dispute redressal mechanisms and institutions.

Comparison of the Indian constitutional scheme with that of other countries.

Parliament and State legislatures—structure, functioning, conduct of business, powers & privileges and issues arising out of these.

Structure, organization and functioning of the Executive and the Judiciary—Ministries and Departments of the Government; pressure groups and formal/informal associations and their role in the Polity.

Q. “Delays in India's district judiciary stem from deeper failures of institutional design rather than mere underfunding”. Discuss. (15 M)

Introduction:

The district judiciary, handling over **87% of India's total pending cases (NJA, 2024)**, suffers not due to lack of resources alone but because of systemic design failures undermining judicial efficiency.

Body

Deeper failures of institutional design causing delays

1. **Opaque disciplinary mechanisms:** Fear of arbitrary action restricts judicial independence.
 - Eg: **District Judge K Ganesan's dismissal (Madras HC, 2021)** based on hearsay evidence illustrates the Kafkaesque nature of inquiries.
2. **Flawed performance appraisal:** Unit-based targets distort judicial priorities.
 - Eg: “**Unit system**” allows equal credits for simple and complex cases (**NITI Aayog's Strategy for New India, 2018**).
3. **Frequent judicial transfers:** Revolving docket hampers case continuity.
 - Eg: **Law Commission 230th Report (2009)** highlighted how transfers prevent single-judge accountability for case disposal.
4. **Lack of specialized judicial management:** Administrative functions handled by judges reduce adjudicatory time.

- Eg: **Court Manager Scheme (13th Finance Commission, 2010)** remains poorly implemented across states.
- 5. **Inadequate integration of technology in procedural reforms:** E-filing and virtual hearings remain underutilized.
 - Eg: **e-Courts Phase III (2023)** rollout is still inconsistent across district courts (Source: Department of Justice, 2024).

Implications

1. **Erosion of public trust:** Persistent delays weaken faith in justice delivery.
 - Eg: **India Justice Report (Tata Trusts, 2023):** 71% citizens distrust lower courts for timely justice.
2. **Socio-economic burden:** Delays disproportionately affect weaker sections unable to bear long litigation costs.
 - Eg: **CESTAT (2022) noted over 35% of district court litigants** are first-generation litigants from vulnerable groups.
3. **Increased case backlog:** Structural inefficiencies amplify pendency despite judicial expansions.
 - Eg: As per NJDG (2024), **4.5 crore cases pending, with 3.3 crore in district courts.**
4. **Distortion in legal outcomes:** Incentive to prioritize easy disposals undermines quality adjudication.
 - Eg: **High acquittal rates in complex criminal trials (NCRB, 2023)** reflect weakened trial quality.
5. **Rise in judicial corruption perception:** Opaque governance fosters rent-seeking behaviour.
 - Eg: **Transparency International (2022)** identified judiciary among top five institutions vulnerable to corruption perceptions.

Way Forward

1. **Reform disciplinary processes:** Ensure transparency, due process and appellate oversight.
 - Eg: **SC in C.S. Karnan Case (2017)** stressed fair procedures even for judges; RTI Act (2005) should cover inquiry reports post-conclusion.
2. **Revamp performance evaluation:** Move to complexity-weighted disposal metrics.
 - Eg: **Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy (2021)** recommends differentiated disposal targets based on case difficulty.
3. **Stabilize judicial postings:** Limit mid-trial transfers and adopt 'one judge one case' model.
 - Eg: **UK's Continuous Trial Model** ensures stability throughout trial duration.
4. **Separate judicial and administrative roles:** Professional court managers to assist judicial functioning.
 - Eg: **13th Finance Commission recommendation (2010):** Dedicated cadre of trained court administrators.
5. **Accelerate digital integration:** Expand e-Courts, AI-based scheduling, and virtual hearings.
 - Eg: **Justice Chandrachud's e-Sewa Kendra model (SC e-Committee, 2023)** enables remote filing and hearings.

Conclusion:

Unless design failures are addressed, resource infusion alone cannot resolve systemic delays. **A governance-driven judicial reform can secure both efficiency and constitutional legitimacy.**

Q. “Judicial reinforcement of free speech remains vital in the face of non-state censorship”. Examine with recent examples. Analyse its implications for India’s democratic resilience. (10 M)

Introduction

Rising instances of **mob-driven censorship** in India highlight the crucial role of judicial interventions in safeguarding constitutional freedoms and upholding the **rule of law** against extra-legal pressures.

Body

Judicial reinforcement of free speech remains vital in the face of non-state censorship

1. **Rising trend of mob intimidation**: Vigilante groups increasingly use threats to suppress certified creative works.
 - **Eg: The Kerala Story (2023)** faced bans and mob threats in **West Bengal** and **Tamil Nadu** despite CBFC clearance
2. **Judiciary as protector of Article 19(1)(a)**: Courts have reinforced that freedom of speech cannot be curtailed by public sentiment alone.
 - **Eg: Padmaavat (2018)** where SC restrained states from banning the film (SC judgement)
3. **Reaffirming state’s law and order duty**: Judiciary holds that states cannot abdicate their role in ensuring lawful expression.
 - **Eg: K M Shankarappa v Union of India (2001)** — CBFC certification binding, states must uphold it
4. **Preventing moral policing by mobs**: Judicial orders limit the spread of majoritarian censorship through violence or threats.
 - **Eg: 2025 SC remarks** — "We can’t allow mobs to take over"
5. **Balancing rights and social order**: Courts maintain the line between genuine public order concerns and unlawful suppression.
 - **Eg: S. Rangarajan v P. Jagjivan Ram (1989)** — mere threat of demonstration not valid ground to suppress speech (SC judgement)

Implications for India’s democratic resilience

1. **Preserving institutional integrity**: Judicial clarity strengthens the role of CBFC and tribunals in protecting artistic freedoms.
 - **Eg: SC 2025 observations** affirming CBFC’s certification
2. **Promoting pluralism and dissent**: Protects diverse voices and fosters democratic debate.
 - **Eg: Aarakshan case (2011)** — SC prevented bans on films discussing caste issues
3. **Safeguarding individual choice**: Reinforces the public’s right to view or reject creative works without coercion.
 - **Eg: Justice Manmohan’s 2025 remarks** — watching a film is a personal choice
4. **Deterring mob veto and vigilantism**: Discourages unlawful censorship through intimidation or violence.
 - **Eg: SC stay on West Bengal ban on The Kerala Story (2023)** prevented similar bans
5. **Reinforcing constitutional governance**: Strengthens accountability of the executive to uphold rights.

- **Eg: Padmaavat (2018)** judgement reasserted that executive cannot yield to public pressure (SC judgement)

Conclusion

A vigilant judiciary is central to India's **democratic resilience**. Strengthening **institutional accountability** and building **robust enforcement mechanisms** can further fortify constitutional freedoms against non-state censorship.

Q. How is the Governor's role defined and limited by the Constitution? How do recurring tensions with elected State governments affect federalism? Suggest reforms to uphold neutrality and accountability. (15 M)

Introduction

The Governor, envisaged as a constitutional figurehead, has become a flashpoint in Centre–State relations due to frequent political interference and symbolic assertiveness, raising concerns over India's cooperative federalism.

Body

Constitutional definition and limitations on Governor's role

1. **Aid and advice of the Council of Ministers**: Article 163 mandates the Governor to act on the advice of the Council of Ministers except in specified discretionary cases.
 - **Eg: Shamsher Singh v. State of Punjab (1974) – Supreme Court ruled** that the Governor is bound by ministerial advice in all but rare exceptions.
2. **No independent executive authority**: As per Article 154, the Governor has no real powers independent of the elected government.
 - **Eg: B.R. Ambedkar in the Constituent Assembly** clarified that the Governor is merely a **constitutional head**, not an executive decision-maker.
3. **Discretionary powers are limited**: Use of Article 200 (assent to Bills) or Article 356 (report to President) is subject to judicial review.
 - **Eg: Nabam Rebia case (2016) – SC restricted** the use of discretion to prevent arbitrary use in recommending President's Rule.
4. **Doctrine of constitutional morality**: The Governor's actions must align with constitutional values and democratic norms.
 - **Eg: S.R. Bommai case (1994) – SC upheld** secularism and federalism, curbing misuse of Governor's powers under Article 356.
5. **No power to use unrecognised symbols**: Constitutional decorum prohibits the use of cultural-religious imagery in official functions.
 - **Eg: Kerala Raj Bhavan controversy (2025) – Displaying Bharat Mata image** in official state events was challenged for lacking constitutional sanction.

Impact of Governor–State government tensions on federalism

1. **Erosion of State autonomy**: Persistent interference weakens the authority of elected State governments.

- **Eg: NEET Bill in Tamil Nadu (2022)** – Governor delayed assent for months, obstructing State policy implementation.
- 2. **Politicisation of key appointments**: Unilateral decisions on university VCs or trust votes often undermine State prerogatives.
 - **Eg: West Bengal VC row (2023)** – Governor appointed Vice-Chancellors without State consultation, escalating conflict.
- 3. **Administrative deadlocks and delays**: Withholding assent or ordinances disrupts governance and service delivery.
 - **Eg: Punjab Budget address deadlock (2023)** – Governor withheld approval, creating constitutional friction.
- 4. **Breakdown of cooperative federalism**: Frequent confrontations hinder Centre–State cooperation envisioned in the Constitution.
 - **Eg: Maharashtra political crisis (2019) – Midnight oath-taking** exposed misuse of gubernatorial discretion.
- 5. **Bypassing electoral mandates**: Governors have often been accused of enabling governments that lack majority.
 - **Eg: Karnataka hung assembly (2018)** – Governor invited the largest party despite a post-poll coalition majority.

Reforms to uphold neutrality and accountability

1. **Consultative appointment process**: Appointment of Governors should involve the Chief Minister and Opposition.
 - **Eg: Punchhi Commission recommendation** – Proposed a **consultative and bipartisan mechanism** for appointment of Governors.
2. **Fixed tenure and removal safeguards**: Security of tenure and clear grounds for removal will insulate Governors from political pressure.
 - **Eg: Sarkaria Commission (1988)** – Advocated **5-year fixed tenure** and constitutional removal process.
3. **Code of conduct for Governors**: A written code can help curb partisan conduct and preserve constitutional dignity.
 - **Eg: Venkatchaliah Commission (2002)** – Recommended a **binding code of conduct** for all constitutional authorities.
4. **Strengthened judicial review**: Fast-tracking constitutional cases involving gubernatorial overreach can act as deterrent.
 - **Eg: Uttarakhand President’s Rule case (2016)** – **SC overturned** arbitrary dismissal of State government based on Governor’s report.
5. **Revive Inter-State Council mechanism**: Periodic reviews of Centre-State ties can include examination of the Governor’s role.
 - **Eg: Punchhi Commission** – Suggested regular Centre-State consultations to defuse emerging constitutional conflicts.

Conclusion

Reforming the office of the Governor is essential to safeguard the federal spirit and uphold constitutional morality. Institutionalising neutrality will help restore trust and strengthen the democratic fabric.

Salient features of the Representation of People's Act.

Appointment to various Constitutional posts, powers, functions and responsibilities of various Constitutional Bodies.

Q. What are the constitutional and statutory functions of the National Commission for Scheduled Castes (NCSC)? Critically evaluate the effectiveness of its institutional functioning in recent years. (10 M)

Introduction

Created under **Article 338 of the Constitution**, the NCSC serves as a vital institution to uphold constitutional safeguards and monitor socio-economic justice for historically disadvantaged groups.

Body

Constitutional and statutory functions of the NCSC

1. **Monitoring of legal safeguards**: NCSC monitors the implementation of safeguards under the Constitution and laws.
 - **Eg**: In **2024**, NCSC directed action in the **Jalore school caste-atrocity case**, invoking **Article 17 and the PoA Act** (NCSC Annual Report).
2. **Inquiry into rights violations**: It investigates complaints regarding denial of rights or safeguards.
 - **Eg**: In **2023**, NCSC sought explanation from **DU administration** over alleged discrimination in faculty recruitment.
3. **Advisory role in development**: Advises central and state governments on socio-economic upliftment measures.
 - **Eg**: **2022 recommendations** included suggestions for **residential hostels and post-matric scholarships** in rural regions.
4. **Annual reporting to the President**: Submits detailed reports on the status of rights implementation and violations.
 - **Eg**: The **2021–22 report** highlighted lapses in **reservation policy enforcement** in IITs and central universities.

Critical evaluation of effectiveness of NCSC functioning

A. Positive aspects

1. **Proactive in urgent cases**: NCSC has shown institutional assertiveness through suo motu actions.
 - **Eg**: In **2025**, it issued notices in the **Telangana Gurukul school incident**, citing violation of **dignity and institutional equity**.
2. **Accessible grievance redressal**: E-platforms and helplines have improved visibility and citizen outreach.
 - **Eg**: The NCSC **grievance portal**, revamped in **2022**, received over **28,000 petitions** in a year (NCSC data).
3. **Collaboration with law enforcement**: Works with police and civil authorities to ensure timely investigation in atrocity cases.

- **Eg:** In **MP (2023)**, it coordinated with the DGP's office to expedite pending **atrocious FIRs under SC/ST Act**.
4. **Focus on education and employment data**: Actively tracks representation in higher education and government jobs.
- **Eg:** NCSC's **2022–23 report** flagged shortfalls in **Group A recruitment** in several central PSUs.

B. Limitations

1. **Lack of enforcement power**: NCSC's recommendations are advisory, limiting its ability to compel action.
 - **Eg:** Despite repeated warnings, many states failed to implement the **SC Sub Plan guidelines** (NITI Aayog, 2023).
2. **Delayed reporting and action gaps**: Long delays between incident, inquiry, and institutional action reduce its impact.
 - **Eg:** The **2018–19 report** was laid before Parliament only in **2021**, delaying accountability on key issues.
3. **Concerns over autonomy**: Political appointments and executive influence raise questions on its neutrality.
 - **Eg:** **2023 Standing Committee** flagged lack of independent vetting in selection of Commission members.
4. **Underutilisation at the grassroots**: Awareness about NCSC remains limited among rural and semi-urban populations.
 - **Eg:** A **TISS study (2022)** found only **11% of rural SC respondents** were aware of NCSC complaint mechanisms.

Conclusion

To make NCSC a truly effective watchdog, it must be given **greater institutional autonomy**, time-bound compliance frameworks, and **grassroots outreach capacity** to transform safeguards into everyday justice.

Q. Post-retirement appointments of key constitutional authorities often blur the line between neutrality and political alignment. Analyse their impact on institutional credibility. Assess the need for a cooling-off period. (10 M)

Introduction

The credibility of democratic institutions rests on their perceived independence from political incentives. The trend of appointing retired constitutional functionaries to executive or political roles raises concerns over institutional neutrality.

Body

Impact on institutional credibility

1. **Perception of compromised neutrality**: Post-retirement roles may create a belief that decisions during tenure were influenced by political considerations.

- **Eg: Former CAG Vinod Rai's** comments on political outcomes post-2G audit led to public debates on **audit independence**.
- 2. **Erosion of public trust**: Citizens may lose faith in constitutional roles if retirements lead to quick political absorption.
 - **Eg: Former CJIs Ranjan Gogoi and P Sathasivam** took post-retirement roles in **Rajya Sabha and as Governor**, triggering debate.
- 3. **Chilling effect on dissent**: Serving officials may avoid decisions that displease the political executive, fearing post-retirement fallout.
 - **Eg: Former EC Ashok Lavasa's transfer to ADB** after dissenting on Model Code violations raised concerns over **institutional pressure**.
- 4. **Weakening of checks and balances**: Constitutional posts act as counterweights to executive excess. Post-retirement incentives may dilute this role.
 - **Eg: Election Commission's silence** on electoral bond transparency during 2019 raised questions on **executive influence**.
- 5. **Politicisation of regulatory and quasi-judicial bodies**: Frequent appointments of ex-officials can alter the independence of oversight institutions.
 - **Eg: Former bureaucrats** appointed to **tribunals and commissions** without open selection, violating **SC directives (Madras Bar Association v. UoI, 2020)**.

Need for a statutory cooling-off period

1. **Restoring neutrality and dignity of office**: A gap period can remove perceived linkage between decisions in office and political rewards.
 - **Eg: Loksatta's proposal (2020)** suggested **2–3-year cooling-off** for SC judges, ECs, and CAGs to ensure credibility.
2. **Preventing conflict of interest**: Cooling-off helps prevent direct benefit from prior regulatory decisions.
 - **Eg: TRAI Act** already bars its chairperson from future government employment post-tenure.
3. **Global best practices**: Mature democracies enforce restrictions to protect institutional sanctity.
 - **Eg: In the USA**, top public officials observe a **mandatory lobbying ban** post-tenure under **ethics legislation**.
4. **Legal clarity and uniformity**: Absence of a standard rule leads to arbitrary post-retirement placements.
 - **Eg: 2nd ARC Report on Ethics in Governance (2007)** recommended codifying post-retirement restrictions across constitutional offices.
5. **Strengthening institutional independence**: Curbing incentives ensures decisions are based solely on law and conscience.
 - **Eg: Law Commission of India** recommended clear norms for appointments to **tribunals and commissions**.

Conclusion

Ensuring institutional neutrality demands that public functionaries are insulated from post-retirement temptations. A statutory cooling-off period can institutionalise this firewall, restoring faith in the architecture of India's constitutional governance.

Q. What are the constitutional provisions governing the election and tenure of the Deputy Speaker? How does their status differ from that of the Speaker? (10 M)

Introduction

The office of the Deputy Speaker plays a crucial constitutional role in ensuring continuity of legislative proceedings, acting as the presiding officer in the absence of the Speaker.

Body

Constitutional provisions governing election and tenure

1. **Election by the House:** Deputy Speaker is elected by the members of Lok Sabha or State Assembly from among themselves.
 - Eg: Article 93 (Lok Sabha), Article 178 (State Assemblies).
2. **No mandatory timeframe:** The Constitution uses the phrase “as soon as may be” but does not fix any deadline for the election.
 - Eg: The 17th Lok Sabha (2019–2024) remained without a Deputy Speaker throughout its tenure.
3. **Election process:** Elected through a simple majority of members present and voting.
4. **Tenure co-terminus with the House:** Holds office till the dissolution of the House unless removed or resigns earlier.
 - Eg: Article 94 (Lok Sabha), Article 179 (State Assemblies).
5. **Resignation procedure:** Resignation is submitted to the Speaker.
 - Eg: Article 94(b), Article 179(b).
6. **Removal procedure:** Can be removed by a resolution of the House passed by an effective majority (majority of total membership).
 - Eg: Article 94(c), Article 179(c).

Status differences between Speaker and Deputy Speaker

1. **Presiding authority:** Speaker presides over House regularly; Deputy Speaker presides only during Speaker’s absence, vacancy or when delegated.
Eg: Article 95(1), Article 180(1).
2. **Administrative control:** Speaker controls Lok Sabha Secretariat and administrative affairs; Deputy Speaker has no independent administrative authority.
3. **Committee roles:** Speaker is ex-officio chair of key parliamentary committees; Deputy Speaker generally heads select committees as assigned (e.g. Private Members’ Bills Committee).
4. **Authority while presiding:** Deputy Speaker, while presiding, exercises all powers of the Speaker and rulings are binding.
5. **Warrant of Precedence:** Speaker holds 6th rank; Deputy Speaker has lower position in the Warrant of Precedence.

Conclusion

Ensuring timely election and strengthening the functional role of the Deputy Speaker can reinforce legislative balance, procedural neutrality, and constitutional accountability.

Q. “The structure of the Finance Commission appointment process creates the perception of partisanship”. Critically examine. How does this affect cooperative federalism in India? (15 M)

Introduction:

In India’s evolving fiscal federalism, the Finance Commission under Article 280 plays a critical role, but concerns over its appointment process have intensified amidst widening regional and political divergence.

Body

The perception of partisanship in the appointment process

Reasons for perception of partisanship

1. **Centralised appointment authority:** The Union government holds complete control over appointments, excluding states from the selection process.
 - Eg: **In the appointment of the XVI Finance Commission (2023)**, no formal consultations were held with states.
2. **Regional imbalance in representation:** States with higher economic contribution often find minimal representation despite contributing significantly to national revenue.
 - Eg: **Southern states contributing nearly 35% of India’s GDP** had only one representative in XVI FC.
3. **Inclusion of individuals perceived close to the establishment:** Selection of persons seen aligned with central ideology raises neutrality concerns.
 - Eg: **Members with previous policy advisory roles** for the central government have been appointed in earlier Commissions
4. **Terms of reference perceived as centrally driven:** The Union’s unilateral drafting of ToRs can embed priorities that may disadvantage some states.
 - Eg: **XV FC’s mandate to use 2011 Census data** and factor defence spending was criticised by population-stabilised states.

Why perception may be overstated

1. **Constitutionally valid process:** The appointment mechanism adheres to **Article 280** and has been consistently applied since 1951.
2. **Expert-based composition ensures competence:** Eminent administrators and economists provide technical rigour and fiscal expertise.
 - Eg: **Chairs of recent Commissions** have held extensive experience in economic governance and public administration.
3. **States participate during consultations:** States submit memoranda and appear for detailed discussions before the Commission.
 - Eg: **All 28 states presented submissions to XV FC** reflecting their fiscal positions.
4. **Parliamentary oversight mechanism:** Recommendations are tabled and debated in Parliament, enabling wider political scrutiny.
 - Eg: **The XV FC report was extensively debated** during the 2021 Budget Session.

How this affects cooperative federalism

1. **Weakening of federal trust:** Lack of inclusivity erodes mutual trust and affects intergovernmental relations.
 - Eg: **Southern Chief Ministers' Conference (2025)** expressed concerns over exclusion in FC appointments.
2. **Skewed devolution outcomes:** Perceptions of bias may influence resource allocation favoring certain regions disproportionately.
 - Eg: **Performance-based grants in XV FC** led to concerns of uneven benefit distribution across states.
3. **Intensification of regional tensions:** States may collectively oppose central fiscal decisions, hampering cooperative governance.
 - Eg: **Some states approached the Supreme Court** over delayed GST compensation and central fiscal policies.
4. **Erosion of institutional credibility:** Persistent charges of bias weaken public trust in constitutional bodies like the Finance Commission.
 - Eg: **Academic reviews in EPW (2023)** warned of growing executive dominance in fiscal institutions.

Way forward

1. **Mandate state consultation** during appointments through Inter-State Council as recommended by the **Punchhi Commission on Centre-State Relations (2010)**.
2. **Ensure balanced zonal representation** by adopting principles of equitable representation suggested in the **Sarkaria Commission Report (1988)**.
3. **Establish independent expert selection panel** involving judiciary, states, and domain experts on lines similar to recommendations of the **Second ARC (2007)** on constitutional body appointments.
4. **Frame Terms of Reference** jointly through consultative bodies like **NITI Aayog Governing Council** to ensure wider consensus and transparency.

Conclusion:

Transparent, inclusive reforms in the appointment process are essential to uphold the neutrality of the Finance Commission and preserve India's delicate fiscal federal balance.

Statutory, regulatory and various quasi-judicial bodies.

Q. What are the core constitutional and statutory foundations for mediation in India. Why is institutional mediation gaining traction in judicial reform? How can it be made legally and procedurally robust? (15 M)

Introduction

With over **5.8 crore pending cases** across Indian courts (National Judicial Data Grid, 2024), mediation is emerging as a constitutional promise for **speedy, inclusive and accessible justice**, moving beyond adversarial litigation.

Body

Constitutional and statutory foundations for mediation in India

1. **Article 21 and access to speedy justice**: Mandates the right to a fair and expeditious trial as a component of life and liberty.
 - **Eg**: In **Hussainara Khatoun vs State of Bihar (1979)**, SC linked **delay in trials to violation of Article 21**.
2. **Article 39A and legal aid**: Directs the State to provide **equal access to justice** via suitable legislation or schemes.
 - **Eg**: NALSA, created under the **Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987**, anchors mediation through legal aid camps.
3. **Section 89 of CPC, 1908 (amended 2002)**: Enables courts to refer disputes for ADR including mediation, arbitration, conciliation.
 - **Eg**: In **Salem Advocate Bar Association v. Union of India (2003)**, SC upheld validity of **Section 89** and encouraged court-annexed mediation.
4. **Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987**: Empowers legal services institutions to organise **Lok Adalats and mediation camps**.
 - **Eg**: Under NALSA's mediation framework, over **5.5 lakh pre-litigation cases** were settled in 2023.
5. **Mediation Act, 2023**: Provides a **statutory framework for voluntary, institutional mediation** with time-bound processes and enforceability.
 - **Eg**: The Act mandates **mandatory pre-litigation mediation** for civil and commercial disputes up to ₹3 crore.

Reasons for rise of institutional mediation in judicial reform

1. **Reducing judicial backlog**: Institutional mediation offers an organised, scalable alternative to tackle systemic case pendency.
 - **Eg**: The '**Mediation for the Nation**' campaign (**July–Sept 2025**) targets pending cases from **taluka to High Courts**, under NALSA and MCPC.
2. **Standardisation and professionalism**: Institutional mediation ensures **trained mediators, protocols and monitoring**.
 - **Eg**: **Supreme Court's Mediation and Conciliation Project Committee (MCPC)** monitors quality and training since 2005.
3. **Hybrid and digital accessibility**: Institutions are better placed to enable **online and hybrid mediation**, enhancing rural access.
 - **Eg**: **Online mediation by District Legal Services Authorities** under the 2025 campaign supports remote participation.
4. **Inclusion of new dispute categories**: Institutional setups now cover **family, consumer, service, land and cheque bounce cases**.
 - **Eg**: The 2025 campaign includes **partition, service matters, DV cases** in its mediation scope.
5. **Support from judiciary and policy**: Judicial pronouncements and recent laws have institutionalised mediation in policy discourse.
 - **Eg**: **Justice S.A. Bobde Committee (2020)** on ADR promoted court-linked mediation infrastructure.

Measures to make mediation legally and procedurally robust

1. **Clarify legal enforceability of settlements:** Ensure **clear statutory recognition and enforcement** of mediated agreements.
 - **Eg: Mediation Act, 2023**, under Section 28, treats agreements as **decrees under CPC**.
2. **Create a national accreditation framework:** Develop uniform training, certification and ethics standards for mediators.
 - **Eg: India International Arbitration Centre** model offers best practice for accrediting **neutral third parties**.
3. **Incorporate mediation into judicial workflow:** Courts must integrate **mandatory mediation stages** in case management.
 - **Eg: Delhi High Court Mediation Centre** refers **pre-litigation and pending cases** as routine.
4. **Establish performance-linked monitoring mechanisms:** Track success rates, neutrality, and satisfaction through institutional dashboards.
 - **Eg: MCPC Mediation Monitoring Committees** at state level track outcomes of the 90-day campaign.
5. **Expand legal literacy and public trust:** Awareness programmes and **incentives for early settlement** can increase participation.
 - **Eg: NALSA's legal literacy camps** in 2024 saw **43% rise** in voluntary participation in matrimonial mediation.

Conclusion

India must shift from a reactive litigation model to a proactive resolution-based culture. Mediation, when **institutionally integrated, procedurally safeguarded and legally empowered**, can become the cornerstone of a more humane and efficient justice system.

Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

Q. What are the main reasons behind the continued incarceration of poor undertrials in India? Suggest short- and long-term reforms to address this systematically. (10 M)

Introduction:

The undertrial crisis in India is not just a legal failure but a systemic denial of liberty rooted in poverty, delayed processes and institutional apathy.

Body

Reasons for continued incarceration of poor undertrials

1. **Inability to furnish bail bonds:** Poor prisoners often lack sureties or funds to post bail even when granted.
 - **Eg: As per India Justice Report 2025**, over **25% of undertrials** remain in custody despite being granted bail due to **non-payment of sureties**.
2. **Lack of legal aid awareness and access:** Many undertrials are unaware of free legal aid or do not receive effective counsel.

- **Eg: NCRB 2023** shows only **13% of prisoners** accessed legal aid lawyers; most lacked consistent representation.
- 3. **Delays in police investigation and filing of chargesheets:** Undertrials suffer long detention due to slow case processing.
 - **Eg:** In the **Satender Kumar Antil v. CBI (2022)** case, SC highlighted how delays in chargesheet filing prolong custody.
- 4. **Judicial backlog and systemic delay:** Courts are overburdened, leading to prolonged pre-trial detention.
 - **Eg:** As per **NJDG 2025**, over **4.7 crore cases** are pending in Indian courts, with **71% of prison population being undertrials**.
- 5. **Discretionary and inconsistent application of bail norms:** Courts often deny bail for similar offences due to subjective standards.
 - **Eg:** The **Law Commission 268th Report** noted inconsistent bail practices as a key cause of pre-trial injustice.

Reforms to address the issue

A. Short-term reforms

1. **Operationalise the Support to Poor Prisoners Scheme:** Actively identify eligible inmates and disburse funds for bail/fines.
 - **Eg:** MHA's 2023 scheme remains underutilised despite funds allocated via **NCRB** and clear SOPs issued.
2. **District legal aid clinics inside jails:** Regularly monitor undertrials and assist with bail applications.
 - **Eg:** **Delhi Prisons Legal Aid Model** shows success in weekly **paralegal interface and bail filing**.
3. **Mandatory bail review hearings for long-term undertrials:** Periodic judicial review for those detained beyond prescribed limits.
 - **Eg:** **SC direction in Hussainara Khatoun v. State of Bihar (1979)** led to **speedy trial being recognised as a fundamental right**.
4. **Digitisation of undertrial data with tracking:** Real-time prison-court coordination to track eligibility and avoid delays.
 - **Eg:** **ePrisons project by MHA** enables real-time prisoner data tracking and flagging of long-term detentions.

Long-term reforms

1. **Codify uniform bail norms through legislation:** Reduce judicial discretion and ensure equity in pre-trial release.
 - **Eg:** Recommended by **Criminal Justice Reforms Committee (Madhava Menon, 2007)** for structured bail guidelines.
2. **Increase judicial capacity and special bail benches:** Appoint more judges and create fast-track bail courts.
 - **Eg:** **Justice Ramana's 2021 recommendation** to increase **judge strength from 21 to 50 per million population**.

3. **Community bail bond and public surety schemes:** Use of state/NGO-verified sureties for indigent accused.
 - **Eg:** **Telangana’s pilot bail bond pooling scheme (2022)** showed success in reducing undertrial numbers.
4. **Strengthen undertrial review committees (UTRCs):** Regular monthly meetings with measurable accountability.
 - **Eg:** **NCRB Guidelines 2023** recommend active tracking of undertrial cases through **District Legal Services Authorities**.

Conclusion:

India cannot afford a justice system where liberty is priced by economic status. True criminal justice reform must begin by dismantling the structural barriers that keep the poor locked behind bars without conviction.

Development processes and the development industry —the role of NGOs, SHGs, various groups and associations, donors, charities, institutional and other stakeholders.

Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes; mechanisms, laws, institutions and Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections.

Q. Rigid expenditure controls dilute the demand-driven design of employment guarantee schemes. Analyse this statement. Examine how the current cap disrupts the MGNREGA implementation architecture. (10 M)

Introduction

Employment guarantee schemes like MGNREGA were designed to automatically respond to rural distress; rigid fiscal controls undermine this fundamental design principle.

Body

How rigid expenditure controls dilute demand-driven design

1. **Violation of statutory entitlement:** MGNREGA legally guarantees employment on demand under Section 3 of MGNREGA 2005.
 - **Eg:** The recent **60% cap for FY 2025-26** limits funds irrespective of actual demand (**Ministry of Rural Development, 2025**).
2. **Failure to address seasonal and climatic variations:** Employment demand fluctuates with agricultural cycles and weather shocks.
 - **Eg:** **Karnataka exhausted 70% of its MGNREGS budget in 6 months in 2023** due to extreme drought conditions.
3. **Disincentivising timely supplementary allocation:** Rigid ceilings discourage timely release of additional funds during periods of rural distress.
 - **Eg:** In FY 2024-25, **supplementary allocations were delayed**, resulting in **Rs 21,000 crore pending dues**.

4. **Erosion of welfare state principle:** Fiscal caps undermine Article 21's evolved interpretation as a positive right to livelihood.
 - Eg: **Swaraj Abhiyan v Union of India (2016)** held that financial inability cannot override statutory duties.

How current cap disrupts MGNREGA implementation architecture

1. **Distorts planning at state level:** State governments face difficulty in forecasting labour demands within central budget limits.
 - Eg: States like **Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh** reported job card holders being denied work post fund exhaustion (**NREGA Sangharsh Morcha, 2025**).
2. **Leads to wage delays and legal violations:** Section 3 and Schedule II of MGNREGA mandate timely wage payments within 15 days.
 - Eg: As of **June 2025**, wage arrears stood at **Rs 19,200 crore** (**Rural Development Ministry, 2025**).
3. **Weakens demand-based monitoring systems:** Expenditure caps replace real-time demand-based fund flows with arbitrary limits.
 - Eg: The **NREGASoft MIS portal** shows pending transactions piling up despite active job demand (**NREGASoft Dashboard, 2025**).
4. **Dilution of participatory planning:** Gram Panchayats lose autonomy to plan shelf of projects due to uncertain fund availability.
 - Eg: **CAG Report 2023** highlighted that Gram Sabhas often curtailed project proposals fearing non-release of funds.

Conclusion

The viability of employment guarantee schemes rests on flexible and responsive fund allocation; fiscal rigidity risks reducing MGNREGA into a token welfare program rather than a statutory right-based safety net.

Q. Explain how the adoption of AI-based criminal justice tools affects the rights of marginalised groups in India. Assess the institutional vulnerabilities that may aggravate this. (10 M)

Introduction

The rise of **AI-powered criminal justice tools** in India, without inclusive safeguards, risks deepening historical social inequities and weakening constitutional protections for marginalised groups.

Body

Impact of AI-based criminal justice tools on rights of marginalised groups

1. **Reinforcement of existing bias:** Biased training datasets reflect caste, religion, and gender prejudices embedded in society.
 - Eg: **NCRB Prison Statistics 2018** show **66% of undertrials belong to Dalit, Adivasi, OBC, and minority groups.**

2. **Violation of right to equality:** Discriminatory outcomes violate **Article 14** and undermine equal protection of law.
 - Eg: **COMPAS tool in the US rated Black defendants as higher risk (ProPublica, 2016), showing global pattern of bias replication.**
3. **Denial of due process:** Algorithmic risk assessments may override individual case contexts, violating **Article 21** protections of fair trial.
 - Eg: **Punjab and Haryana High Court used ChatGPT in bail rejection in 2023.**
4. **Privacy infringements:** AI surveillance tools such as facial recognition systems threaten privacy rights recognised under **Puttaswamy judgment (2017)**.
 - Eg: **National Automated Facial Recognition System (AFRS) lacks privacy regulations.**
5. **Exclusion from data representation:** Underrepresentation in digital datasets marginalises Dalits, Adivasis, women, and rural poor.
 - Eg: **Oxfam India Inequality Report 2022 shows women use internet 33% less than men; rural access only 31%.**

Institutional vulnerabilities aggravating the risks

1. **Lack of legal framework:** Absence of a dedicated **AI regulatory law** allows unchecked deployment of flawed technologies.
 - Eg: **No specific legislation governs AI in criminal justice as of 2025 (NITI Aayog AI Strategy Report, 2021).**
2. **Limited judicial capacity:** Judiciary lacks technical expertise to scrutinise algorithmic decisions effectively.
 - Eg: **Justice B.N. Srikrishna highlighted lack of AI literacy in courts (Bar & Bench, 2023).**
3. **Concentration of control:** Privately developed AI tools with proprietary algorithms reduce state accountability and transparency.
 - Eg: **Amazon AI hiring tool scrapped in 2014 due to gender bias.**
4. **Weak institutional oversight:** Existing bodies like **NHRC or National Commission for SC/ST** have limited capacity to review algorithmic bias.
 - Eg: **NHRC has yet to release guidelines on AI and human rights violations (NHRC Annual Report, 2024).**
5. **Opaque procurement processes:** AI tools procured without public scrutiny risk embedding flawed technologies in official use.
 - Eg: **Facial recognition pilots launched in multiple states without public consultation (Internet Freedom Foundation, 2024).**

Conclusion

Without robust legal, ethical, and institutional checks, AI may reproduce structural injustice under the guise of efficiency. **An inclusive, rights-based AI governance model must be prioritised to protect the most vulnerable.**

Q. What are the key legal gaps in India's approach to refugee protection? Analyse how this affects the socio-economic integration of long-term refugees. Recommend steps to align domestic frameworks with international best practices. (15 M)

Introduction

India hosts over **200,000 refugees**, but the absence of a national refugee law or formal legal status has led to inconsistent and ad hoc responses, limiting the protection and integration of long-term refugee populations.

Body

Key legal gaps in India's approach to refugee protection

1. **No dedicated national refugee law**: India lacks a consolidated legal framework defining refugee status, rights, and protections.
 - Eg: **India is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention or the 1967 Protocol (UNHCR, 2025).**
2. **Absence of legal recognition of refugee status**: Refugees are treated under the **Foreigners Act, 1946**, which conflates them with illegal migrants.
 - Eg: **Sri Lankan refugees in Tamil Nadu** are classified as "foreigners" under the Act.
3. **Lack of codified non-refoulement principle**: No statutory safeguard exists against forced return of refugees to danger zones.
 - Eg: The **Supreme Court in Mohammad Salimullah case (2021)** highlighted the lack of binding non-refoulement provisions.
4. **No uniform rights-based framework**: Refugee access to employment, education, and legal identity varies across groups and states.
 - Eg: **Tibetan refugees** benefit from **Tibetan Rehabilitation Policy (2014)**, while **Sri Lankan refugees** lack such protections (**MHA Annual Report 2024**).
5. **Inconsistent judicial interpretations**: In the absence of national law, protection depends on varying judicial discretion.
 - Eg: **SC observation (2025)** — "India is not a dharamshala" — in Sri Lankan refugee case under **UAPA**.

Impact on socio-economic integration of long-term refugees

1. **Restricted employment opportunities**: Without legal recognition, many refugees are barred from formal employment sectors.
 - Eg: Only **5% of Sri Lankan engineering graduates** in Tamil Nadu secure employment in their trained fields.
2. **Barriers to education and healthcare**: Inconsistent entitlements hinder access to quality education and public services.
 - Eg: **Rohingya refugees** in Delhi face school enrolment barriers due to lack of formal identity documents (**UNHCR India, 2024**).
3. **Perpetuation of dependency on aid**: Camp-based refugee models reinforce cycles of dependency rather than promoting self-reliance.
 - Eg: **Rehabilitation camps** house two-thirds of Sri Lankan refugees in Tamil Nadu for over **40 years**.

4. **Legal insecurity and social exclusion**: Lack of legal clarity fosters marginalisation and xenophobic attitudes.
 - Eg: Increased targeting of **Rohingya refugees** during communal tensions in **Hyderabad (NHRC Report, 2024)**.
5. **Limited participation in local governance**: Refugees lack civic representation, hampering social inclusion and voice.
 - Eg: No representation for **Sri Lankan refugee youth** in Tamil Nadu local governance bodies.

Steps to align domestic frameworks with international best practices

1. **Enact a comprehensive national refugee law**: Codify status, rights, and protections aligned with constitutional principles and international norms.
 - Eg: Draft **Model National Refugee Law** proposed by **NHRC, 2017**.
2. **Incorporate non-refoulement into domestic law**: Embed this principle in line with **Article 21 (right to life and liberty)** of the Constitution.
 - Eg: Cited in **Ktaer Abbas Habib Al Qutaifi vs Union of India (1999)** by **Gujarat HC**.
3. **Develop inclusive socio-economic policies**: Ensure access to education, healthcare, skilling, and employment pathways.
 - Eg: **Tibetan Rehabilitation Policy (2014)** offers a model for expanding refugee welfare (**MHA Annual Report 2024**).
4. **Harmonise central and state approaches**: Create coordinated frameworks respecting **federal structure** under **Seventh Schedule**.
 - Eg: Collaboration between **Centre and Tamil Nadu** on refugee welfare.
5. **Institutionalise UNHCR cooperation**: Strengthen ties with **UNHCR India** for transparent refugee status determination.
 - Eg: **UNHCR partnerships in Nepal and Bangladesh** provide useful best practices (**UNHCR 2025 Global Trends Report**).

Conclusion

A robust, rights-based refugee law aligned with **constitutional values** and **international best practices** can transform India's refugee governance — balancing national security with human dignity and fostering long-term socio-economic integration.

Q. Vulnerable groups often face 'institutional invisibility' in governance structures. Explain this idea. How can institutions be redesigned to recognise and include the undocumented and marginalised? (10 M)

Introduction

Governance systems that rely solely on formal documentation often fail to acknowledge the lived presence of undocumented individuals, leaving them invisible to state services and democratic protections.

Body

Meaning and causes of institutional invisibility

1. **Exclusion from services due to lack of formal ID**: Absence of Aadhaar, ration cards, or birth certificates leads to denial of entitlements.
 - **Eg: Homeless citizens in Mumbai** were excluded from **COVID relief and shelters** due to lack of address proof (**TISS Report, 2021**).
2. **Digitalisation without inclusion safeguards**: Digital-first governance marginalises those without internet access or tech literacy.
 - **Eg: Nomadic tribes in Rajasthan** were denied **PDS and pension access** due to biometric mismatches in Aadhaar (**NHRC Report, 2023**).
3. **Rejection of community-based or oral identity proofs**: Institutions overlook locally validated documents and oral histories.
 - **Eg: In Assam NRC**, panchayat certificates issued to married women were deemed invalid despite SC guidance (**Rahima Khatun v. State of Assam, 2021**).
4. **Data invisibility translates to policy invisibility**: Absence in official datasets leads to under-targeting in schemes.
 - **Eg: Seasonal migrant workers** were excluded from relief during the 2020 lockdown due to **non-registration in NSS or SECC** (**ILO–India Migration Report, 2022**).
5. **Presumption of illegality over lived citizenship**: Poor and stateless populations are often criminalised despite generational presence.
 - **Eg: In Jaynab Bibi case (2025)**, a woman was declared **foreigner despite decades of residence** in Assam, later stayed by SC (**SC Order, June 2025**).

How institutions can be redesigned for inclusion

1. **Accept multi-layered identity proofs**: Allow for alternative documents like self-declarations, local body certificates, and community attestations.
 - **Eg: Rajasthan’s Bhamashah Scheme** and **SECC 2011** accepted gram panchayat–verified self-declarations for welfare inclusion (**Planning Commission, 2014**).
2. **Conduct human rights audits in exclusion-prone systems**: Periodic review of exclusion in welfare delivery by independent bodies.
 - **Eg: SC in Swaraj Abhiyan v. Union of India (2016)** directed states to review **PDS and MGNREGA exclusion patterns**.
3. **Strengthen decentralised grievance redressal platforms**: Community-based helpdesks and multilingual, mobile appeals units can reduce exclusion.
 - **Eg: Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board (DUSIB)** uses community volunteers to link slum dwellers with welfare schemes.
4. **Include vulnerable voices in institutional design**: Representation in governance boards and gram sabhas enables inclusion from within.
 - **Eg: Forest Rights Act, 2006** mandates **ST and forest-dweller participation** in land claims decisions (**MoTA Report, 2023**).
5. **Ensure portability and presence-based access to welfare**: Decouple entitlements from fixed residence or state-bound identity.
 - **Eg: One Nation One Ration Card (2020)** enabled **migrant workers to access food grains** anywhere in India (**NITI Aayog Evaluation, 2022**).

Conclusion

A democracy must be capable of seeing and serving even those without papers. Designing institutions for dignity, flexibility, and proximity is vital for inclusive citizenship.

Q. Criminal justice reform must go beyond laws to include institutional preparedness and public trust. Discuss the institutional challenges in enforcing India's new criminal codes. How can the system ensure citizen-centric justice? (10 M)

Introduction

Laws alone cannot transform justice delivery unless supported by institutional readiness, technological adaptation, and citizen trust in enforcement agencies.

Body

Institutional challenges in enforcing new criminal codes

1. **Digital infrastructure deficit**: Limited devices, outdated systems, and poor connectivity at police stations hinder adoption of digital tools.
 - Eg: As per **R.K. Vij** the **e-Sakshya app** cannot run on phones below **Android 10**, yet IOs are using **personal devices** due to lack of official provision.
2. **Lack of forensic capacity**: Insufficient FSLs, unnotified cyber labs, and delay in expert deployment weaken evidence quality.
 - Eg: The **State FSL in Chhattisgarh** is yet to be notified under the **IT Act**, affecting **cyber evidence admissibility**
3. **Judicial integration gaps**: Courts are not directly integrated with ICJS platforms like NGC, leading to duplication and manual submissions.
 - Eg: IOs still submit evidence via **pen drives**, despite uploading it to **Sakshya Lockers**, causing delays and inefficiencies
4. **Shortage of trained personnel**: New provisions require real-time video documentation, but IOs lack proper training and support staff.
 - Eg: **Only one tablet** was provided per police station in several states, despite **multiple IOs**, affecting timely compliance
5. **Ambiguous legal drafting**: Vague clauses create confusion in application and enable selective enforcement.
 - Eg: **Section 303(1) of BNS** on theft under ₹5000 is inconsistently applied, while **Section 112** on petty crimes remains **open-ended and misused**.

Measures to ensure citizen-centric justice

1. **Strengthening last-mile digital access**: Equip all IOs with secure, standardised devices and enable seamless uploads.
 - Eg: The **CCTNS-ICJS integration roadmap (MHA, 2024)** includes offline-to-online syncing to support **remote rural stations**.
2. **Timely forensic and medical reporting**: Expand certified labs and ensure timely digital reporting of medico-legal data.
 - Eg: **MedLEaPR platform (NIC Haryana)** under trial in **Chhattisgarh** aims to speed up **post-mortem and medical reports**

3. **Victim-sensitive procedural reforms**: Institutionalise privacy, time-bound action, and easy legal access for victims.
 - Eg: **Section 184 BNSS** mandates a **7-day deadline** for submission of rape survivor medical reports to police.
4. **Stakeholder consultation and feedback loop**: Institutionalise field-level feedback from IOs and victims to adapt reforms.
 - Eg: The **Law Commission 277th Report** recommended periodic reviews based on **IO feedback and public trust metrics**.
5. **Judicial capacity-building**: Train judiciary in digital evidence handling and improve court-ICJS integration.
 - Eg: Though **Section 530 BNSS** allows **video-based witness examination**, it is underused due to **court-level digital lag**.

Conclusion

True justice flows not from codebooks but from capacity and trust. A responsive, tech-enabled, and citizen-aligned system must anchor India's criminal justice reforms.

Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

Q. "The future of higher education lies not in a single model but in dynamic, decentralised networks that evolve with societal needs." Examine the features of an ecosystem model for tertiary education. Assess its potential to transform the future of education delivery and learning outcomes. (15 M)

Introduction

India's goal of achieving 50% GER by 2035 under NEP 2020 calls for moving beyond rigid institutional structures to **dynamic education ecosystems** that adapt to evolving learner needs and industry relevance.

Body

Dynamic networks and evolving needs in higher education

1. **From single-purpose to multi-mission institutions**: Education must combine academic learning with skilling, research, and entrepreneurship.
 - Eg: The **MCC-MRF Innovation Park** links departments with incubators and industry-driven upskilling modules.
2. **Expansion of alternate learning pathways**: Certificates, online modules, and micro-credentials are gaining legitimacy.
 - Eg: As per **Inside Higher Ed (2024)**, **65% US adults believe certification suffices for a good job**.
3. **Millennial focus on ROI and outcomes**: Youth demand employability, entrepreneurship, and visible returns from education.
 - Eg: **NIRF 2024** shows higher placements in institutions with strong industry-academia interfaces.

4. **Shifting industry needs require modularity**: Rapid tech change demands continuous curricular updates.
 - **Eg: India Skills Report 2024** stresses hybrid skillsets in AI, design thinking, and data analytics.
5. **Localised and community-responsive learning**: Education models now align with local economies and social needs.
 - **Eg: Kerala Knowledge Economy Mission** integrates higher education with local gig platforms.

Features of an ecosystem model for tertiary education

1. **Multi-actor collaboration without hierarchy**: Diverse actors including universities, startups, and NGOs function in synergy.
 - **Eg: NEP 2020's cluster approach** encourages collaborative institutional networks.
2. **Academic-industry feedback loops**: Real-time input from industry helps shape curriculum and pedagogy.
 - **Eg: AICTE 2023** mandates internships and live projects in undergraduate education.
3. **Interconnected yet independent roles**: Institutions play flexible, complementary roles without rigid ranking.
 - **Eg: Smelser's multi-campus model** envisages interdependent learning ecosystems.
4. **Continuous curriculum innovation**: Ongoing feedback ensures pedagogy reflects current needs.
 - **Eg: Hackathons at MCC Innovation Park** collect industry pain points to design student projects.
5. **Lifelong and flexible learning pathways**: Entry-exit options allow diverse learners to engage over time.
 - **Eg: Academic Bank of Credits** enables credit mobility across institutions and modes.

Transformative potential for education delivery and outcomes

1. **Learner-centric modular delivery**: Students gain autonomy to personalise academic journeys.
 - **Eg: Platforms like SWAYAM and NPTEL** allow self-paced, credit-worthy learning.
2. **Stronger employability and job alignment**: Ecosystem models reduce the industry-academia disconnect.
 - **Eg: NSDC-Tata STRIVE** integrates vocational skilling into higher education.
3. **Boost to innovation and entrepreneurship**: Learning becomes practice-oriented and problem-solving driven.
 - **Eg: ARIIA 2024** rewards institutions for patents, incubators, and startup support.
4. **Improved access and social inclusion**: Ecosystem approach allows decentralised access to underserved groups.
 - **Eg: Odisha's Community Colleges (2023)** take tertiary education to tribal and rural regions.
5. **Agility in adapting to societal shifts**: Flexible ecosystems evolve with environmental, economic, and technological changes.
 - **Eg: UNESCO's Futures of Education (2022)** stresses the role of lifelong, adaptive learning systems.

Conclusion

To future-proof India's higher education, institutions must evolve into **ecosystems of learning, innovation, and inclusion**—capable of responding to society's fast-changing needs while delivering value-driven outcomes.

Q. Why has the RTE quota failed to ensure access to quality education for underprivileged students? Examine the limitations in school-level implementation. Suggest reforms to make inclusion pedagogically meaningful. (15 M)

Introduction:

The Right to Education Act's 25% quota was a transformative promise of **social justice through schooling**, yet its potential has been undercut by **institutional inertia, exclusionary practices, and weak integration**.

Body

Reasons for failure of RTE quota in ensuring quality education

1. **Exclusionary admission processes**: Many elite schools make the process non-transparent and difficult for marginalised parents.
 - **Eg**: NCPCR 2022 found top schools in **Delhi** asking for excessive documentation and screening interviews, violating RTE norms.
2. **Inadequate reimbursement rates**: The cost fixed by states does not match actual private school expenditure, discouraging compliance.
 - **Eg**: **Maharashtra** reimburses ~Rs 17,000 per child vs. actual costs of **Rs 40,000–Rs 60,000**
3. **Social discrimination and peer bias**: Quota students often face verbal stigmatisation and are subtly isolated.
 - **Eg**: A **2021 Vidhi Centre study** found children being called “**free quota kids**” and seated separately in classrooms.
4. **No significant improvement in learning outcomes**: The promise of better education is diluted due to academic neglect.
 - **Eg**: **ASER 2022** reported minimal gains in **reading and numeracy** among RTE students in private unaided schools.
5. **Loopholes through minority institution exemption**: Many schools convert to linguistic/religious minority status to escape quotas.
 - **Eg**: Over **15,000 schools** sought minority status post-2017 (Ministry of Education data).

Limitations in school-level implementation

1. **Teacher bias and lack of sensitisation**: Many teachers lack training to handle mixed socio-economic classrooms.
 - **Eg**: A **2023 TISS study** found 45% of teachers in private schools unaware of **inclusive teaching strategies**.
2. **Segregated classroom practices**: Schools often separate RTE students into different batches or sections.
 - **Eg**: In **Tamil Nadu**, RTE students were reported to have **exclusive classrooms and restricted activity access**.

3. **Absence of remedial and bridge learning**: RTE students get no support to bridge prior learning gaps.
 - **Eg**: NCERT’s 2022 RTE review flagged that 70% of schools had no academic support for first-generation learners.
4. **Hidden charges and informal fees**: RTE families are often asked to pay for uniforms, books, or transport.
 - **Eg**: Reports from Gujarat (2023) highlighted quota students being denied books unless “voluntary donations” were made.
5. **Weak grievance redressal and monitoring**: Parents lack channels to report exclusion or mistreatment.
 - **Eg**: As per UDISE+ 2023, over 30% districts lacked any functional RTE monitoring committee.

Reforms to make inclusion pedagogically meaningful

1. **Mandatory inclusive training for teachers**: Sensitisation and pedagogy modules should be part of teacher certification.
 - **Eg**: NEP 2020 recommends capacity-building in **inclusive education and socio-emotional learning** for all teachers.
2. **Realistic and indexed reimbursement**: Reimbursement must reflect actual per-child expenditure and inflation.
 - **Eg**: The Anil Bordia Committee (2013) proposed linking reimbursements to actual district-wise per capita costs.
3. **Bridge learning programs with periodic assessment**: Support RTE children through accelerated learning initiatives.
 - **Eg**: Delhi SCERT’s 2024 Bridge Course showed 22% improvement in foundational numeracy over 3 months.
4. **Annual social inclusion audits in schools**: Schools must be evaluated on integration, dignity, and academic parity.
 - **Eg**: Karnataka’s 2022 diversity audits under Samagra Shiksha tracked integration metrics across districts.
5. **Centralised digital dashboards for RTE monitoring**: Ensure transparency in admission, fund flow, and dropout tracking.
 - **Eg**: Madhya Pradesh’s 2023 RTE portal enabled **real-time monitoring** of reimbursements and school-wise enrolment.

Conclusion:

The RTE quota must evolve from a **legal entitlement to a lived reality** of equitable learning. True inclusion lies not in admission alone, but in fostering a classroom that enables **equal participation, support, and respect** for every child.

Issues relating to poverty and hunger.

Important aspects of governance, transparency and accountability, e-governance- applications, models, successes, limitations, and potential; citizens charters, transparency & accountability and institutional and other measures.

Q. Public officials misusing power for personal gain undermines the credibility of state institutions. Evaluate how regulatory coercion affects citizen trust. Suggest administrative measures to restore integrity. (10 M)

Introduction

The misuse of power by regulatory officials transforms institutions from protectors to predators, leading to deep erosion of **public trust, compliance, and constitutional legitimacy**.

Body

How regulatory coercion affects citizen trust

1. **Loss of institutional legitimacy:** Citizens view regulators as extortionists, not enforcers of justice.
 - Eg: **CBI arrest of IRS officer** for soliciting a **₹45 lakh bribe** in a tax case damaged **faith in the tax system**.
2. **Decline in voluntary compliance:** Fear of arbitrary penalties reduces willingness to follow rules.
 - Eg: **Income tax compliance ratio remains under 6%** of population despite growth in formal employment.
3. **Democratic disengagement:** Harassed citizens avoid civic participation, weakening democratic accountability.
 - Eg: **CPR study (2023)** reported significant drop in public grievance redressal usage in harassment-prone departments.
4. **Proliferation of informal economy:** People shift to informal systems to escape regulatory overreach.
 - Eg: **NSSO (2024)** data shows **over 85% of workers remain informal**, reflecting fear of regulatory systems.
5. **Violation of rule of law:** Coercive practices violate Article 14 and corrode constitutional protections.
 - Eg: **Vineet Narain case (1997)** underscored that **executive control over investigations** undermines public trust in fairness.

Administrative measures to restore integrity

1. **Mandatory conflict of interest disclosures:** Officers must declare personal and familial commercial affiliations.
 - Eg: **Hota Committee (2004)** proposed a statutory **Code of Ethics** for civil servants including disclosure norms.
2. **Digital governance and faceless enforcement:** AI-led automation reduces discretionary power.

- Eg: **Faceless assessment scheme (2021)** by CBIC eliminated in-person interface in scrutiny and audits.
- 3. **Rotation and fixed tenures**: Prevent long-term collusion networks in sensitive roles.
 - Eg: **CVC circular (2022)** mandated **rotation of enforcement staff** every 3 years to reduce familiarity-based corruption.
- 4. **Strengthened whistleblower protection**: Encourage internal reporting of misconduct with safety nets.
 - Eg: **Whistle Blowers Protection Act, 2014**—currently under review—needs better implementation in regulatory agencies.
- 5. **Creation of independent regulatory ombudsman**: Enable citizens to report coercion and harassment externally.
 - Eg: **RBI's Integrated Ombudsman Scheme (2021)** offers a model for institutional grievance redress in public-facing bodies.

Conclusion

Trust is the invisible currency of governance—restoring it requires a shift from opaque, person-centric regulation to transparent, accountable, and citizen-sensitive institutions.

Q. Performance-based governance models are gaining traction in India. Analyse their core features. How do they impact institutional accountability? (10 M)

Introduction

India's governance model is undergoing a transition from entitlement-based administration to **performance-driven delivery**, emphasising outcomes, citizen-centricity, and data-led decision-making.

Body

Core features of performance-based governance models

1. **Outcome-driven policymaking**: Policies are assessed based on measurable impacts, not just intentions.
 - **Eg**: The **Aspirational Districts Programme** ranks 112 districts using **Delta Ranking** across indicators like health and education (NITI Aayog, 2024).
2. **Real-time monitoring and analytics**: Governance uses digital tools to track performance metrics and service gaps.
 - **Eg**: The **Poshan Tracker App** enables real-time monitoring of child nutrition under **ICDS** across states (MWCD, 2024).
3. **Incentive-based funding**: Resource allocation is linked to performance outcomes to nudge institutional reforms.
 - **Eg**: The **15th Finance Commission** allocated performance grants to states for **urban governance** and **power sector reforms** (2021-26).
4. **Ranking and benchmarking**: Comparative metrics foster competition and highlight best practices.
 - **Eg**: The **Swachh Survekshan** annual city rankings improved municipal performance on cleanliness indicators.

5. **Citizen-centric feedback mechanisms**: Service delivery is aligned with public input and grievance redressal systems.
 - **Eg**: The **CPGRAMS 2023 reform** uses AI-based sorting for faster redressal and public tracking of complaints.

Impact on institutional accountability

1. **Enhanced transparency and public visibility**: Data dashboards improve access to service performance information.
 - **Eg**: The **Jal Jeevan Mission Dashboard** provides real-time village-level data on tap water coverage.
2. **Shift towards outcome-based accountability**: Institutions are judged on end results rather than bureaucratic compliance.
 - **Eg**: The **PM Gati Shakti Portal** tracks multi-ministerial infrastructure projects using GIS-linked performance indicators.
3. **Reduced bureaucratic inertia**: Emphasis on results fosters innovation and proactive service delivery.
 - **Eg**: The **Smart Cities Mission** empowered city-level SPVs to innovate using localised planning and digital tools.
4. **Risk of data manipulation and superficial compliance**: Focus on rankings can incentivise misreporting.
 - **Eg**: The **2023 Parliamentary Standing Committee** flagged concerns over data fudging in **foundational literacy outcomes** under NIPUN Bharat.
5. **Tension with decentralised governance**: Centralised metrics may overlook local contexts and autonomy.
 - **Eg**: States expressed reservations on the applicability of **UDISE+ indicators** in remote tribal and hill regions.

Conclusion

Performance-based governance has redefined delivery and transparency, but its long-term credibility hinges on **data integrity**, **institutional resilience**, and **context-sensitive benchmarks** to ensure genuine accountability.

Role of civil services in a democracy.

Q. Examine the existing gender imbalance in India's urban bureaucratic architecture. Analyse how this affects service delivery and inclusivity. Suggest systemic reforms for enhancing women's representation in administrative and technical roles. (15 M)

Introduction

A gender-imbalanced urban bureaucracy risks perpetuating policies and infrastructure that ignore the needs of half the population, undermining the inclusiveness of India's urban growth trajectory.

Body

Existing gender imbalance in urban bureaucratic architecture

1. **Low share in IAS and allied services**: Despite overall progress, only **20%** of IAS officers today are women, limiting gender perspectives at decision-making levels (IndiaSpend 2022).
 - **Eg: In Maharashtra, only 18% of municipal IAS officers are women, with most concentrated in welfare departments (MoHUA 2024).**
2. **Severe under-representation in technical cadres**: Women's representation remains below **10%** in critical fields like planning, engineering, and transport, resulting in male-dominated design of city services.
 - **Eg: Delhi Development Authority reports just 7.5% women among sanctioned urban planners, constraining inclusive spatial design (DDA Annual Report 2024).**
3. **Gender gap in urban policing**: Women constitute only **11.7%** of police personnel (BPRD 2023), with very low presence in field duties, limiting gender-sensitive community policing.
 - **Eg: In Mumbai Police, only 2 out of 93 police stations are headed by women officers, impacting effective outreach on gender-based crimes.**
4. **Limited women in municipal leadership**: Across **100 Smart Cities**, fewer than **5%** municipal commissioners are women, reinforcing a masculine leadership culture in urban governance.
 - **Eg: Bengaluru and Pune have not had a woman municipal commissioner in the last decade, despite high urbanisation (Janaagraha 2025).**
5. **Concentration in low-impact roles**: Women are over-represented in health and welfare roles, but are missing from finance, infrastructure, and core city management.
 - **Eg: In Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation, 90% of women employees are confined to social welfare, with no representation in engineering or transport wings (AMC HR Data 2024).**

Impact on service delivery and inclusivity

1. **Poor responsiveness to gendered mobility needs**: Urban transport planning lacks sensitivity to women's multi-stop, caregiving-linked travel patterns, undermining mobility equity.
 - **Eg: ITDP-Safetipin study (2023) found that 84% of women depend on public or shared transport, yet first/last-mile safety remains a persistent gap in Delhi and Mumbai.**
2. **Neglect of community-level infrastructure**: Sanitation, safe public spaces, and childcare remain underfunded due to absence of gender perspectives in decision-making.
 - **Eg: UN Women (2023) study found that ULBs led by women elected representatives invested 27% more in public sanitation compared to male-dominated councils.**
3. **Low gender-sensitivity in urban policing**: A male-dominated police force reduces the comfort level and trust of women in accessing law enforcement.
 - **Eg: NCRB (2024) reports that states with higher female police representation saw a 38% increase in reporting of gender-based violence cases.**
4. **Public spaces remain unsafe**: Poor lighting and unsafe design of public spaces disproportionately affect women's participation in economic and social life.
 - **Eg: Safetipin audit (2019) across 50 cities found 60% of public spaces poorly lit, directly limiting evening-time access for women.**
5. **Reduced public trust and civic engagement**: Lack of gender diversity in governance structures undermines public trust, especially among women citizens.
 - **Eg: ICRIER (2023) found that gender-balanced ULBs reported 40% higher civic trust scores among female constituents.**

Systemic reforms for enhancing representation

1. **Reservation in municipal technical roles**: Mandating **33% reservation** in planning, engineering, and core municipal cadres will institutionalise diversity.
 - **Eg: Tamil Nadu Urban Policy (2024) has introduced a 33%** reservation for women in technical roles, aiming to bridge structural gaps.
2. **Targeted scholarships and recruitment**: Creating gender-focused pipelines through scholarships and active recruitment in urban governance education and hiring.
 - **Eg: Kudumbashree-NIT Calicut (2023)** collaboration launched fellowships for women in urban planning and design disciplines.
3. **Gender-responsive HR policies**: Promotion pathways that account for career breaks and support professional advancement of women in technical and leadership roles.
 - **Eg: South Korea's Gender Equity Act (2022) has led to 50%** parity in promotions within public service by adopting flexible promotion policies.
4. **Mandatory gender audits**: Regular gender audits of staff composition linked to performance appraisal and funding, creating accountability for diversity.
 - **Eg: Philippines' Local Government Code (2023 Amendment)** mandates annual gender audits for all municipal bodies.
5. **Gender-focused capacity building**: Institutionalising mandatory gender-sensitisation and equity training for urban bureaucrats at all levels.
 - **Eg: Kerala's Institute of Local Administration (KILA)** runs annual gender-sensitisation programs for municipal staff (2024).

Conclusion

To realise inclusive urbanisation, Indian cities must mainstream gender equity in their bureaucratic structures. Empowered, gender-diverse administrative cadres will ensure cities are truly designed for all.

India and its neighborhood- relations.

Q. The resurgence of China-led trilaterals in South Asia marks a turning point in regional geopolitics. Discuss the motivations behind these alignments. Analyse the risks they pose to India's security. Suggest a coherent counter-strategy. (15 M)

Introduction

The emergence of **China-led trilaterals** involving **Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan** reflects a deeper strategic recalibration aimed at limiting India's influence in South Asia. These alignments reveal **Beijing's attempt to convert economic clout into geopolitical leverage.**

Body

Motivations behind China-led trilateral alignments

1. **Containment of Indian strategic assertiveness**: China seeks to counter India's proactive postures post-**Doklam (2017)** and **Galwan (2020)**.

- **Eg:** The **Kunming Trilateral (June 2025)** with Pakistan and Bangladesh came after India's **Operation Sindoor** following the Pahalgam terror attack.
- 2. **Reviving Pakistan's regional relevance:** Beijing aims to restore Pakistan's standing amid its economic and diplomatic isolation.
 - **Eg:** Post-Pahalgam, China backed Pakistan's call for a "political resolution", deflecting attention from **India's retaliatory strikes**.
- 3. **Creating entry points for BRI expansion:** Trilateralism offers China indirect access to infrastructure and energy networks across South Asia.
 - **Eg:** The **China-Pakistan-Afghanistan Trilateral (May 2025)** proposed CPEC extension into Afghan territory.
- 4. **Neutralising pro-India regimes through engagement:** By influencing new governments, China aims to dilute India's bilateral leverage.
 - **Eg:** Increasing outreach to **Bangladesh's new government (2024)** after India's ties weakened due to Teesta impasse and border incidents.
- 5. **Shaping multilateral narratives against India:** Beijing seeks to institutionalise strategic encirclement through regional consensus.
 - **Eg:** **China's UN shielding of Pakistan-backed terrorists**, combined with regional trilaterals, frames India as a destabilising actor.

Risks these trilaterals pose to India's security

1. **Strategic encirclement and maritime threats:** China's presence in littoral South Asia enhances its capacity for **dual-use infrastructure** near Indian Ocean chokepoints.
 - **Eg:** **Gwadar Port in Pakistan** and **Hambantota in Sri Lanka** add to India's maritime vulnerability (Source: IDSA, 2024).
2. **Facilitation of cross-border terrorism:** China-backed Pakistan influence in Afghanistan and Bangladesh may promote extremist networks.
 - **Eg:** The Pahalgam attack (April 2025) used **Chinese-origin UAVs and communication jammers** deployed from Pakistani bases.
3. **Breakdown of regional trust and cooperation:** Trilateral alignments isolate India diplomatically within SAARC and BIMSTEC ecosystems.
 - **Eg:** India excluded from **China-led disaster and energy coordination talks** involving Nepal, Bangladesh, and Myanmar (2025).
4. **Undermining India's deterrence credibility:** Frequent interventions by China in favour of Pakistan erode India's punitive posture.
 - **Eg:** Post-**Surgical Strike 2.0 (2019)** and **Operation Sindoor (2025)**, China called for restraint, diluting international support for India.
5. **Constraining India's regional economic integration:** Parallel corridors and funding undercut India's connectivity projects and development aid.
 - **Eg:** Delay in India-Nepal-Bangladesh energy grid vs progress in **China-Bangladesh-Nepal power corridor talks** (MEA brief, May 2025).

Coherent counter-strategy for India

1. **Deepening bilateral strategic convergence:** India must fast-track military, economic and infrastructure cooperation with neighbours.

- **Eg: India-Maldives defence pact renewal (June 2025)** neutralised initial anti-India stance of President Muizzu.
- 2. **Revitalising regional multilateralism**: Strengthening **BIMSTEC** and promoting **IORA** can provide an inclusive, India-led alternative.
 - **Eg: India hosted the 2025 BIMSTEC Disaster Resilience Summit** with Thailand and Sri Lanka in May 2025.
- 3. **Leveraging G20 and Quad platforms for diplomatic signalling**: India can showcase commitment to rules-based order.
 - **Eg: During India's G20 Presidency (2023)**, Delhi pushed for **debt sustainability and transparency**, contrasting with China's opaque lending.
- 4. **Countering debt-trap diplomacy through competitive financing**: Expand Lines of Credit and development grants with local employment clauses.
 - **Eg: India's \$500 million solar park funding in Sri Lanka (2025)** undercut China's stalled BRI energy project.
- 5. **Enhancing defence readiness and forward diplomacy**: Integrated military-civilian coordination in border and maritime zones is key.
 - **Eg: Launch of "Mission Shakti Suraksha" in Northeast (June 2025)** post-Chinese outreach to Bangladesh.

Conclusion

To prevent strategic isolation, India must combine **smart diplomacy, regional leadership and credible deterrence**. A nimble foreign policy backed by consistent neighbourhood engagement will be key to navigating the **new China-Pakistan-led regional order**.

Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

Q. "Latin America is the untapped frontier in India's quest for strategic economic diversification". Examine the opportunities and challenges of India's outreach to MERCOSUR. Outline steps to strengthen India's presence in Latin America. (15 M)

Introduction

Latin America offers a geopolitical and resource-rich avenue to recalibrate India's trade diplomacy, reduce overdependence on traditional markets, and leverage South-South cooperation amidst a shifting global order.

Body

Opportunities in India's outreach to MERCOSUR

1. **Access to critical minerals and energy security**: Latin America is rich in lithium, copper, and rare earths essential for India's green transition.
 - **Eg: Paraguay's hydropower capacity and lithium reserves in Bolivia and Argentina** are key to India's electric mobility goals (NITI Aayog, 2023).
2. **Diversification of trade partnerships**: Engagement can reduce India's reliance on China, EU, and the US.
 - **Eg: India-MERCOSUR Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA)** since 2004 covers 450 items but trade remains below **USD 15 billion annually** (MEA, 2024).

3. **Untapped agri-food export market:** Demand for rice, pharma, and textiles in Latin America remains high.
 - **Eg: India is the 4th largest supplier of generic drugs to Brazil**, with pharma exports crossing **USD 700 million in 2023** (Pharmexcil, 2024).
4. **Strategic leverage via multilateral groupings:** Engagement strengthens India's presence in global South-South platforms.
 - **Eg: IBSA and BRICS cooperation** with Brazil and South Africa aligns with India's multilateral diplomacy.
5. **Complementary digital and space sectors:** India's IT and space capabilities match Latin American development needs.
 - **Eg: ISRO's cooperation with Argentina's CONAE** for satellite launches reflects high-tech synergies.

Challenges in deepening India-MERCOSUR relations

1. **Logistical and connectivity constraints:** Long distance and absence of direct shipping lines increase transaction costs.
 - **Eg: No direct air or sea routes** between India and most South American countries as of 2025 (FIEO, 2024).
2. **Low institutional presence and outreach:** Diplomatic missions are limited and trade offices sparse.
 - **Eg: India opened its embassy in Paraguay only in 2022**, and still lacks resident missions in several MERCOSUR nations (MEA, 2024).
3. **Internal divergences within MERCOSUR:** Political ideologies differ, affecting bloc cohesion.
 - **Eg: Argentina's right-leaning Javier Milei vs. Brazil's leftist Lula da Silva** show intra-bloc friction .
4. **Overlapping trade pacts with China and EU:** India faces stiff competition in Latin American markets.
 - **Eg: China-Latin America trade crossed USD 450 billion in 2023**, outpacing India's modest presence .
5. **Limited awareness and language barriers:** Indian exporters face hurdles due to Spanish/Portuguese language and legal differences.
 - **Eg: FICCI's 2023 survey** showed that over **65% of MSMEs** found Latin America difficult due to regulatory opacity.

Steps to strengthen India's presence in Latin America

1. **Upgrade PTA to a comprehensive trade agreement:** Broaden scope beyond goods to cover services and investments.
 - **Eg: Commerce Ministry's 2025 proposal** to expand India-MERCOSUR PTA to include pharma, IT, and agri-tech.
2. **Institutionalise India-Latin America summits:** Create regular high-level forums to coordinate policy and trade.
 - **Eg: India-Africa Forum Summit model** can be replicated for Latin America with rotating host countries.
3. **Enhance diplomatic footprint and trade facilitation:** Open more embassies and Invest India desks.

- **Eg: Vietnam model of trade attachés** in niche markets has boosted their exports in Latin America.
- 4. **Strengthen logistic linkages and shipping routes**: Invest in direct maritime and air connectivity.
 - **Eg: Sagarmala-linked Indo-Pacific shipping partnerships** can extend to Atlantic ports in Brazil and Uruguay.
- 5. **Leverage diaspora diplomacy and cultural exchange**: Promote goodwill through cultural missions and scholarships.
 - **Eg: India-Brazil Festival of Democracy (2023)** improved soft power ties and academic collaboration.

Conclusion

India must look beyond traditional geographies to shape a resilient and multipolar economic future. Latin America offers that possibility—what is needed now is sustained diplomatic will and institutional commitment.

Q In what ways does India's current diplomatic approach fall short in shaping long-term international opinion? Propose institutional reforms. (10 M)

Introduction

India's growing geopolitical heft is often undermined by its ad-hoc and reactive diplomatic messaging, lacking institutional depth and continuity.

Body

Shortcomings in India's diplomatic approach

1. **Lack of strategic continuity**: India lacks a bipartisan and enduring foreign policy narrative.
 - **Eg: No formal foreign policy doctrine** unlike the US's **National Security Strategy**, leading to policy swings post-government change.
2. **Weak institutionalised narrative-building**: There is no centralised agency to coordinate strategic communication globally.
 - **Eg: India lacks a counterpart to the US Global Engagement Center (GEC)**, which counters propaganda and builds public diplomacy.
3. **Event-driven outreach over long-term engagement**: Diplomacy is often reactive to crises rather than proactive.
 - **Eg: The seven parliamentary delegations post-Pahalgam massacre (2025)** were formed abruptly, not part of a larger strategic communication effort (The New Indian Express).
4. **Diplomatic teams lack subject-matter depth**: Delegations include members without expertise in counter-terrorism or global affairs.
 - **Eg: The Operation Sindoor outreach delegations** included politicians and liaison officers but lacked intelligence or CT experts (Ajai Sahni, June 2025).
5. **Underutilisation of diaspora and soft power assets**: India does not institutionalise diaspora engagement for strategic influence.
 - **Eg: China's use of Confucius Institutes** and diaspora-backed think tanks like **CIIS** contrasts with India's informal and fragmented approach.

Proposed institutional reforms

1. **Set up a National Strategic Communication Authority**: A body under MEA to coordinate all international messaging.
 - **Eg:** The NSAB (2021) recommended creating a unified platform to counter misinformation and amplify India's narrative globally.
2. **Establish a Global South Diplomacy Division**: Dedicated to sustained engagement in the Global South beyond crisis diplomacy.
 - **Eg:** India's limited media and think-tank presence in Africa and Latin America, unlike China's CGTN en Español.
3. **Form a Parliamentary Committee on Global Narrative**: For bipartisan review and continuity in foreign policy positions.
 - **Eg:** UK's Foreign Affairs Committee ensures consistent global messaging across regimes.
4. **Institutionalise Track-II diplomacy networks**: Build formal bridges with foreign universities, think tanks, and opinion-shapers.
 - **Eg:** China and Western countries regularly engage institutions like Chatham House, but Indian representatives are underrepresented.
5. **Professionalise IFS training in narrative diplomacy**: Equip diplomats with tools in global media handling and storytelling.
 - **Eg:** France's ENA integrates communication strategy into diplomat training—India's SSIFS needs a similar upgrade.

Conclusion

India must shift from episodic messaging to a well-architected, institutionalised public diplomacy model—only then can it shape the narrative, not just react to it.

Q. Analyse the evolution of India's multilateral diplomacy on cross-border terrorism since the 1990s. What factors have limited its success? How should India align its layered diplomatic strategies to counter terrorism effectively? (15 M)

Introduction

India's global efforts against cross-border terrorism have transitioned from **normative appeals to proactive strategic diplomacy**, but entrenched global ambiguities continue to constrain tangible outcomes.

Body

Evolution of India's multilateral diplomacy on terrorism

1. **CCIT proposal at UN (1996)**: India's push for a Comprehensive Convention Against International Terrorism aimed to define terrorism globally.
 - **Eg:** The CCIT draft submitted by India in 1996 remains pending due to disagreements on **state-sponsored and freedom-struggle-related terrorism**.
2. **Post-9/11 global momentum**: India leveraged global attention on terrorism to raise Pakistan-based threats.
 - **Eg:** After 2001 Indian Parliament attack, India cited UNSC Resolution 1373 to demand action against cross-border terror infrastructure.

3. **Institutional engagement with UNSC bodies**: India worked through the **UN CTC and FATF** to designate individuals and entities.
 - **Eg**: India's efforts led to the **UN listing of Masood Azhar (2019)** after overcoming a Chinese technical hold at **UN 1267 Committee**.
4. **G20 and BRICS platform activism**: India has raised terrorism as a priority theme in economic and political groupings.
 - **Eg**: The **BRICS Summit Declaration 2023** condemned **cross-border terrorism** without naming Pakistan, reflecting partial success.
5. **Post-Uri and Balakot narrative shifts**: India's global pitch now invokes the **right to self-defence under Article 51** of the UN Charter.
 - **Eg**: In 2025, India justified **Operation Sindoor** under **self-defence and proportionality**, briefed to P5 and G20 partners.

Factors limiting the success of India's global strategy

1. **Lack of global consensus on terrorism definition**: Differing views on 'freedom struggle' vs. 'terrorism' dilute efforts.
 - **Eg**: OIC and some Western states cite **Palestine and Kashmir** to resist binding terrorism definitions (UNGA debates).
2. **Geopolitical realignments and veto politics**: Strategic interests often override security concerns.
 - **Eg**: China blocked India's attempts to blacklist **Pakistan-based actors** at **UN Sanctions Committees** for years.
3. **Non-alignment of domestic laws with global protocols**: India lacks a unified framework linking international conventions with enforcement.
 - **Eg**: **India is not yet a party to the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT)** which affects coordination on **terror financing and arms diversion**.
4. **Perceived militarisation of counter-terror responses**: India's strategic strikes are viewed cautiously in forums promoting restraint.
 - **Eg**: The **UNSC did not formally endorse Balakot airstrikes (2019)** despite India's diplomatic outreach.
5. **Hyphenation with Pakistan in global forums**: Historical framing of Kashmir as a bilateral dispute clouds India's terror narrative.
 - **Eg**: UN maps still carry disclaimers on **LoC and Kashmir**, affecting narrative clarity.

Strategies to align India's layered diplomacy effectively

1. **Recalibrating bilateral engagement for credibility**: India must strengthen high-level dialogues with key powers to pre-empt neutrality.
 - **Eg**: India's post-Sindoor special envoy briefings in **May 2025** helped clarify intent to **France, UAE and Japan**.
2. **Leveraging regional groupings beyond SAARC**: Use of **IOR, BIMSTEC, SCO** can expand India's consensus base.
 - **Eg**: The **BIMSTEC counter-terror framework (2023)** was initiated under India's leadership for intelligence sharing.
3. **Institutionalising a unified counter-terror doctrine**: India should integrate foreign policy, legal, and military frameworks.

- **Eg:** A proposal for a **National Commission on Counter-Terror Diplomacy** was floated by think tanks like **IDSAs in 2024**.
- 4. **Linking counter-terrorism with global development goals:** Framing terror as a barrier to SDGs can widen support.
 - **Eg:** India's **G20 presidency (2023)** linked **terror-financing and illicit trade** with **Goal 16 (Peace, Justice and Institutions)**.
- 5. **Enhancing legal diplomacy and treaty harmonisation:** Push for **binding international legal instruments** on terror financing, extradition and border control.
 - **Eg:** India ratified the **UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime** in 2022, but follow-up legal reforms remain pending.

Conclusion

To succeed in the long term, India must balance **legal legitimacy, strategic restraint, and multilateral coalition-building**, ensuring its terror narrative transcends regional contestations and anchors itself in global security frameworks.

Q. The low level of intra-regional trade in South Asia reflects deeper trust and security deficits. Analyse the roots of this deficit and its impact on regional economic potential. Also suggest a pathway for balanced progress. (15 M)

Introduction

South Asia, home to **25% of the global population**, remains among the **least economically integrated regions**, with intra-regional trade at barely **5-7% of total trade** (UNESCAP, 2024), primarily due to **deep-rooted political and security distrust**.

Body

Roots of trust and security deficit

1. **Historical conflicts and unresolved border disputes:** Partition legacies, Kashmir conflict, and undemarcated borders sustain political mistrust.
 - **Eg:** **Indo-Pak trade** shrank from **\$2.4 billion (2018)** to **\$1.2 billion (2024)** post-**Pulwama attack** and Article 370 abrogation.
2. **Cross-border terrorism and insurgencies:** Persistent terrorist activities foster a perception of economic engagement as a security threat.
 - **Eg:** The **Pahalgam terror attack (2025)** led India to freeze bilateral trade discussions with Pakistan.
3. **Political instability and regime shifts:** Changing governments shift regional priorities, undermining long-term economic planning.
 - **Eg:** Leadership turnover in **Sri Lanka (2022)** delayed finalisation of the **Indo-Lanka ETCA**.
4. **Militarised foreign policy approaches:** Dominance of security agencies in foreign relations discourages economic openness.
 - **Eg:** Pakistan's **National Security Council** blocked efforts to revive cross-LoC trade in **2023**.
5. **Weak institutional mechanisms in SAARC:** Lack of binding enforcement or conflict-resolution forums inhibits trust-building.

- Eg: The **SAARC Regional Convention on Suppression of Terrorism (1987)** remains poorly operationalised.

Impact on regional economic potential

1. **Stunted trade volume**: Intra-SAARC trade remains at **\$23 billion**, far below the projected **\$172 billion** (UNESCAP, 2024).
 - Eg: **Bangladesh's trade potential** with SAARC neighbours remains **93% unexploited**.
2. **Failure to develop regional value chains**: High trade costs and regulatory bottlenecks discourage regional production linkages.
 - Eg: It remains **20% costlier** for an Indian exporter to trade with Pakistan than Brazil, **22 times farther** (World Bank, 2024).
3. **Limited foreign investment**: Political tensions deter FDI inflows into the region.
 - Eg: Pakistan's **FDI inflows** dropped by over **30% in 2023** following Indo-Pak trade suspension (UNCTAD, 2024).
4. **Poor infrastructure connectivity**: Inadequate transport and digital links raise logistics costs.
 - Eg: The **BBIN Motor Vehicle Agreement**, signed in **2015**, is still awaiting full ratification.
5. **Escalating trade deficits**: Trade deficit rose from **\$204 billion (2015)** to **\$339 billion (2022)** due to growing import-dependence.
 - Eg: **World Bank South Asia Economic Update (2024)** highlights regional imbalances.

Pathway for balanced progress

1. **Reviving and reforming SAARC frameworks**: Implement SAFTA with binding commitments and arbitration.
 - Eg: **UNESCAP 2024** recommended reactivating the **SAFTA Arbitration Council**.
2. **Strengthening sub-regional initiatives**: Leverage BBIN and BIMSTEC for focused integration.
 - Eg: **BIMSTEC Master Plan on Transport Connectivity (2023)** identified 267 priority infrastructure projects.
3. **Decoupling trade from political disputes**: Establish clear protocols insulating trade from diplomatic crises.
 - Eg: The **EU's Generalised Scheme of Preferences (GSP)** shows how trade frameworks can remain functional amid political frictions.
4. **Harmonising standards and reducing NTBs**: Align customs and regulatory processes across the region.
 - Eg: **ASEAN Single Window Initiative** cut intra-regional trade clearance times by over **20%**.
5. **Building regional security dialogue**: Institutionalise counter-terrorism cooperation at SAARC level.
 - Eg: Proposal for a **SAARC Counter-Terrorism Centre** discussed at **2024 SAARC Secretariat meet**.

Conclusion

A **forward-looking, pragmatic approach** combining sub-regional cooperation, institutional reforms and security dialogue can unlock **South Asia's immense trade potential** — vital for shared prosperity in the region.

Q. Analyse India's recent Mediterranean outreach as part of its West Asia and Europe policy. Evaluate Cyprus's role as a gateway for Indian economic interests in Europe. (10 M)

Introduction

India's Mediterranean diplomacy today strategically bridges its West Asia focus with European ambitions, enhancing **connectivity, trade, and geopolitical balancing** in an evolving multipolar order.

Body

India's recent Mediterranean outreach as part of its West Asia and Europe policy

1. **Bridging IMEC through Eastern Mediterranean**: The region enables India's **India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC)** vision to connect with Europe
 - Eg: **PM Modi's 2025 Cyprus visit** linked directly to promoting **IMEC connectivity**, positioning Cyprus as a transit hub (Indian Express, June 2025).
2. **Counterbalancing Turkey-Pakistan-Azerbaijan axis**: Strategic ties with **Greece, Cyprus, Armenia** act as regional balancing against hostile alignments
 - Eg: Deepened **India-Cyprus-Greece defence and diplomatic** partnerships post **Pahalgam attack** and **Operation Sindoor** (ORF Report, June 2025).
3. **Expanding India's European engagement beyond traditional centres**: India now actively engages **Central Europe, Baltics, Nordics and Mediterranean**
 - Eg: **Raisina MED Dialogue in Marseille (Feb 2025)** launched as an extension of Raisina Dialogue for Mediterranean outreach.
4. **Strengthening maritime and energy diplomacy**: Mediterranean engagement supports India's interests in **Eastern Mediterranean gas fields and blue economy**
 - Eg: **India-Cyprus Bilateral Defence Cooperation Programme 2025** includes maritime security and energy dialogues (MEA release, 2025).
5. **Leveraging EU dynamics through smaller states**: Partnering with countries like Cyprus helps India influence **EU strategic and trade policies**
 - Eg: **Cyprus's upcoming EU Council Presidency in 2026** offers India an entry point to shape FTA and regulatory discussions (Indian Express, 2025).

Cyprus's role as a gateway for Indian economic interests in Europe

1. **Strategic geographic location**: Cyprus sits at the crossroads of **Europe, West Asia and North Africa**, ideal for Indian market access
 - Eg: **PM Modi called Cyprus a "gateway to Europe"** at the **India-Cyprus CEO Forum (June 2025)**.
2. **High FDI inflows into India**: Cyprus is among the **top 10 FDI sources** for India due to its investor-friendly tax regime
 - Eg: **Cypriot FDI into India exceeded USD 11 billion** by 2025, primarily routed through European investments (DPIIT data, 2025).
3. **Emerging fintech and payment linkages**: Cyprus may soon adopt **India's UPI platform** for cross-border digital transactions
 - Eg: **MoU signed between NSE Gift City and Cyprus Stock Exchange (June 2025)** to boost fintech and cross-border payments.

4. **Bilateral platforms for economic integration:** The new **India-Greece-Cyprus Business and Investment Council (2025)** fosters trilateral economic synergy
 - Eg: Launched in 2025 to accelerate **joint ventures and investment** in sectors like **civil aviation, shipbuilding, innovation**.
5. **Supporting India's EU trade goals:** Cyprus's diplomatic support strengthens India's push for **India-EU FTA** and market access
 - Eg: **Cypriot government prioritised India-EU FTA conclusion** ahead of its **EU Presidency 2026**.

Conclusion

By leveraging Cyprus's geoeconomic position and aligning with emerging Mediterranean dynamics, India is crafting a **robust bridge between West Asia and Europe**, crucial for its long-term strategic autonomy.

Q. "Cross-border terrorism continues to test the limits of multilateral forums like the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)". Analyse. How can regional mechanisms be strengthened to ensure credible and coordinated counter-terrorism action? (10 M)

Introduction

India's refusal to sign the **SCO Joint Declaration (June 2025)** over diluted language on terrorism highlights growing dissatisfaction with regional inaction. Despite platforms like **RATS-SCO**, collective counter-terrorism efforts remain fractured by geopolitical interests.

Body

Cross-border terrorism and limits of SCO

1. **Geopolitical divergence among members:** Conflicting national interests, especially between **India, Pakistan, and China**, hinder consensus on naming and punishing state sponsors.
 - Eg: In June 2025, India protested Pakistan's exclusion from condemnation in the **SCO Defence Ministers' Joint Declaration** on terrorism.
2. **Consensus-based decision-making:** SCO's principle of unanimity leads to lowest-common-denominator positions on terrorism.
 - Eg: **RATS (Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure)** has failed to evolve into an operationally active intelligence-sharing body due to lack of trust (Source: SCO Charter, 2002).
3. **Lack of binding enforcement mechanism:** SCO does not have legal authority to impose sanctions or conduct joint operations against terror entities.
 - Eg: Unlike **UNSC sanctions committees**, SCO has no listing mechanism for terror groups.
4. **Safe havens and state complicity:** Members accused of sponsoring terrorism—like Pakistan—enjoy impunity within SCO due to political shielding.
 - Eg: India has consistently raised **cross-border terror from Pakistan** during SCO meetings, including the **2023 Goa Summit** (Source: MEA Briefs, 2023).
5. **Insufficient regional intelligence integration:** Fragmented threat assessments and weak coordination limit operational response to terror threats.
 - Eg: India's calls for structured **real-time intel exchange** under RATS have seen limited uptake (Source: IDSA Analysis, 2024).

Strengthening regional counter-terrorism mechanisms

1. **Operationalising RATS into an active platform**: RATS must evolve into a secure real-time coordination centre with binding mandates.
 - **Eg**: Proposal to transform RATS into a **regional fusion centre** like the **EUROPOL Counter Terrorism Centre** (Source: EUROPOL, 2023).
2. **Institutionalising a regional blacklist mechanism**: SCO should adopt a **UNSC-style listing system** for terror groups and individuals.
 - **Eg**: India's 2024 proposal at SCO to **sanction LeT proxies like The Resistance Front** post-Pahalgam attack was blocked by Pakistan.
3. **Legal harmonisation of terror definitions**: A uniform regional definition of terrorism is essential for joint operations and prosecution.
 - **Eg**: **South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)'s 1993 Terrorism Convention** attempted this but lacked implementation.
4. **Establishing a joint rapid response taskforce**: A coordinated taskforce can deter cross-border attacks through joint patrolling and pre-emptive action.
 - **Eg**: ASEAN's **Our Eyes Initiative** for coordinated surveillance against transnational terror (Source: ASEAN, 2022).
5. **Independent verification and monitoring body**: A neutral body under SCO to verify cross-border attacks and assign accountability.
 - **Eg**: India's call for **third-party verification of terror bases** post-Operation Sindoor (2025) was supported by Iran and Kazakhstan.

Conclusion

Regional forums like SCO must evolve from being **dialogue platforms to enforcement-oriented institutions**. India's assertive diplomacy offers a blueprint for collective security grounded in accountability and strategic clarity.

Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora.

Q. India-Australia defence cooperation has moved beyond symbolic ties towards operational synergy. Examine this transformation. What challenges remain in deepening integration between the two nations? (10 M)

Introduction

India and Australia's defence engagement, once limited to diplomacy, has gained operational momentum driven by shared Indo-Pacific security concerns and institutional depth.

Body

Transformation towards operational synergy

1. **Institutional consolidation of partnership**: Strategic dialogues and agreements now ensure long-term continuity.

- **Eg: Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (2020)** and **2+2 Ministerial Dialogue (2021)** institutionalised bilateral defence coordination (MEA, 2021).
- 2. **Logistics and access integration**: Enabling real-time interoperability in missions and humanitarian operations.
 - **Eg: Mutual Logistics Support Agreement (2020)** allows Indian and Australian forces to use each other's facilities.
- 3. **Tri-service military exercises**: Enhanced operational trust through regular joint and multilateral drills.
 - **Eg: Exercises like AUSINDEX (Navy), AUSTRAHIND (Army), Malabar, and Pitch Black** have increased force-level cooperation (Australian DoD, 2024).
- 4. **Air force collaboration through enablers**: Expanding aerial capabilities through technical coordination.
 - **Eg: RAAF refuelled IAF Su-30MKIs** in November 2024 under air-to-air refuelling arrangement, enhancing reach.
- 5. **Emerging defence industry linkages**: Beginning collaboration in niche defence sectors like MRO and coastal security.
 - **Eg: India's naval MRO contracts with UK/US** extended to talks on **joint patrol boat production** for island nations .

Challenges in deepening integration

1. **Mismatch in strategic focus**: India's continental priorities differ from Australia's maritime outlook.
 - **Eg: India faces border tensions with China and Pakistan**, while Australia is realigning through **AUKUS and Pacific outreach** .
2. **Understaffed defence representation**: Lack of tri-service presence limits deeper military interaction.
 - **Eg: India has only a Navy-led Defence Adviser in Canberra**, with no Army or Air Force support.
3. **Disconnect in MSME and startup ecosystems**: Missed opportunity to co-develop dual-use tech and innovation.
 - **Eg: Absence of a joint MSME forum or INDUS-X model** hinders engagement between defence startups.
4. **No shared joint operational doctrine**: Strategic alignment is yet to be codified in joint mission planning.
 - **Eg: No regular classified war-gaming or joint planning exercises** exist to build tactical understanding .
5. **Weak personnel and academic exchange frameworks**: Limited interaction constrains mutual doctrinal awareness.
 - **Eg: No permanent staff college fellowships or officer exchange programs** are active between the forces.

Conclusion

To sustain momentum, India and Australia must invest in doctrinal synergy, institutional expansion, and innovation co-development, positioning themselves as independent anchors of Indo-Pacific security.

Q4. U.S. tariff actions increasingly undermine WTO's multilateral dispute resolution framework. Analyse the legal challenges posed by U.S. tariffs. Evaluate India's strategic response. Suggest ways India can strengthen multilateral trade institutions. (15 M)

Introduction

The rise of unilateral tariff actions by the U.S., bypassing WTO rules, signals a deeper erosion of global trade norms, challenging weaker economies like India in securing equitable outcomes.

Body

Legal challenges posed by U.S. tariffs

1. **Violation of WTO's MFN principle:** U.S. tariffs breach Article I of GATT mandating equal treatment for all members.
 - Eg: **Trump-era steel and aluminium tariffs (Section 232)** applied discriminatory duties up to **50% on India (June 2025)** while excluding select allies.
2. **Abuse of national security exception:** Frequent invocation of GATT Article XXI undermines objective security threats requirement.
 - Eg: **WTO Panel ruling (2022) in disputes by China, EU, Norway, Türkiye** held U.S. tariffs unjustified under national security exception.
3. **Bypassing WTO dispute settlement system:** U.S. blocks appointment of Appellate Body members, paralyzing the system since **December 2019**.
 - Eg: **WTO Appellate Body crisis (Source: WTO Dispute Settlement Body Reports, 2024)**.
4. **Expansion of unilateral executive authority:** Domestic laws like **Trade Expansion Act 1962 (Section 232)** enable the executive to impose tariffs without legislative oversight.
 - Eg: **Trump One Big Beautiful Bill (OB BB), 2025 proposal**, seeks immunity from judicial oversight on trade actions.
5. **Undermining multilateral rule-making:** Aggressive U.S. pursuit of plurilateral deals sidelines consensus-based WTO reforms.
 - Eg: **U.S.-led Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF), 2023**, excluding comprehensive tariff negotiations.

India's strategic response

1. **Mutually agreed settlements to defuse disputes:** India pragmatically withdrew WTO disputes in return for sectoral gains.
 - Eg: **India-U.S. mutually agreed solution on steel dispute (2023)** (Source: Ministry of Commerce, 2023).
2. **Targeted retaliatory tariffs:** Imposed counter-duties within WTO-permitted framework to protect domestic sectors.
 - Eg: **India's 2019 retaliatory tariffs on 28 U.S. products** after U.S. GSP withdrawal.
3. **Leveraging services trade surplus:** India emphasizes its strength in services trade during negotiations.
 - Eg: **U.S. services trade surplus with India estimated at USD 35-40 billion (Global Trade Research Initiative, 2025)**.

4. **Active G-20 advocacy for multilateralism:** Pushed for WTO reforms and Appellate Body revival during India's **G-20 Presidency (2023)**.
 - Eg: **G-20 New Delhi Declaration, 2023**, reaffirmed commitment to WTO reform (Source: MEA G20 Secretariat, 2023).
5. **Diversifying trade partners:** Pursues FTAs with EU, UAE, and Australia to reduce overdependence on U.S. market.
 - Eg: **India-EFTA Trade Agreement signed in March 2024** (Source: Ministry of Commerce, 2024).

Ways India can strengthen multilateral trade institutions

1. **Proactive WTO coalition building:** Align with developing nations to collectively advocate dispute settlement reforms.
 - Eg: **India's role in G-33 coalition on food security issues (WTO Ministerial, Abu Dhabi 2024)**.
2. **Institutional legal capacity enhancement:** Build expert teams to litigate and defend India's interests at WTO forums.
 - Eg: **Centre for Trade and Investment Law (CTIL), Ministry of Commerce initiative (2023)**.
3. **Support Appellate Body reforms:** Advocate structured Appellate Body reforms addressing U.S. concerns while preserving independence.
 - Eg: **India's joint proposal with EU and others (WT/GC/W/752, 2023)**.
4. **Promoting binding multilateral digital trade rules:** Actively engage in WTO e-commerce negotiations ensuring data sovereignty.
 - Eg: **India's submission to WTO Joint Statement Initiative on e-commerce, 2024**.
5. **Push for new disciplines on unilateral coercive measures:** Advocate for global rules restricting arbitrary trade actions citing security grounds.
 - Eg: **Proposal at WTO General Council (2024) to initiate discussions on misuse of GATT Article XXI**.

Conclusion

As unilateralism threatens global trade stability, India's resolve must be to champion a reformed, rules-based multilateral system that protects both its national interest and global economic fairness.

Q. U.S. tariff actions increasingly undermine WTO's multilateral dispute resolution framework. Analyse the legal challenges posed by U.S. tariffs. Evaluate India's strategic response. Suggest ways India can strengthen multilateral trade institutions. (15 M)

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Conclusion

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Q. Assess how India's participation in G-7 outreach summits reflects its evolving role in global conflict resolution. Discuss the opportunities and risks involved. (15 M)

Introduction

India's presence in G-7 outreach summits signals its transition from a regional power to a credible conflict management actor amid shifting global equations.

Body

India's evolving role in global conflict resolution through G-7 outreach

1. **Platform to project principled neutrality**: India uses G-7 to advocate sovereignty, territorial integrity, and peaceful resolution.
 - Eg: **PM Modi's 2023 Hiroshima speech** emphasized **UN Charter adherence** without directly condemning Russia (MEA, 2023).
2. **Strategic autonomy balancing**: India leverages G-7 to balance relations with both Western powers and Russia without compromising interests.
 - Eg: **2024 G-7 Apulia Summit** saw India maintaining **independent stand on Ukraine** while strengthening Western trade ties.
3. **Global peace facilitator profile**: Participation builds India's credentials as a neutral facilitator in conflict resolution.
 - Eg: **Ukraine's 2025 request inviting India** to facilitate Russia-Ukraine dialogue.
4. **Voice for Global South in conflict forums**: India highlights concerns of developing nations affected by global conflicts.

- **Eg: G-7 Hiroshima 2023 discussions on food security** saw India raise concerns of developing economies facing grain shortages (MEA, 2023).
- 5. **Engagement with conflict-related global norms**: G-7 provides India space to contribute to global security, sanctions, and legal debates.
 - **Eg: India's discussions in G-7 Cornwall 2021 on vaccine equity and rules-based order** strengthened its image as a responsible actor (MEA, 2021).

Opportunities for India

1. **Global power projection**: G-7 inclusion enhances India's image as a responsible global stakeholder and future rule-shaper.
 - **Eg: PM's 2024 Apulia Summit interactions** with NATO members showcased India's growing geopolitical weight .
2. **Strategic diversification of partnerships**: Provides avenues for advanced tech transfer, defence cooperation, and economic agreements.
 - **Eg: India-Japan 2024 defence tech talks** were facilitated during G-7 outreach engagements
3. **Leadership on multilateral reforms**: India can push global governance reforms reflecting developing country concerns.
 - **Eg: PM Modi's G-7 pitch for UNSC reforms** in 2023 Hiroshima (UNGA, 2023).
4. **Access to high-end technology frameworks**: Participation exposes India to cutting-edge AI, digital trade, and green tech regimes.
 - **Eg: G-7 Digital Compact discussions 2023** opened channels for India's cooperation on ethical AI development.
5. **Space for non-aligned hedging**: India can retain decision-making freedom while engaging all major blocks.
 - **Eg: India continued oil imports from Russia despite G-7 energy price cap consultations** in 2023-24.

Risks involved

1. **Pressure for geopolitical alignment**: G-7 may expect India to adopt stronger positions against Russia or China.
 - **Eg: US Congress 2024 debates urging India to reduce Russian defence imports.**
2. **Strategic discomfort for traditional partners**: BRICS and SCO members may view India's G-7 involvement with suspicion.
 - **Eg: Russia's 2024 remarks expressing concern** on India's closeness to G-7
3. **Diplomatic double standards criticism**: India's neutral posture may be perceived as selective principle-based diplomacy.
 - **Eg: Western media critique on India's Ukraine abstentions** at UNGA in 2023-24
4. **Constraints in G-7 core decision-making**: India remains outside G-7's inner circle limiting real policy influence.
 - **Eg: India's exclusion from G-7 AI regulatory outcomes 2024 despite participating** in discussions.
5. **Domestic sensitivities on foreign policy choices**: G-7 engagements may spark internal political debate on India's independent foreign policy.
 - **Eg: 2024 opposition criticism of India's cautious stand on Russia** at G-7 Apulia Summit.

Conclusion

India's calibrated engagement with G-7 reflects a maturing foreign policy navigating complex global conflicts. Future influence will depend on India's ability to combine principled diplomacy with pragmatic interests.

Q. The collapse of bilateral arms control regimes in the Global North is fuelling a multipolar nuclear race. Analyse. What challenges does this pose for Global South diplomacy? (10 M)

Introduction

The breakdown of bilateral arms control treaties has disrupted deterrence stability, replacing it with competitive modernisation and unchecked proliferation. This has reshaped nuclear geopolitics and undermined the diplomatic leverage of Global South nations.

Body

Collapse of arms control and rise of a multipolar nuclear race

1. **End of New START and absence of successor treaty**: The expiry of the last arms control pact has removed the final constraint on US-Russia arsenals.
 - **Eg: New START (2010)** capped **US and Russian** deployed warheads at **1,550** each; no successor treaty exists as of **mid-2025 (US State Dept)**.
2. **Nuclear modernisation without limits**: Key nuclear powers are investing in new warhead designs and delivery systems without oversight.
 - **Eg: China's arsenal doubled** to over **600 warheads** by 2024, with projections of **1,000 by 2030 (SIPRI Yearbook 2024)**.
3. **Strategic ambiguity and tactical deployments**: Nations are redeploying or expanding nuclear reach through tactical weapons.
 - **Eg: Russia's 2023 tactical nuclear deployment to Belarus** challenges prior disarmament trends (**Carnegie Endowment**).
4. **Collapse of INF and Open Skies treaties**: The breakdown of verification and medium-range missile controls weakens transparency.
 - **Eg: US withdrawal from INF in 2019 and Open Skies in 2020** led to **Russia's retaliatory exit in 2021**.
5. **Rise of new nuclear actors and doctrines**: Informal nuclear powers and aggressive doctrines complicate strategic predictability.
 - **Eg: Israel's 2025 airstrike on Iran** highlights pre-emptive deterrence logics beyond treaty constraints.

Challenges for Global South diplomacy

1. **Marginalisation in global nuclear governance**: Non-nuclear Global South countries are excluded from key decisions by the P5.
 - **Eg: TPNW 2017**, supported by over **90 Global South nations**, was **boycotted by all nuclear powers**.
2. **Breakdown of disarmament legitimacy under NPT**: Nuclear states are ignoring Article 6's disarmament obligation, weakening faith in the regime.

- **Eg: India's 2023 UNGA speech** criticised the NPT's **structural inequity** and stagnant disarmament progress.
- 3. **Regional destabilisation from strategic spillovers**: Nuclear build-ups near the Global South create direct security threats.
 - **Eg: China's expansion of nuclear bases in Tibet** escalates threats along India's northern borders (IDSA 2024).
- 4. **Proliferation incentives among regional actors**: Insecurity and lack of deterrence parity may encourage nuclear aspirations.
 - **Eg: Saudi Arabia's 2023 statement** warned of developing nuclear weapons if **Iran acquires them**.
- 5. **Loss of moral authority on disarmament**: The Global South's push for disarmament appears ineffective amidst great power defiance.
 - **Eg: NAM's 2022 working paper on disarmament** failed to influence any policy shift during the NPT RevCon 2022.

Conclusion

The Global South faces a crisis of relevance in nuclear diplomacy. **Only a unified, reform-oriented multilateral push** can restore fairness, prevent proliferation, and reinvigorate the global disarmament discourse.

Q. The Iran-Israel conflict is redrawing West Asia's strategic map amid a fragmented global order. Enumerate the key drivers of this shift. Evaluate the risks it poses for India's energy and trade security. Suggest India's optimal diplomatic posture. (15 M)

Introduction

The intensifying Iran-Israel conflict reflects not only old rivalries but also new alignments as West Asia witnesses shifting alliances, external power vacuums, and evolving security doctrines amidst the growing multipolarity of global geopolitics.

Body

Key drivers of the shift in West Asia's strategic map

1. **Sectarian rivalries and ideological contestation**: The enduring **Shia-Sunni divide** continues to fuel conflicts and realignments.
 - **Eg: Iran's support to Hezbollah, Hamas** and opposition to Gulf Sunni monarchies
2. **Proxy warfare and hybrid conflicts**: State and non-state actors are increasingly using **proxies, cyberwarfare and drones**.
 - **Eg: Israel's targeting of Hezbollah and Iranian missile networks (2025)**
3. **US strategic recalibration**: The relative decline of **direct US intervention** has emboldened regional players to pursue independent agendas.
 - **Eg: Abraham Accords (2020)** strengthening **Israel-Gulf ties** in absence of US guarantees
4. **Iran's nuclear ambitions**: Accelerating **Iranian nuclear program** is prompting pre-emptive Israeli actions.
 - **Eg: 2025 Israeli strikes on Natanz nuclear facility (IAEA Reports, May 2025)**

5. **Fragmented global order and great power competition:** **Russia-Ukraine war** and **US-China rivalry** are weakening multilateral conflict management.
 - **Eg: Ineffectiveness of UN Security Council** on recent **West Asia escalations**.

Risks for India's energy and trade security

1. **Oil price volatility:** Disruption near **Strait of Hormuz** impacts India's oil imports (~80% dependence on Gulf).
 - **Eg: Brent crude rose by \$10/barrel in June 2025** after Israeli strikes (**IEA Report, 2025**)
2. **Maritime trade disruptions:** Risk to **shipping lanes and ports** vital for India's exports-imports (~40% through Gulf).
 - **Eg: Drone attacks on Gulf shipping** by Iranian proxies (**2024–25**) (**Indian Navy MARSEC Bulletin**)
3. **Insurance and freight cost escalation:** Increased **war-risk premiums** on Indian merchant fleet.
 - **Eg: Marine insurance premiums surged 30% post-April 2025 attacks** (**Lloyd's of London Reports**)
4. **Risks to diaspora:** Over **8 million Indians** in Gulf could face evacuation or economic distress.
 - **Eg: Operation Rahat during Yemen crisis (2015)** sets precedent (**MEA Report**)
5. **Energy payment disruptions:** Potential disruption of **rupee-rial payment mechanisms** with Iran.
 - **Eg: Sanctions post-JCPOA collapse (2018)** forced India to halt Iranian oil imports (**MoPNG, GoI**)

India's optimal diplomatic posture

1. **Preserve strategic autonomy:** Avoid overt alignment, maintain balance between **Israel, Iran, Gulf states**.
 - **Eg: 2025 MEA statement** emphasising non-partisan engagement
2. **Backchannel diplomacy:** Quiet engagement with **Tehran and Tel Aviv** to defuse escalation.
 - **Eg: Track II dialogues via academic and business forums** (**ORF Policy Briefs, 2025**)
3. **Protect maritime security:** Strengthen **Indian Navy deployments** in the Gulf of Oman and Arabian Sea.
 - **Eg: Mission-based deployments by Indian Navy under SAGAR policy** (**Indian Navy Annual Report, 2024-25**)
4. **Engage multilateral forums:** Push for **de-escalation through SCO, IORA and BRICS**.
 - **Eg: India's BRICS Chairmanship 2026 agenda** includes **West Asia dialogue** (**MEA Projections**)
5. **Diversify energy sources:** Accelerate deals with **US, Brazil, and African producers** to reduce Gulf dependence.
 - **Eg: 2024 Indo-US strategic energy partnership for LNG imports** (**MoPNG, GoI**)

Conclusion

India's nuanced diplomacy must preserve strategic autonomy while enhancing resilience in energy and maritime domains—turning this challenge into an opportunity to reinforce its role as a stabilising power in West Asia.

Q. “The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) is a product of the Cold War era, yet it remains central to today’s nuclear order”. Assess the treaty’s contemporary relevance and the key challenges it faces. (10 M)

Introduction

Over five decades after its adoption, the **NPT** remains the foundational legal framework governing nuclear weapons, shaping global norms and state behaviour — even as new strategic, technological, and normative challenges emerge in today’s multipolar world.

Body

Contemporary relevance of NPT

1. **Foundational legal instrument against proliferation**: The NPT defines legally binding obligations that deter new states from developing nuclear weapons.
 - Eg: **191 states** are party to the NPT, with only **4 non-signatories** — India, Pakistan, Israel, North Korea (**IAEA, 2024**).
2. **Global verification through IAEA safeguards**: The treaty enables IAEA inspections, crucial for building transparency and trust.
 - Eg: IAEA conducted **1,150 inspections across 69 states** in 2023, covering both declared and undeclared sites (**IAEA Annual Report 2024**).
3. **Constrains horizontal proliferation trends**: Despite regional tensions, the NPT has prevented widespread proliferation beyond the original nuclear states.
 - Eg: No new officially declared nuclear weapon states added since **North Korea’s 2006 tests** (**UNSC Resolution 1874**).
4. **Enabler of peaceful nuclear cooperation**: The treaty facilitates civilian nuclear technology sharing with safeguards.
 - Eg: **India’s civil nuclear deals with US (2008) and France (2010)** — though India is not a signatory, IAEA frameworks applied.
5. **Global forum for diplomatic engagement**: Regular NPT Review Conferences promote consensus on disarmament and peaceful use.
 - Eg: **2022 NPT Review Conference** addressed Article VI concerns and new proliferation risks (**UNODA, 2022**).

Key challenges faced by NPT

1. **Structural discrimination entrenched in P5 privilege**: Only the five nuclear powers of 1967 are recognised, undermining equity.
 - Eg: Repeated protests from **NAM states** — over 120 nations — in latest Review Conferences (**NAM Ministerial Declaration, 2022**).
2. **Non-implementation of Article VI disarmament**: P5 states have failed to progress on comprehensive disarmament obligations.
 - Eg: **SIPRI 2024 Report** shows rising modernisation of US, Russia, and China’s arsenals, despite NPT commitments.
3. **Regional proliferation flashpoints**: Middle East and Asia remain vulnerable to new nuclear arms races.

- Eg: **Iran's enrichment beyond 60% uranium purity** since 2023 amid JCPOA breakdown (IAEA Board Resolution, June 2025).
- 4. **Technological and doctrinal loopholes**: New weapon systems (AI, hypersonics, space assets) evade existing treaty structures.
 - Eg: **AI-enabled nuclear command systems** debated at **UNIDIR 2025 forum (UNIDIR 2025 Report)**.
- 5. **Risk of treaty exit weakening norms**: The withdrawal clause can be legally invoked, undermining enforcement and deterrence.
 - Eg: **North Korea's 2003 withdrawal** followed by unrestrained nuclear testing (IAEA archives).

Conclusion

To remain relevant, the NPT must evolve through **strengthened verification, accelerated disarmament efforts, and updated frameworks for emerging technologies** — ensuring it can anchor global nuclear stability in the 21st century.

Q. Evaluate how the US-Iran escalation may impact India's connectivity initiatives such as the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEEC). Analyse strategic options for India to insulate its regional interests. (10 M)

Introduction

The **June 2025 US strikes on Iranian nuclear sites** have aggravated geopolitical instability in West Asia, threatening India's flagship connectivity initiative — the **India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEEC)** — amid rising regional tensions.

Body

Impact on IMEEC and regional connectivity

1. **Rising security risks for infrastructure**: US-Iran tensions elevate risks to ports, terminals, and rail links critical for IMEEC.
 - Eg: **Iran's move to block the Strait of Hormuz (June 2025)** poses a direct threat to maritime sections of IMEEC.
2. **Supply chain disruptions and insurance costs**: Regional instability disrupts freight movement and increases costs.
 - Eg: **Houthi drone attacks in the Red Sea (June 2025)** forced rerouting of India-Europe shipments.
3. **Diplomatic coordination challenges**: Divergent interests among IMEEC partners delay project milestones.
 - Eg: **Saudi Arabia's and UAE's muted response post-US strikes** affected joint coordination talks (MEI June 2025).
4. **Investor confidence erosion**: Strategic instability deters private capital for corridor infrastructure.
 - Eg: **Post-strike spike in risk premium on FDI in Middle East logistics sector (UNCTAD June 2025)**.
5. **Threat of escalation into broader conflict**: Wider regional conflict could indefinitely stall IMEEC timelines.

- **Eg: Israel's July 2025 mobilisation against Hezbollah** raised fears of prolonged West Asia instability.

Strategic options for India

1. **Balance regional diplomacy**: Engage all sides — US, Israel, Iran, Arab Gulf — to maintain project momentum.
 - **Eg: PM Modi's June 2025 call with Iran President** reinforced India's balanced diplomatic stance.
2. **Fast-track alternative corridors**: Accelerate Chabahar Port, INSTC and Eurasian links to hedge risks.
 - **Eg: India-Iran joint statement (May 2025)** pledged fast-tracking Chabahar-Zahedan railway.
3. **Diversify energy imports**: Reduce overdependence on Gulf routes via long-term energy partnerships.
 - **Eg: India-Norway LNG MoU signed in May 2025** expanded non-Gulf energy sourcing.
4. **Build maritime security partnerships**: Strengthen anti-piracy and security coordination in Red Sea, Arabian Sea.
 - **Eg: India-France joint maritime drills in Gulf of Aden (April 2025)** enhanced corridor security.
5. **Promote regional multilateralism**: Use platforms like IORA, IBSA to collectively address regional risks.
 - **Eg: India-led IORA Council 2025 initiative on maritime safety** aimed at stabilising regional sea lanes.

Conclusion

India must proactively hedge IMEEC against evolving geopolitical risks through diversified connectivity, agile diplomacy, and stronger multilateral engagement — ensuring long-term strategic resilience in West Asia.

Important International institutions, agencies and fora - their structure, mandate.

Q. "The UN Security Council remains structurally frozen in a post-1945 order". Critically examine the need for permanent membership expansion. Discuss the case for including India and Global South representation. Suggest steps to democratise the Council's composition. (15 M)

Introduction

Despite massive geopolitical shifts, the **UN Security Council (UNSC)** remains bound to the post-World War II power structure, limiting its legitimacy and effectiveness in addressing contemporary global challenges.

Body

Need for permanent membership expansion

1. **Power asymmetry in global governance**: P5 no longer reflects current geopolitical and economic realities.
 - **Eg: India, Germany, and Brazil** are among the top economies and troop contributors but are excluded from P5 (**IMF 2024, UN Peacekeeping Report 2023**).
2. **Ineffectiveness in crisis resolution**: Frequent vetoes stall timely intervention in global conflicts.
 - **Eg: Russia's vetoes** blocked UNSC resolutions on Ukraine (2022–24), undermining collective action.
3. **Legitimacy deficit and trust erosion**: Perceived Western dominance alienates much of the Global South.
 - **Eg: African Union** criticized UNSC silence on **Sudan and Congo**, demanding reforms.
4. **Lack of representation for populous regions**: Africa and Latin America remain without permanent voice in global security.
 - **Eg: 54 African nations** make up over a quarter of UN membership but have **zero P5 representation** (**UNGA data 2024**).
5. **Inability to address emerging threats**: New issues like cyberwarfare, climate migration, and pandemics require broader participation.
 - **Eg: UNSC's slow COVID-19 response (2020)** highlighted its narrow security lens (**WHO-UN Review, 2022**).

Case for including India and Global South

1. **India's strategic and economic credentials**: India is a major global actor across defence, technology, and trade.
 - **Eg: India's G20 Presidency (2023)** led on **climate finance and inclusive growth** (**MEA 2023**).
2. **Democratic and peacekeeping legacy**: India consistently supports multilateralism and global stability.
 - **Eg: Over 250,000 Indian troops** have served in UN missions (**UN Peacekeeping Stats, 2024**).
3. **Disproportionate burdens on Global South**: These countries face the worst impacts of war and climate without decision-making power.
 - **Eg: SIDS and African nations** are climate-vulnerable but lack UNSC influence (**UNFCCC 2023 Adaptation Report**).
4. **Moral leadership and diplomatic balance**: India has taken principled, balanced stances in global crises.
 - **Eg: India called for dialogue and humanitarian aid** in both **Russia-Ukraine** and **Israel-Gaza** conflicts (**UNGA Voting Records, 2023–24**).
5. **Support from major powers**: India's candidature is backed by leading global actors.
 - **Eg: France, UK, USA, and Russia** support India's inclusion in UNSC.

Steps to democratise UNSC composition

1. **Expand permanent membership inclusively**: Include powers from Africa, Latin America, and Asia.
 - **Eg: G4 Proposal** (India, Brazil, Germany, Japan) and **L.69 Group** support regional diversity.

2. **Reform veto power with accountability**: Introduce veto restraint and mandatory justification.
 - **Eg: French-Mexican Veto Restraint Initiative** and **ACT Group proposals** recommend public disclosure.
3. **Introduce semi-permanent rotating seats**: Regional leaders can be given medium-term memberships.
 - **Eg: Razali Ismail Proposal** (revived in **2023 UN working paper**) suggests 8–10-year non-veto seats.
4. **UN Charter amendment reform**: Relax P5 ratification monopoly under **Articles 108 and 109**.
 - **Eg**: Existing rules allow **any one P5 member** to block globally supported changes.
5. **Enhance General Assembly’s moral authority**: Activate **Uniting for Peace Resolution (1950)** to override UNSC deadlock.
 - **Eg**: Used during **Ukraine conflict (2022)** when UNSC action was blocked by Russia.

Conclusion

To stay relevant in the 21st century, the UNSC must evolve from **post-war rigidity to modern inclusivity**. A **reformed, representative, and transparent Council** is vital not just for legitimacy but for delivering effective global leadership.

Q. What are the key institutional roles of the IAEA in the global nuclear governance architecture? How do recent conflicts involving nuclear sites challenge these roles? (10 M)

Introduction

Founded in 1957, the **International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)** anchors the global nuclear governance framework by promoting peaceful uses of nuclear energy while ensuring non-proliferation. Recent attacks on Iran’s nuclear sites (2025) highlight emerging challenges to its role.

Body

Key institutional roles of the IAEA

1. **Verification of non-proliferation commitments**: IAEA conducts safeguards to verify civilian nuclear material is not diverted to military use.
 - **Eg: IAEA verified Iran’s nuclear programme** under **JCPOA** until US withdrawal in 2018 (IAEA Annual Report 2023)
2. **Promotion of peaceful nuclear technology**: Facilitates the use of nuclear science in energy, agriculture, medicine.
 - **Eg: Rays of Hope initiative (2022)** for **cancer therapy expansion in Africa**
3. **Nuclear safety and security standards**: Sets global benchmarks on nuclear safety, waste management, and physical security.
 - **Eg: IAEA’s 2024 guidelines for Small Modular Reactors (SMRs)**
4. **Technical assistance and capacity building**: Provides training and equipment to member states for peaceful nuclear applications.
 - **Eg: IAEA assistance to Ukraine (2022)** to maintain nuclear safety amid war (IAEA Board Brief, 2022)
5. **Early warning and emergency response**: Coordinates international monitoring and response to nuclear emergencies.

- Eg: IAEA’s rapid radiation monitoring after Iran site attacks (2025).

How recent conflicts challenge these roles

1. **Restricted site access**: Active conflicts obstruct IAEA teams from conducting inspections.
 - Eg: IAEA inspectors blocked from Fordow and Natanz after Iran strikes (2025)
2. **Unaccounted nuclear material risk**: Potential diversion of nuclear materials during evacuations or attacks.
 - Eg: Iran’s relocation of 400 kg enriched uranium to undisclosed sites (2025)
3. **Threat to inspector safety**: Deployment of IAEA staff in warzones exposes them to physical harm.
 - Eg: IAEA withdrawal of staff from Zaporizhzhia NPP in Ukraine (2023)
4. **Weakening verification credibility**: Delayed or incomplete reporting erodes trust in IAEA findings.
 - Eg: IAEA delayed assessments after Iran nuclear site attacks (2025) leading to UN debates
5. **Politicisation of IAEA role**: Geopolitical rivalries may compromise IAEA neutrality and credibility.
 - Eg: US-Iran tensions stalling IAEA Board consensus on Iran inspections (2025).

Conclusion

To safeguard its global nuclear governance role, the IAEA must be empowered with **enhanced legal backing, secured access rights, and stronger multilateral support** for impartial operations even amidst conflicts.