



**Secure Synopsis compilation for January-2026**

**General Studies-2**

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

**Q. A Republic weakens not through sudden collapse, but through gradual normalisation of institutional compromise. Discuss this statement in the context of India’s constitutional bodies. Examine the long-term democratic risks involved and propose robust safeguards. (15 M)**

**Introduction**

The endurance of a Republic depends less on dramatic constitutional breakdowns and more on everyday

fidelity to institutional norms. When constitutional compromises become routine, democratic decay sets in silently but systematically.

## Body

### Gradual normalisation of institutional compromise in India

1. **Erosion of autonomy of constitutional bodies:** Repeated executive influence over independent institutions weakens their credibility and functional independence envisaged by the Constitution.  
**Eg: Concerns over neutrality of the Election Commission of India** have been flagged in debates on appointment processes, despite its constitutional mandate under **Article 324**.
2. **Instrumental use of constitutional offices:** Offices meant to act as constitutional checks are increasingly drawn into partisan political contestation.  
**Eg: Role of Governors under Articles 153–156** in delaying assent to Bills has been questioned by the **Supreme Court in federalism-related cases**.
3. **Selective application of laws:** Normalisation of differential enforcement of laws undermines equality before law and institutional credibility.  
**Eg: Use of investigative agencies** against political executives has raised concerns regarding **Article 14** and institutional neutrality.
4. **Judicial delays and internal institutional stress:** Persistent vacancies and delays affect the judiciary's ability to act as an effective constitutional sentinel.  
**Eg: Backlog of cases and delayed appointments** despite the **collegium system affirmed by the Supreme Court** impacts access to timely justice.
5. **Weakening of legislative oversight:** Declining parliamentary scrutiny reduces accountability of the executive to the legislature.  
**Eg: Reduced sittings of Parliament and limited referral of Bills to Standing Committees**, contrary to best practices highlighted by parliamentary reform discussions.

### Long-term democratic risks involved

1. **Normalization of constitutional deviation:** Repeated compromises lower institutional resistance to future violations.  
**Eg: Frequent use of ordinances under Article 123** risks bypassing parliamentary debate, as cautioned by the **Supreme Court in ordinance-related judgments**.
2. **Erosion of public trust:** Loss of perceived neutrality diminishes citizens' faith in democratic institutions.  
**Eg: Declining public confidence in oversight bodies**, reflected in increased litigation and public dissent.
3. **Centralisation of power:** Institutional weakening facilitates concentration of authority in the executive.  
**Eg: Marginalisation of federal institutions** challenges the basic structure doctrine emphasising federalism.
4. **Democratic backsliding:** Gradual erosion can lead to illiberal democratic practices without formal constitutional change.  
**Eg: International democracy indices flagging institutional stress** in electoral and civil liberty domains.

5. **Reduced constitutional accountability:** Institutions become less willing to check unconstitutional actions.  
**Eg: Reluctance of institutions to invoke constitutional remedies promptly,** affecting rule of law enforcement.

### **Robust safeguards to prevent institutional decay**

1. **Transparent and independent appointment mechanisms:** Institutional autonomy requires insulation from partisan influence.  
**Eg: Second Administrative Reforms Commission** recommended transparent processes for appointments to regulatory and oversight bodies.
2. **Strengthening parliamentary oversight:** Legislatures must reclaim their deliberative and accountability roles.  
**Eg: Regular use of Department-related Standing Committees** to scrutinise legislation and executive action.
3. **Judicial capacity augmentation:** Functional independence must be supported by adequate resources and timely appointments.  
**Eg: Filling judicial vacancies and infrastructure strengthening,** aligned with Supreme Court directives on access to justice.
4. **Codification of constitutional conventions:** Informal norms should be institutionalised to prevent arbitrary deviation.  
**Eg: Clear conventions on Governor's role** to uphold cooperative federalism as recognised in constitutional jurisprudence.
5. **Civic vigilance and free media:** External democratic checks are essential complements to formal institutions.  
**Eg: Independent media and civil society engagement** acting as watchdogs, reinforcing constitutional morality.

### **Conclusion**

A Republic is sustained by everyday respect for institutional boundaries, not episodic constitutional heroics. Reinforcing autonomy, accountability, and constitutional morality is essential to arrest silent democratic erosion and secure India's constitutional future.

## **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. Outline the constitutional basis of fiscal federalism in India. Describe how revenue and expenditure powers are allocated between the Union and the States. Assess the implications of this allocation for State fiscal autonomy. (15 M)**

### **Introduction**

Fiscal federalism in India represents the constitutional arrangement for sharing financial powers between the Union and the States to ensure national cohesion alongside regional autonomy. However, evolving centralised welfare governance has increasingly tested this constitutional balance.

## Body

### Constitutional basis of fiscal federalism in India

1. **Part XII of the Constitution as the fiscal foundation:** Part XII (Articles 268–293) constitutionally structures taxation powers, revenue distribution, grants, and borrowing between the Union and the States.  
**Eg: Articles 268–271** govern levy, collection, and sharing of taxes, forming the legal backbone of Centre–State fiscal relations.
2. **Finance Commission as the balancing institution:** Article 280 establishes the Finance Commission to correct vertical and horizontal fiscal imbalances through tax devolution and grants.  
**Eg: The 15th Finance Commission (2021–26)** retained **41% vertical devolution**, reinforcing constitutionally mandated fiscal decentralisation.
3. **Grants-in-aid to address fiscal disparities:** Article 275 enables the Union to provide grants to States facing structural or regional fiscal disadvantages.  
**Eg: Revenue deficit grants** to States such as **Kerala and West Bengal** aimed to maintain basic fiscal stability.
4. **Borrowing powers under constitutional discipline:** Article 293 recognises State borrowing powers while subjecting them to Union oversight for macroeconomic stability.  
**Eg: Article 293(3)** mandates Union consent for State borrowing when central loans are outstanding.

### Allocation of revenue and expenditure powers

1. **Union dominance in revenue-elastic taxation:** The Union controls broad-based and buoyant taxes, giving it superior revenue-raising capacity.  
**Eg: Income tax, corporation tax, and customs duties** fall under Union jurisdiction.
2. **States as primary expenditure authorities:** States bear responsibility for major social and developmental expenditures despite limited revenue autonomy.  
**Eg: Health, education, agriculture, rural employment, and welfare delivery** are predominantly State-executed functions.
3. **GST and shared but centralised tax regime:** GST introduced concurrent taxation, but institutional design has strengthened central influence.  
**Eg: The GST Council under Article 279A**, despite State representation, reflects the Union’s agenda-setting role.
4. **Central determination of fiscal parameters:** Normative allocation criteria and expenditure conditions are increasingly set by the Centre.  
**Eg: Unilateral determination of objective allocation parameters** mirrors concerns regarding fiscal centralisation.

### Impact of this distribution on State fiscal autonomy

1. **Constriction of effective fiscal autonomy:** Limited revenue powers combined with expanding expenditure mandates reduce State fiscal discretion.  
**Eg: States often fund near-equal or higher shares** in centrally driven welfare programmes.
2. **Weakening of collaborative fiscal decision-making:** States’ role in fiscal governance is frequently consultative rather than determinative.  
**Eg: Central-dominated steering mechanisms** dilute meaningful State participation.

3. **Licensed dissent as a constitutional safeguard:** Fiscal federalism permits States to resist unilateral fiscal dominance within constitutional bounds.  
**Eg: Mohit Minerals (2022)** recognised **uncooperative federalism and licensed dissent** as essential federal correctives.
4. **Heightened fiscal vulnerability of States:** Disproportionate fiscal liabilities undermine State capacity for region-specific development.  
**Eg: Delayed compensation and mandated State spending** highlight fiscal stress under centralised welfare governance.

### Conclusion

India's fiscal federalism remains constitutionally grounded but operationally strained by centralised fiscal control. Restoring genuine collaborative mechanisms and rebalancing revenue authority with expenditure responsibility is vital for sustaining federal equilibrium.

### **Q. The increasing use of central investigative agencies in corruption cases has redefined the accountability architecture of Indian federalism. Comment. (15 M)**

#### **Introduction**

India's anti-corruption framework has undergone a structural shift with the expanding role of **central investigative agencies** in cases involving State-level governance. This has reshaped how accountability is enforced within a constitutionally federal system.

#### **Body**

#### **Redefinition of accountability architecture in Indian federalism**

1. **Centralised enforcement of integrity norms:** Central agencies increasingly function as key instruments for enforcing probity standards across States, supplementing traditional State vigilance mechanisms.  
**Eg: Enforcement Directorate investigations under the PMLA** into corruption-linked money laundering involving State officials extend accountability beyond departmental disciplinary control.
2. **Shift from political to legal accountability:** Accountability is increasingly mediated through judicially supervised investigations rather than political oversight within State governments.  
**Eg: Vineet Narain vs Union of India (1997)** institutionalised court-monitored corruption investigations and strengthened investigative autonomy.
3. **Inter-governmental oversight beyond State boundaries:** Central agencies enable scrutiny of offences with inter-State and national economic implications, altering vertical accountability relations.  
**Eg: CBI investigations under the Delhi Special Police Establishment Act, 1946** allow examination of offences transcending State jurisdictions, subject to consent norms.
4. **Integration of economic offences with governance accountability:** Corruption is no longer treated merely as service misconduct but linked to financial crime and economic integrity.  
**Eg: PMLA framework upheld in Vijay Madanlal Choudhary vs Union of India (2022)** affirmed the national character of anti-money laundering enforcement.
5. **Judicially mediated federal accountability:** Constitutional courts increasingly arbitrate the balance between State autonomy and national anti-corruption imperatives.

**Eg: Supreme Court oversight over ED and CBI procedures** has reinforced due process while permitting central enforcement.

### **Challenges arising from this shift**

1. **Federal friction and consent disputes:** Expanded central investigations have intensified Centre–State tensions over jurisdictional autonomy.  
**Eg:** Withdrawal of **general consent to CBI investigations by several States** citing erosion of federal principles under the constitutional scheme.
2. **Perception of selective enforcement:** Uneven timing or focus of investigations risks perceptions of political bias, weakening institutional credibility.  
**Eg:** Repeated concerns raised regarding **instrumentalisation of investigative agencies** in politically sensitive cases.
3. **Marginalisation of State accountability institutions:** Central probes can bypass or weaken State vigilance, Lokayukta and service-rule based mechanisms.  
**Eg: State Lokayuktas** often lose relevance when high-profile corruption cases are taken over by central agencies.
4. **Due process and liberty concerns:** Strong enforcement laws raise concerns regarding proportionality and personal liberty.  
**Eg:** Debates surrounding **arrest, bail and prolonged investigation under PMLA** highlight civil liberties challenges.

### **Way forward**

1. **Clearly defined federal protocols for agency intervention:** Transparent criteria can reduce jurisdictional friction and uncertainty.  
**Eg:** Formal guidelines specifying **thresholds for central agency involvement** in State-related corruption cases.
2. **Strengthening State-level accountability institutions:** Empowered Lokayuktas and vigilance bodies can reduce over-centralisation.  
**Eg:** Effective implementation of **Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, 2013** at the State level.
3. **Enhanced parliamentary and judicial oversight:** Robust oversight can ensure independence without overreach.  
**Eg:** Periodic review of investigative functioning through **constitutional oversight mechanisms**.
4. **Institutionalising cooperative federal mechanisms:** Dialogue-based coordination can align enforcement with federal spirit.  
**Eg:** Greater use of **Inter-State Council under Article 263** for resolving governance and accountability disputes.

### **Conclusion**

While central investigative agencies have strengthened anti-corruption accountability, their expanding role has recalibrated India’s federal balance. Sustaining legitimacy requires embedding enforcement within a cooperative, transparent and constitutionally respectful federal framework.

**Q. Bring out the role of municipal councils in implementing urban welfare schemes. Highlight the challenges they face in reconciling local priorities with policies framed at higher levels of government. (10 M)**

### **Introduction**

Municipal councils form the core of urban welfare governance in India, translating constitutional decentralisation into last-mile service delivery. Their role has become increasingly significant with the expansion of multi-level urban welfare programmes.

### **Body**

#### **Role of municipal councils in implementing urban welfare schemes**

- 1. Last-mile delivery of welfare benefits:** Municipal councils operationalise welfare schemes through beneficiary identification, service provisioning, and monitoring under **Article 243W read with the Twelfth Schedule**.  
**Eg:** Under **PMAY–Urban**, municipal councils conduct demand surveys, approve beneficiaries, and oversee housing construction for **economically weaker sections**.
- 2. Context-specific adaptation of schemes:** Councils customise scheme execution to local socio-economic, spatial, and demographic conditions, ensuring relevance at the city level.  
**Eg:** In **AMRUT 2.0**, municipal councils prioritise water supply and sewerage projects based on **city-specific water stress and settlement patterns**.
- 3. Democratic deliberation and oversight:** Municipal councils provide a representative forum for debate, approval, and monitoring of welfare initiatives, strengthening accountability.  
**Eg:** Standing committees of municipal corporations scrutinise urban welfare expenditures and implementation progress.
- 4. Inter-governmental coordination:** Councils act as nodal agencies coordinating between State departments, parastatals, and Central ministries for scheme convergence.  
**Eg:** **Swachh Bharat Mission–Urban 2.0** implementation requires municipal coordination across multiple agencies for sanitation outcomes.
- 5. Citizen interface and grievance redressal:** Municipal councils serve as the primary point of contact for citizens, addressing grievances and feedback related to welfare delivery.  
**Eg:** Ward committees and city grievance portals enable residents to report exclusion or service gaps in urban schemes.

#### **Challenges in reconciling local priorities with higher-level policies**

- 1. Limited fiscal autonomy:** Dependence on State and Central transfers restricts municipal ability to prioritise locally urgent welfare needs.  
**Eg:** Tied grants under Finance Commission transfers limit flexibility beyond prescribed sectors.
- 2. Top-down policy design:** Uniform scheme norms and conditionalities often constrain municipal discretion and local innovation.  
**Eg:** Standardised housing cost ceilings may not reflect **high land and construction costs** in large cities.
- 3. Capacity constraints:** Inadequate technical and administrative capacity weakens effective adaptation of higher-level policies.

**Eg:** Shortages of **urban planners and engineers** in smaller cities affect project quality and timelines.

4. **Political misalignment across levels:** Divergent political priorities between municipal, State, and Central governments complicate coordination.

**Eg:** Delays in approvals or agreements for centrally sponsored schemes affect municipal implementation schedules.

5. **Limited policy voice of ULBs:** Municipal councils have minimal institutional role in framing higher-level welfare policies, reducing alignment with local needs.

**Eg:** Urban schemes are often designed without formal consultation of municipal councils.

## Conclusion

Municipal councils are indispensable for urban welfare delivery but remain constrained by fiscal dependence, top-down designs, and limited autonomy. Strengthening their capacity, discretion, and policy voice is essential for effective and responsive urban governance.

**Q. “Federalism ceases to be a balancing mechanism when it becomes electorally homogenised”. Examine this statement. Analyse the structural reasons behind this trend. Discuss its implications for democratic diversity. (15 M)**

## **Introduction**

Federalism in India was conceived as a **constitutional equilibrium between unity and diversity**, enabling States to act as political, fiscal and cultural counterweights to the Union. However, growing **electoral homogenisation across levels of government** is altering this equilibrium, raising concerns about the dilution of democratic diversity.

## **Body**

### **Federalism ceasing to be a balancing mechanism under electoral homogenisation**

1. **Single-party dominance across Union and States:** When the same political formation controls multiple tiers, federalism shifts from negotiated autonomy to top-down coordination.  
**Eg: “Double-engine government” narrative post-2019**, which prioritises political alignment over constitutional balance, reducing independent State bargaining space.
2. **Decline of institutional friction:** Electoral uniformity weakens constructive Centre–State contestation that sustains federal checks and balances.  
**Eg: Limited dissent by ruling-party States in GST Council decisions**, reducing the federal character of fiscal negotiations.
3. **Transformation of federalism into administrative compliance:** States increasingly function as implementers rather than policy innovators.  
**Eg: Centralised scheme design with uniform guidelines**, constraining State-level experimentation despite diverse regional needs.
4. **Erosion of asymmetrical federal practices:** Electoral homogenisation discourages accommodation of regional political diversity.  
**Eg: Reduced space for region-specific governance models**, particularly in culturally distinct States.

## Structural reasons behind the trend of electoral homogenisation

1. **Union-biased constitutional structure:** Provisions such as **Articles 246, 249 and 356** structurally strengthen the Centre, enabling consolidation when reinforced by electoral dominance.  
**Eg: Central legislative expansion into State List domains using Concurrent List powers,** limiting State policy discretion.
2. **Majoritarian bias of the electoral system:** The **First-Past-The-Post system** magnifies vote share into legislative dominance, aiding uniform political outcomes.  
**Eg: Disproportionate seat conversion in national elections,** translating plural votes into single-party control.
3. **Fiscal centralisation through common tax regimes:** Uniform fiscal architecture reduces States' independent revenue authority.  
**Eg: GST implementation curtailing States' taxation flexibility,** increasing dependence on central transfers.
4. **Centralisation of political narrative and leadership:** National leadership-centric campaigning weakens State-level political identities.  
**Eg: Presidential-style election campaigns,** overshadowing regional leadership and State-specific issues.

## Implications for democratic diversity

1. **Shrinking political pluralism:** Electoral uniformity reduces ideological competition across regions.  
**Eg: Decline in effective opposition in several State legislatures,** limiting democratic deliberation.
2. **Marginalisation of regional aspirations:** Diverse socio-cultural interests risk subordination to national narratives.  
**Eg: State resistance to centrally framed education and language policies,** reflecting democratic dissonance.
3. **Weakening of cooperative federalism:** Federal relations shift from partnership to compliance-based governance.  
**Eg: Diminished role of inter-governmental forums,** reducing structured Centre–State dialogue.
4. **Democratic accountability deficit:** Concentration of political power narrows institutional avenues for dissent.  
**Eg: Simultaneous political alignment across tiers,** reducing checks on executive overreach.

## Way forward

1. **Strengthening institutional federal forums:** Revitalising platforms for structured Centre–State dialogue.  
**Eg: Regularising Inter-State Council meetings under Article 263,** enabling cooperative decision-making.
2. **Reinforcing fiscal autonomy of States:** Ensuring predictable and timely fiscal transfers.  
**Eg: Greater flexibility within GST framework,** allowing limited State-level rate adjustments.
3. **Electoral and political decentralisation:** Encouraging State-centric leadership and issue-based contests.  
**Eg: Strengthening intra-party federalism,** enabling regional leadership autonomy.

4. **Judicial and constitutional safeguards for federalism:** Protecting States against arbitrary centralisation.  
**Eg: Strict adherence to principles laid down in S.R. Bommai judgment**, preserving federal checks.

### **Conclusion**

India's democratic resilience depends on **reviving federalism as a space of creative tension rather than political uniformity**. Sustaining democratic diversity requires reaffirming States as **equal constitutional partners**, not mere extensions of central power.

### **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.**

**Q. Critically examine the role of opposition parties in ensuring executive accountability in India. Analyse the structural challenges they face. Suggest reforms to strengthen parliamentary democracy. (15 M)**

### **Introduction**

A functional parliamentary democracy rests not only on a strong executive but equally on a vigilant and credible Opposition. In India, while constitutional design envisages Opposition-led scrutiny as a core accountability mechanism, its effectiveness has increasingly weakened due to structural and political constraints.

### **Body**

#### **Role of opposition parties in ensuring executive accountability**

1. **Legislative scrutiny of government actions:** Opposition parties examine bills, policies and executive decisions through debates, questions and motions, thereby acting as the first institutional check on executive overreach.  
**Eg: Question Hour**, restored fully after its disruption during **COVID-19 (2020–21)**, has been repeatedly highlighted by **PRS Legislative Research** as a key forum where Opposition exposes gaps in policy design and implementation.
2. **Financial accountability through budgetary oversight:** The Opposition scrutinises demands for grants, expenditure priorities and fiscal transparency, ensuring parliamentary control over public finance as mandated under **Article 114**.  
**Eg: The Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG)** reports on defence procurement and public sector undertakings are primarily debated and flagged by Opposition members in Parliament.
3. **Protection of constitutional values and rights:** Opposition parties raise issues related to civil liberties, minority rights and federal balance, reinforcing constitutional morality beyond electoral majorities.

**Eg:** Opposition-led debates on the use of **central agencies like ED and CBI**, citing concerns raised in **Vineet Narain vs Union of India (1997)** on institutional independence.

4. **Alternative policy articulation:** By presenting counter-narratives and shadow positions, the Opposition prevents monopolisation of public discourse and enriches democratic choice.

**Eg:** Parliamentary Standing Committees, where Opposition members often play a dominant role, have suggested amendments to key legislations such as the **Personal Data Protection framework** based on stakeholder consultations.

### Structural challenges faced by opposition parties

1. **Numerical weakness and dominance of the executive:** A strong majority in the Lok Sabha reduces the Opposition's capacity to influence legislative outcomes despite debates.

**Eg:** The frequent passage of bills as **Money Bills under Article 110**, criticised by the **Supreme Court in Rojer Mathew vs South Indian Bank (2019)**, limits Opposition scrutiny in the Rajya Sabha.

2. **Weak institutionalisation of the Leader of the Opposition:** The absence of statutory backing and clear privileges undermines the authority of the Opposition leadership.

**Eg:** The **Second Administrative Reforms Commission (ARC)** noted that a strong and formally empowered **Leader of the Opposition** is essential for democratic balance.

3. **Disruptions and reduced parliamentary time:** Frequent adjournments reduce deliberative space, paradoxically harming Opposition scrutiny more than the executive.

**Eg:** **PRS Legislative Research (2023–24)** data shows declining sitting days of Parliament compared to historical averages, constraining detailed debate.

4. **Centralisation of party structures:** Weak internal democracy within parties affects policy coherence and sustained issue-based opposition.

**Eg:** The **Law Commission (170th Report)** flagged the absence of internal party democracy as a systemic weakness affecting representative accountability.

### Reforms to strengthen parliamentary democracy

1. **Strengthening parliamentary committees:** Mandatory referral of all non-financial bills to Standing Committees would enhance evidence-based scrutiny.

**Eg:** The **National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution (NCRWC)** recommended institutionalising committee oversight to counter executive dominance.

2. **Statutory recognition of the Leader of the Opposition:** Providing legal status, resources and consultative roles would strengthen Opposition capacity.

**Eg:** Existing practice of including the **Leader of the Opposition** in appointments to bodies like **CVC and Lokpal** shows the democratic value of this role.

3. **Minimum guaranteed parliamentary sittings:** Fixing a minimum number of sitting days would restore deliberative accountability.

**Eg:** **PRS Legislative Research** has consistently recommended aligning India's parliamentary calendar with mature democracies to improve legislative scrutiny.

4. **Electoral and party reforms:** Promoting internal democracy and transparent funding would strengthen Opposition credibility.

**Eg:** The **Election Commission of India** has repeatedly emphasised inner-party democracy and financial transparency as prerequisites for robust democratic competition.

## Conclusion

A strong executive without a credible Opposition risks hollowing out parliamentary democracy. Strengthening institutional safeguards, empowering Opposition leadership and deepening deliberative mechanisms are essential to restore constitutional balance and democratic resilience in India.

**Q. “Indian cities suffer from a democratic deficit at the municipal level”. Bring out the basis of this statement. Identify the institutional causes behind it and evaluate its impact on urban governance outcomes. (15 M)**

## Introduction

India’s cities are engines of economic growth and social transformation, yet their systems of urban governance remain weakly democratic. This gap between urban importance and political empowerment manifests as a democratic deficit at the municipal level.

## Body

### Basis of the democratic deficit at the municipal level

- 1. Ceremonial nature of city leadership:** Elected mayors in most Indian cities lack executive authority, reducing democratic control over urban governance.  
**Eg: Mayors in large municipal corporations** largely perform symbolic roles while real decision-making power rests outside elected leadership.
- 2. Dominance of unelected executive authority:** Day-to-day administration is exercised by bureaucrats rather than elected representatives.  
**Eg: State-appointed municipal commissioners** control administration, personnel and finances of major cities.
- 3. Weak accountability to urban citizens:** Citizens cannot clearly attribute responsibility for service failures at the city level.  
**Eg: Urban service breakdowns** in sanitation, housing or water supply rarely translate into electoral accountability.
- 4. Irregular or delayed municipal elections:** Democratic continuity is disrupted by postponement of local body elections and administrator rule.  
**Eg: Extended periods without elected councils** in several cities weaken representative urban governance.
- 5. State-centric political focus in municipal contests:** Urban issues are overshadowed by state-level political narratives.  
**Eg: Municipal elections fought on state leadership and party alignments** rather than city-specific governance performance.

### Institutional causes behind the democratic deficit

- 1. Partial devolution under the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act:** The constitutional vision of empowered municipalities remains unevenly realised.  
**Eg: Functions under the Twelfth Schedule** are devolved selectively, limiting genuine local self-government.
- 2. State control over municipal administration:** Executive authority remains concentrated with state governments.

**Eg: Municipal commissioners appointed under state laws** exercise overriding control over elected councils.

3. **Inadequate fiscal decentralisation:** Municipalities lack independent and buoyant revenue sources.

**Eg: Heavy dependence on state grants and transfers** constrains local priority-setting and accountability.

4. **Weak metropolitan governance institutions:** Bodies meant to manage metropolitan regions lack binding authority.

**Eg: Metropolitan Planning Committees** often function only on paper, limiting coordinated urban planning.

5. **Upward bureaucratic accountability:** Municipal officials are accountable primarily to state hierarchies rather than city residents.

**Eg: Career progression of senior municipal officials** depends on state governments, not elected urban bodies.

### **Impact on urban governance outcomes**

1. **Poor quality of basic urban services:** Democratic weakness translates into ineffective and uneven service delivery.

**Eg: Persistent deficits in sanitation, housing and public health** across major cities despite large municipal budgets.

2. **Deepening urban inequality:** Governance failures disproportionately affect informal settlements and vulnerable groups.

**Eg: Expansion of slums without basic amenities** reflects exclusionary urban governance.

3. **Erosion of civic participation:** Citizens disengage due to limited influence over city-level decision-making.

**Eg: Low public engagement beyond municipal elections** weakens participatory urban democracy.

4. **Fragmented planning and coordination failures:** Multiple agencies operate without unified democratic oversight.

**Eg: Overlapping authorities in transport, housing and utilities** undermine coherent city planning.

5. **Limited innovation and long-term urban vision:** Weak political leadership discourages strategic, locally driven reforms.

**Eg: Short-term, scheme-driven interventions** dominate over integrated city-level planning.

### **Conclusion**

The democratic deficit in Indian cities flows from incomplete decentralisation and entrenched state dominance over municipal governance. Strengthening political authority, fiscal autonomy and accountability at the city level is essential to achieve effective, inclusive and democratic urban governance.

### **Q. Assess the need for standard-setting in the functioning of legislative institutions in India.**

**Evaluate the role of inter-legislative platforms in achieving this objective. (10 M)**

#### **Introduction**

India's legislatures are constitutionally autonomous yet collectively responsible for upholding democratic standards. Standard-setting is therefore essential to ensure minimum norms of deliberation, transparency and accountability across legislatures without diluting federal diversity.

## Body

### Need for standard-setting in legislative functioning

- 1. Deliberative quality and legislative scrutiny:** Absence of baseline norms for debate duration, committee scrutiny and consultation weakens informed law-making and parliamentary oversight.  
**Eg: PRS Legislative Research (2023–24)** noted **declining referral of Bills to committees**, reflecting uneven deliberative practices across legislatures.
- 2. Transparency and citizen trust:** Variations in disclosure of proceedings, attendance, voting records and committee reports undermine public accountability and trust in legislatures.  
**Eg: Article 118 and Article 208** permit procedural autonomy, resulting in **uneven digital transparency standards between Parliament and State Assemblies**.
- 3. Capacity asymmetry among legislatures:** Smaller legislatures often lack research staff, training systems and expert support, affecting legislative efficiency and informed debate.  
**Eg: National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution (2002)** highlighted weak institutional support to legislators as a systemic deficiency.
- 4. Ethical conduct and institutional dignity:** Absence of common ethical benchmarks leads to frequent disruptions, adjournments and erosion of legislative decorum.  
**Eg: Repeated loss of legislative time due to disruptions**, documented in **Parliamentary productivity reports**, indicates lack of enforceable norms.
- 5. Uniform minimum democratic benchmarks:** Standard-setting ensures that all legislatures meet basic democratic expectations irrespective of political or regional differences.  
**Eg: Supreme Court in Raja Ram Pal v. Speaker, Lok Sabha (2007)** underscored the need to preserve the dignity and functional integrity of legislatures.

### Role of inter-legislative platforms

- 1. Sharing of best practices:** Inter-legislative forums enable diffusion of successful procedural, ethical and technological innovations across legislatures.  
**Eg: All India Presiding Officers' Conference (AIPOC)** regularly facilitates exchange on **rules, conduct and use of technology**.
- 2. Voluntary and cooperative standard-setting:** These platforms promote consensus-based norms without infringing constitutional autonomy of legislatures.  
**Eg: Federal spirit under Article 246 and Seventh Schedule** is preserved as recommendations remain **non-binding conventions**.
- 3. Capacity building of legislators:** Platforms provide a collective mechanism for training, orientation and professional development of Members.  
**Eg: AIPOC deliberations on recognising educational and professional expertise of legislators** aim at improving legislative performance.
- 4. Technology-driven harmonisation:** Inter-legislative coordination supports adoption of digital tools and emerging technologies in a calibrated and responsible manner.  
**Eg: Recent discussions on AI-assisted legislative processes** stress reliability, safeguards and institutional learning.
- 5. Strengthening institutional memory:** Regular interaction between Parliament and State Legislatures helps preserve legislative knowledge and procedural continuity.

**Eg: Coordination between Parliament and State Assemblies**, emphasised in recent conferences, aids sharing of archival data and procedural experience.

## **Conclusion**

Standard-setting strengthens democratic credibility and legislative effectiveness across India. Inter-legislative platforms offer a constitutionally sound, cooperative pathway to harmonise norms while respecting federal autonomy, making legislatures more accountable, capable and future-ready.

## **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. “Specialisation within the judiciary reflects functional necessity, not judicial fragmentation”. Analyse this statement in the context of special criminal courts. Evaluate the concerns associated with such institutional arrangements. (15 M)**

### **Introduction**

The rising complexity of criminal offences involving terrorism, organised crime, cyber networks and financial flows has placed unprecedented stress on India’s conventional trial system. Judicial specialisation has therefore emerged as an institutional response to complexity and delay, aimed at strengthening justice delivery rather than fragmenting judicial authority.

### **Body**

#### **Specialisation within the judiciary as a functional necessity**

- 1. Adjudicatory efficiency in complex offences:** Special criminal courts allow judges to develop domain expertise in specialised statutes, evidentiary standards and procedural nuances, improving the quality and speed of adjudication.  
**Eg: NIA special courts** conducting day-to-day trials in terrorism cases involving encrypted digital evidence and transnational conspiracies enable focused judicial handling.
- 2. Operationalisation of the right to speedy trial:** Special courts reduce docket congestion and ensure continuous hearings, translating the constitutional mandate of **Article 21** into practical relief for under-trial prisoners.  
**Eg: Judicial directions for day-to-day trials in UAPA cases with large witness pools** aim to prevent prolonged incarceration without conclusion of trial.
- 3. Judicial capacity building without altering hierarchy:** Specialisation operates within the existing judicial structure, with judges drawn from the regular judiciary, preserving appellate oversight and constitutional unity.  
**Eg: Judges presiding over special CBI or NIA courts** remain subject to supervision by **High Courts under Article 227**.
- 4. Improved consistency in statutory interpretation:** Concentrated adjudication reduces interpretational divergence in complex criminal statutes, enhancing legal certainty.  
**Eg: Repeated adjudication of bail thresholds under special security laws** by designated courts has led to more consistent application of statutory standards.
- 5. Reduced burden on constitutional courts:** Effective trial-level adjudication limits the need for accused persons to seek routine reliefs such as bail or expeditious hearing from higher courts.

**Eg:** The Supreme Court's emphasis on strengthening trial courts reflects an institutional shift towards decentralised justice delivery.

### Concerns associated with special criminal courts

1. **Risk of dilution of fair trial guarantees:** Fast-track or special procedures may unintentionally compromise safeguards such as detailed appreciation of evidence or adequate defence preparation.  
**Eg:** Concerns raised regarding **compressed trial schedules in serious offences** affecting effective cross-examination.
2. **Potential executive influence in court creation:** Since special courts are often notified by the executive, there is a perceived risk of undermining judicial independence.  
**Eg:** Debates surrounding **executive discretion in designating special courts under security laws**.
3. **Uneven judicial capacity across regions:** Special courts are unevenly distributed, creating regional disparities in access to specialised justice.  
**Eg:** **Metropolitan concentration of special courts** leads to prolonged trials in states lacking adequate institutional infrastructure.
4. **Possibility of forum exceptionalism:** Repeated reliance on special courts may normalise exceptional procedures, eroding the principle of equality before law under **Article 14**.  
**Eg:** Expansion of special court regimes beyond extraordinary offences into routine criminal categories.
5. **Judicial isolation and workload pressure:** Judges in special courts often handle high-profile, sensitive cases continuously, increasing stress and risk of burnout.  
**Eg:** **Terror-related trials involving hundreds of witnesses** handled by a single designated court for extended periods.

### Way forward

1. **Institutional strengthening over ad-hoc creation:** Expansion of trial court capacity through sanctioned judge strength, infrastructure and technology should accompany specialisation.  
**Eg:** Creation of **additional trial courts alongside special courts** to prevent parallel bottlenecks.
2. **Uniform procedural safeguards:** Clear judicial guidelines must ensure that special courts adhere strictly to principles of natural justice and due process.  
**Eg:** Mandatory judicial scrutiny of **pre-trial detention duration and evidentiary thresholds**.
3. **Transparent and consultative court designation:** Involvement of the judiciary in decisions relating to establishment and allocation of special courts to safeguard independence.  
**Eg:** **High Court-led identification of need-based special courts** within their jurisdictions.
4. **Capacity building and judicial rotation:** Regular training and periodic rotation of judges to avoid institutional insularity and fatigue.  
**Eg:** Structured **judicial training on cyber forensics and financial crimes** combined with tenure limits.
5. **Data-driven judicial planning:** Use of pendency and case-complexity metrics to determine when specialisation is justified and when general courts suffice.  
**Eg:** Deployment of **case-load analytics** to rationalise special court expansion.

### Conclusion

Judicial specialisation, when rooted in constitutional values and institutional balance, enhances efficiency without fragmenting justice. Its legitimacy ultimately depends on strengthening trial capacity, preserving due process, and ensuring that exceptional mechanisms remain servants of justice, not substitutes for it.

**Q. “Executive functions of the Governor are bound by aid and advice, not personal judgement”. Bring out the constitutional basis of this principle with reference to relevant provisions. Assess its implications for the functioning of State legislatures. (10 M)**

### **Introduction**

India’s Constitution establishes a parliamentary system where executive authority flows from the elected Council of Ministers. The Governor’s role is deliberately structured to uphold democratic accountability rather than individual discretion.

### **Body**

#### **Constitutional basis binding the Governor to aid and advice**

1. **Article 163 and primacy of ministerial advice:** The Governor is constitutionally required to act on the aid and advice of the Council of Ministers except in narrowly specified discretionary areas.  
**Eg: Shamsher Singh v. State of Punjab (1974, 7-judge Bench)** held that the Governor has **no independent executive power** in normal governance.
2. **Collective responsibility under Article 164(2):** Executive decisions reflect the will of the elected Cabinet responsible to the legislature, not the Governor.  
**Eg: Constituent Assembly Debates**, quoting **Dr. B.R. Ambedkar**, clarified that the Governor is not an authority superior to the Cabinet.
3. **Executive nature of gubernatorial addresses:** Addresses to the legislature are executive acts articulating Cabinet policy, not personal opinions.  
**Eg: Article 176 read with Article 175** and affirmed by the **Supreme Court in the Tamil Nadu Governor case**.
4. **Judicial limitation on discretionary expansion:** Discretion cannot be implied beyond what the Constitution expressly provides.  
**Eg: Nabam Rebia v. Deputy Speaker (2016)** ruled that discretionary powers cannot be used to destabilise elected governments.
5. **Parliamentary character of State executive:** The Governor functions as a constitutional head within a parliamentary framework, not a political decision-maker.  
**Eg: Samsher Singh (1974)** described the Governor as a **formal constitutional authority**, not an active executive.

#### **Implications for legislative functioning**

1. **Protection of legislative sovereignty:** Binding the Governor to advice ensures that legislative proceedings reflect the mandate of the elected House.  
**Eg: Selective reading or truncation of Assembly addresses** undermines the legislature’s policy articulation.
2. **Prevention of executive dualism:** Limiting personal judgement avoids creation of a parallel executive authority within the State.

**Eg: Shamsher Singh (1974)** warned against Governors taking public stances against Cabinet decisions.

3. **Continuity of legislative business:** Adherence to aid and advice ensures smooth commencement and functioning of legislative sessions.

**Eg: Article 176(1)** mandates the address as part of orderly legislative procedure.

4. **Preservation of federal trust:** Restrained gubernatorial conduct prevents Centre-State friction in opposition-ruled States.

**Eg: Nabam Rebia (2016)** linked misuse of discretion to erosion of federal balance.

5. **Reinforcement of constitutional morality:** Observance of advice upholds restraint expected from high constitutional offices.

**Eg: Supreme Court jurisprudence on constitutional morality** consistently stresses institutional self-discipline.

## Conclusion

The aid-and-advice principle is the constitutional firewall protecting legislative autonomy and responsible government. Any personalisation of executive functions by the Governor risks unsettling both parliamentary democracy and federal equilibrium.

## **Q. Explain the scope and purpose of Article 142 of the Constitution. Examine the conditions under which the Supreme Court may invoke it to mould relief. (10 M)**

### **Introduction**

The Constitution equips the Supreme Court not only as a court of law but also as a guardian of justice where rigid legality may fail. **Article 142** embodies this role by enabling the Court to transcend procedural limits to ensure outcomes aligned with **constitutional morality and substantive justice**.

### **Body**

#### **Scope and purpose of Article 142 of the Constitution**

1. **Power to do complete justice:** Article 142(1) empowers the Supreme Court to pass any decree or order necessary to ensure **complete justice** in matters before it, even where existing laws are inadequate.  
**Eg:** In **Union Carbide vs Union of India (1991)**, the Court used Article 142 to facilitate settlement for **Bhopal gas tragedy victims**, prioritising timely relief over prolonged litigation.
2. **Supplementing, not supplanting law:** The provision allows the Court to **fill legislative or procedural gaps** but not to override substantive statutory provisions.  
**Eg:** In **Supreme Court Bar Association vs Union of India (1998)**, the Court clarified that Article 142 cannot be used to **contravene express statutory mandates**, setting doctrinal limits.
3. **Binding and enforceable authority:** Orders under Article 142 are enforceable across India, ensuring uniform compliance and finality of justice.  
**Eg:** Directions on **inter-state water disputes** and environmental remediation have been enforced nationwide through Article 142-backed orders.
4. **Instrument of equitable justice:** The scope extends to crafting **equitable remedies** where strict application of law would cause manifest injustice.

**Eg:** In Covid-19 related relief cases (2021–2025), the Court moulded relief considering humanitarian hardship and livelihood loss.

### Conditions under which the Supreme Court may invoke Article 142 to mould relief

1. **Existence of exceptional or extraordinary circumstances:** Invocation is justified only when facts reveal grave injustice or irreparable hardship not remediable through ordinary law.  
**Eg:** In *Ashok Kumar Gupta vs State of Uttar Pradesh (1997)*, Article 142 was used to advance social justice objectives in exceptional conditions.
2. **Absence of adequate statutory remedy:** The Court intervenes when statutory frameworks are silent, incomplete or ineffective in addressing the issue.  
**Eg:** In *Vineet Narain vs Union of India (1997)*, institutional guidelines were framed due to a legislative vacuum.
3. **Consistency with constitutional values:** Relief must align with fundamental rights, separation of powers and rule of law.  
**Eg:** The Court has repeatedly stressed that Article 142 cannot violate constitutional structure or basic features.
4. **Use as a measure of last resort:** Article 142 is invoked sparingly, not as a substitute for regular adjudication or policymaking.  
**Eg:** In several recent Article 142 decisions (2023–2025), the Court expressly cautioned against routine or expansive use of this power.

### **Conclusion**

Article 142 represents the Constitution's human face, allowing justice to prevail where law alone is insufficient. Its restrained use ensures that equity complements legality without unsettling the balance among constitutional institutions.

### **Salient features of the Representation of People's Act.**

**Q. "Democratic legitimacy depends as much on administrative fairness as on electoral competition". Analyse its relevance to electoral governance in India. Discuss the institutional mechanisms required to uphold administrative fairness in electoral processes. (15 M)**

### **Introduction**

Democracy is sustained not merely by competitive elections but by the fairness and neutrality of the administrative processes that enable participation. In India's constitutional framework, electoral legitimacy flows as much from procedural justice as from popular mandate.

### **Body**

#### Relevance of administrative fairness to electoral governance in India

1. **Equality before electoral law:** Administrative fairness operationalises Article 14 by ensuring uniform treatment of all electors and political actors.  
**Eg:** In *PUCL vs Union of India (2003)*, the Supreme Court underlined that voter equality and transparent procedures are integral to sustaining democratic legitimacy.

2. **Protection of universal adult franchise:** Fair administrative processes prevent indirect or procedural disenfranchisement, giving effect to **Article 326**.  
**Eg:** The inclusive framework for voter enrolment under the **Representation of the People Act, 1950** reflects the constitutional commitment to universal adult franchise.
3. **Public trust in electoral outcomes:** Procedural integrity enhances acceptance of election results even in intensely competitive contests.  
**Eg:** Confidence in **EVM–VVPAT verification**, reaffirmed by the Supreme Court in **ADR vs Election Commission of India (2024)**, rests on transparent and rule-bound administrative safeguards.
4. **Neutrality of election administration:** Administrative fairness preserves the political neutrality of the election machinery.  
**Eg:** The constitutional role of the **Election Commission under Article 324** has been repeatedly emphasised by the Supreme Court as central to free and fair elections.

### **Institutional mechanisms required to uphold administrative fairness**

1. **Institutional independence of the Election Commission:** Structural autonomy reduces executive influence over electoral administration.  
**Eg:** The Supreme Court in **Anoop Baranwal vs Union of India (2023)** mandated a collegium-based appointment process to strengthen the independence of the Election Commission.
2. **Rule-based statutory procedures:** Clearly defined legal procedures limit discretionary and ad hoc administrative actions.  
**Eg:** The **Representation of the People Acts, 1950 and 1951** prescribe detailed processes for electoral roll preparation and election conduct, ensuring predictability and fairness.
3. **Judicial oversight of electoral processes:** Courts act as constitutional guardians against procedural arbitrariness.  
**Eg:** The Supreme Court’s consistent reliance on the doctrine of **free and fair elections** has reinforced accountability in electoral administration.
4. **Transparency and audit mechanisms:** Open procedures and scrutiny deter bias and enhance institutional credibility.  
**Eg:** Best practices highlighted in **Law Commission of India Report 255** emphasise transparency and periodic review as safeguards for electoral integrity.

### **Conclusion**

Electoral competition gives democracy its vitality, but administrative fairness gives it legitimacy. Strengthening institutional independence, procedural clarity and transparency is essential to preserve public trust in India’s electoral democracy.

**Q. “The problem of political corruption in India has evolved from individual misconduct to systemic distortion.” Examine this shift. Analyse the structural drivers behind it. Propose reforms aimed at systemic correction rather than episodic enforcement. (15 M)**

### **Introduction**

Political corruption in India has transformed from sporadic abuse of office into a systemic distortion rooted in institutional design, political finance, and accountability deficits. This evolution reflects deeper structural weaknesses rather than merely individual moral failure.

## Body

### Shift from individual misconduct to systemic distortion

1. **From isolated illegality to normalised practices:** Corruption earlier involved identifiable illegal acts, whereas it is now embedded in routine political and administrative processes.  
**Eg: Persistent breaches of election expenditure limits**, repeatedly flagged in **Election Commission of India affidavits** and analysed by **Association for Democratic Reforms**, indicate systemic normalisation rather than exceptional violation.
2. **Individual culpability replaced by incentive-driven behaviour:** The focus has shifted from personal wrongdoing to behaviour shaped by structural incentives within the political system.  
**Eg: Supreme Court observations in Vineet Narain (1997)** highlighted how systemic weaknesses allow corruption networks to survive beyond individual actors.
3. **From secrecy to formal compliance without substance:** Corruption now often coexists with formal adherence to disclosure norms, masking deeper distortions.  
**Eg: Asset affidavits mandated under Representation of the People Act, 1951**, disclose information but lack post-disclosure verification, as noted by **ECI reform proposals**.
4. **Expansion from executive acts to legislative processes:** Corrupt practices increasingly influence law-making, regulatory design, and policy prioritisation.  
**Eg: Second Administrative Reforms Commission (2007)** warned that corruption had begun affecting rule-making and policy formulation, not merely implementation.
5. **Shift from moral deviance to institutional pathology:** Corruption today reflects systemic design flaws rather than ethical lapses of a few individuals.  
**Eg: National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution (2002)** noted that institutional incentives often reward rent-seeking behaviour.

### Structural drivers behind systemic political corruption

1. **High-cost electoral competition:** Rising costs of elections compel dependence on opaque funding channels, embedding corruption structurally.  
**Eg: Law Commission of India, 244th Report (2014)** highlighted that unregulated political finance distorts democratic competition.
2. **Weak regulation of political parties:** Political parties remain outside comprehensive statutory accountability, creating governance blind spots.  
**Eg: ECI recommendations** have repeatedly sought stronger disclosure and audit norms for political parties, citing systemic opacity.
3. **Delayed adjudication and low conviction rates:** Slow judicial processes dilute deterrence and convert enforcement into episodic action.  
**Eg: Supreme Court monitoring of criminal cases against legislators** has revealed prolonged pendency, undermining systemic correction.
4. **Institutional overlap and conflict of interest:** Concentration of discretionary power without effective checks encourages rent-seeking.  
**Eg: Second ARC** emphasised that inadequate separation between political authority and regulatory oversight facilitates systemic corruption.
5. **Absence of ethical governance frameworks:** Criminal law dominates anti-corruption efforts, while preventive ethics remain underdeveloped.

**Eg: Second ARC recommendations on Codes of Ethics** for public representatives remain largely unimplemented.

### **Reforms aimed at systemic correction rather than episodic enforcement**

1. **Comprehensive political finance reform:** Moving from disclosure-based norms to enforceable transparency and independent auditing.  
**Eg: Law Commission (255th Report)** recommended statutory regulation of political party funding to address structural distortions.
2. **Strengthening institutional autonomy:** Ensuring functional independence of investigative and oversight bodies to reduce political interference.  
**Eg: Supreme Court directives in Vineet Narain (1997)** laid the foundation for insulating investigative agencies through fixed tenure norms.
3. **Time-bound judicial processes:** Fast-tracking cases involving public representatives to restore deterrence.  
**Eg: Supreme Court directions for special courts** for such cases aim to address systemic delays highlighted in judicial data.
4. **Institutionalising ethical governance:** Creating enforceable codes of conduct and conflict-of-interest norms beyond criminalisation.  
**Eg: Second ARC** proposed a statutory **Code of Ethics** and independent ethics oversight mechanisms within legislatures.
5. **Preventive vigilance and transparency by design:** Embedding transparency in decision-making processes rather than relying on post-facto punishment.  
**Eg: Central Vigilance Commission guidelines** emphasise preventive vigilance as a systemic reform tool.

### **Conclusion**

Political corruption in India can no longer be addressed through episodic enforcement alone. Structural reform of political finance, institutions, and ethical governance is essential to restore democratic accountability and public trust in the long run.

### **Q. Assess the role of internal party elections in strengthening democratic culture in India. Highlight the key institutional challenges involved. (10 M)**

#### **Introduction**

Political parties are the principal channels through which democratic participation is organised and leadership is produced. The depth and credibility of India's democratic culture therefore depend substantially on how democratically political parties conduct their internal affairs.

#### **Body**

#### **Role of internal party elections in strengthening democratic culture**

1. **Leadership accountability within parties:** Regular internal elections make party leaders answerable to their organisational base rather than only to central leadership, reinforcing norms of responsibility and internal checks.  
**Eg: Election Commission of India** requires political parties to declare their organisational structures and internal procedures, embedding accountability as a democratic expectation.

2. **Political socialisation and cadre empowerment:** Competitive internal elections encourage participation, debate, and leadership training among grassroots workers, deepening democratic habits beyond periodic voting.  
**Eg:** **Cadre-based parties** conducting organisational elections at mandal or booth levels have demonstrated stronger worker engagement and sustained political mobilisation.
3. **Leadership renewal and inclusiveness:** Internal elections create institutional pathways for youth, women, and socially marginalised groups to rise through merit and organisational work.  
**Eg:** The **Law Commission of India** has underlined internal party democracy as a means to widen representation within leadership structures.
4. **Democratic legitimacy of governance:** Leaders selected through participatory internal processes enjoy greater moral authority while exercising public power, strengthening democratic trust.  
**Eg:** The **Supreme Court** has recognised political parties as central democratic institutions whose internal functioning has a bearing on the electoral process.
5. **Policy responsiveness and deliberation:** Internal contestation allows multiple viewpoints to surface, improving policy formulation and curbing personality-centric decision-making.  
**Eg:** Committees on governance reforms have observed that internal debate within parties enhances policy coherence and institutional stability.

### **Key institutional challenges in internal party elections**

1. **Weak legal enforceability:** While parties disclose constitutions, Indian law does not strictly mandate or penalise the absence of genuine internal elections.  
**Eg:** The **Representation of the People Act, 1951** focuses on electoral regulation rather than enforceable inner-party democracy.
2. **Centralisation of authority:** High-command culture often limits meaningful competition, turning internal elections into procedural endorsements.  
**Eg:** Frequent **uncontested leadership selections** across parties indicate limited intra-party choice.
3. **Opaque membership processes:** Lack of verified and transparent membership rolls undermines fairness and credibility of internal voting.  
**Eg:** Reform bodies have highlighted uncertainty over **active membership figures** in major political parties.
4. **Absence of independent oversight:** Internal elections are generally supervised by party-appointed authorities, raising concerns of neutrality.  
**Eg:** Proposals for limited external scrutiny have been discussed but remain largely unimplemented.
5. **Tension with freedom of association:** Strong regulation of party elections raises constitutional concerns regarding organisational autonomy.  
**Eg:** Judicial observations have cautioned against excessive State intrusion into internal party functioning.

### **Conclusion**

Internal party elections can serve as training grounds for democratic citizenship, but only when they are competitive and transparent. Balancing party autonomy with minimal democratic safeguards is essential to strengthen India's constitutional democracy from within.

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

**Q. Outline the constitutional position and functional powers of the Lok Sabha Speaker. Bring out how statutory discretion is expected to be exercised in constitutionally sensitive situations. (10 M)**

### Introduction

The Lok Sabha Speaker is the constitutional fulcrum of parliamentary functioning, entrusted with maintaining legislative discipline and protecting the dignity of the House. The office derives legitimacy not merely from constitutional text but from conventions of neutrality and constitutional morality.

### Body

#### Constitutional position and functional powers of the Lok Sabha Speaker

- 1. Election and security of tenure under Articles 93 and 94:** The Speaker is elected by the Lok Sabha and continues in office until dissolution or removal, ensuring institutional continuity and independence from the executive.  
**Eg: Election of the Speaker at the first sitting of every new Lok Sabha** reflects the House's autonomy in choosing its presiding authority.
- 2. Presiding and rule-interpreting authority under Article 100:** The Speaker regulates debates, maintains order, interprets rules of procedure, and exercises a casting vote in case of a tie, enabling smooth legislative functioning.  
**Eg: Use of casting vote during closely contested legislative decisions** has ensured resolution of parliamentary deadlocks.
- 3. Certification and procedural gatekeeping powers:** The Speaker certifies Money Bills and decides admissibility of motions, questions, and resolutions, shaping the legislative agenda of the House.  
**Eg: Certification of Finance Bills as Money Bills** determines the role of the Rajya Sabha in the legislative process.
- 4. Quasi-judicial role under the Tenth Schedule:** The Speaker decides on disqualification of members on grounds of defection, acting as a constitutional tribunal within Parliament.  
**Eg: Disqualification proceedings against defecting MPs** have been decided by the Speaker under Paragraph 6 of the Tenth Schedule.

#### Exercise of statutory discretion in constitutionally sensitive situations

- 1. Adherence to constitutional morality and neutrality:** Statutory discretion must be exercised impartially, without partisan considerations, especially when decisions affect democratic stability.  
**Eg: Timely handling of disqualification petitions** is essential to prevent distortion of legislative majorities.
- 2. Reasonableness and procedural fairness:** Discretion should follow due process, natural justice, and reasoned decision-making to uphold institutional credibility.  
**Eg: Issuance of notice and opportunity of hearing** before taking adverse decisions against members.
- 3. Avoidance of discretion during conflict of interest:** The Speaker must refrain from exercising sensitive powers when personal institutional position is under challenge.

**Eg: Non-exercise of adjudicatory powers when a removal motion is pending** preserves procedural fairness.

4. **Purposive interpretation of statutes:** Discretion must advance constitutional intent rather than rigid literalism, particularly to avoid procedural deadlock.

**Eg: Interpreting parliamentary rules to ensure House functionality during exceptional situations.**

### Safeguards against arbitrariness

1. **Judicial review of Speaker's decisions:** Although internal to Parliament, Speaker's rulings are subject to judicial scrutiny on grounds of mala fides, illegality, or constitutional violation.  
**Eg: Court scrutiny of defection-related rulings** has reinforced constitutional discipline.
2. **Reasoned orders and transparency:** Requirement of speaking orders acts as an internal check against arbitrary exercise of power.  
**Eg: Detailed reasoning in disqualification orders** enables effective judicial oversight.
3. **Constitutional conventions of neutrality:** Established parliamentary conventions expect the Speaker to rise above party affiliations, strengthening institutional trust.  
**Eg: Speakers traditionally resigning from active party roles** after election to office.
4. **Reform-oriented recommendations:** Committees have suggested codification of timelines and clearer procedures to limit discretion.  
**Eg: Recommendations to prescribe time limits for deciding defection cases** aim to reduce arbitrariness.

### **Conclusion**

The authority of the Lok Sabha Speaker rests on constitutional trust, restrained discretion, and institutional neutrality. Strengthening procedural safeguards and conventions is vital to preserve the Speaker's role as an impartial guardian of parliamentary democracy in increasingly contested political environments.

## **Statutory, regulatory and various quasi-judicial bodies.**

**Q. Assess the role of arbitral institutions in reducing judicial burden. Examine the limitations of India's current arbitration framework. (10 M)**

### **Introduction**

With pendency crossing **5 crore cases** in Indian courts, alternative dispute resolution has become a governance necessity rather than a legal luxury. Institutional arbitration is intended to shift commercial disputes away from courts while preserving procedural fairness and enforceability.

### **Body**

#### **Role of arbitral institutions in reducing judicial burden**

1. **Procedural streamlining and case management:** Arbitral institutions administer timelines, hearings and procedural rules, preventing frequent court recourse for procedural clarification.

**Eg: Law Commission of India (246th Report, 2014)** highlighted that institutional arbitration reduces court involvement compared to ad hoc arbitration by standardising procedures.

2. **Limited court intervention framework:** Institutional arbitration aligns with **Section 5 of the Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996**, which mandates minimal judicial intervention once arbitration is chosen.

**Eg: Supreme Court in P. Anand Gajapathi Raju (2000)** reaffirmed that courts must ordinarily refer parties to arbitration, easing judicial docket pressure.

3. **Time-bound dispute resolution:** Institutions enforce statutory timelines for awards, reducing prolonged litigation cycles typical of courts.

**Eg: Section 29A (introduced in 2015)** prescribes time limits for arbitral awards, a reform aimed at lowering prolonged judicial supervision.

4. **Specialised commercial expertise:** Institutional panels provide sector-specific arbitrators, reducing appeals caused by technical misappreciation in courts.

**Eg: Justice B.N. Srikrishna Committee Report, 2017** emphasised expertise-driven arbitration to prevent repeated judicial challenges.

5. **Reduction in enforcement litigation:** Well-administered institutional awards are less vulnerable to challenge under **Section 34**, lowering post-award court workload.

**Eg: Supreme Court in Ssangyong Engineering (2019)** narrowed the scope of “public policy”, reinforcing finality of arbitral awards.

### **Limitations of India’s current arbitration framework**

1. **Dominance of ad hoc arbitration:** Preference for party-controlled arbitration leads to frequent procedural disputes requiring court intervention.

**Eg: Justice Srikrishna Committee Report (2017)** identified ad hoc arbitration as the primary cause of judicial overreach in arbitration matters.

2. **Institutional credibility deficit:** Lack of trusted, independent domestic arbitral institutions discourages parties from fully bypassing courts.

**Eg: Economic Survey 2018–19** noted weak institutional arbitration as a bottleneck to contract enforcement in India.

3. **Delayed constitution of Arbitration Council of India:** Absence of a regulatory framework has slowed accreditation and quality assurance.

**Eg: Supreme Court order dated 23 January 2025** sought Union government’s response on non-constitution of the **Arbitration Council of India**.

4. **Perceived executive influence:** Government’s dual role as regulator and largest litigant raises concerns of neutrality, encouraging judicial oversight.

**Eg: Law Ministry responses in Parliament (2025)** acknowledged stakeholder concerns regarding institutional independence.

5. **High cost and limited accessibility:** Institutional arbitration remains expensive for MSMEs, pushing them back towards courts.

**Eg: Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievances, Law and Justice (2023)** flagged cost barriers in formal arbitration mechanisms.

### **Conclusion**

Arbitral institutions can substantially ease judicial burden, but India’s framework suffers from trust and

design deficits. Strengthening institutional independence and accessibility is crucial to convert arbitration into a genuine substitute for courts rather than an adjunct.

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

**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. Legal frameworks designed for intermediary platforms are ill-suited to governance of generative AI systems. Assess the limitations of India's existing digital liability regime. Discuss the implications for accountability in cases of AI-generated harm. (15 M)**

### **Introduction**

India's digital liability regime emerged in an era where platforms functioned as passive conduits. The advent of generative AI systems that actively interpret prompts and produce content has exposed deep structural inadequacies in existing accountability frameworks.

### **Body**

#### **Why intermediary-centric legal frameworks are ill-suited for generative AI systems**

- 1. Shift from passive hosting to active content creation:** Traditional intermediaries merely transmit user content, whereas generative AI systems algorithmically generate new outputs, blurring the intermediary–publisher distinction.  
**Eg: AI chatbots producing synthetic images or narratives independently,** unlike social media platforms hosting user uploads.
- 2. Algorithmic mediation replaces direct human authorship:** AI outputs emerge from probabilistic models rather than identifiable human intent, undermining liability models based on individual culpability.  
**Eg: Large language models generating defamatory or explicit text without a direct human author.**
- 3. Dynamic learning systems defy static compliance logic:** Generative AI systems evolve through reinforcement learning and user interaction, making one-time compliance assessments insufficient.  
**Eg: Model behaviour changing over time due to prompt-based fine-tuning,** beyond original training datasets.
- 4. Design choices directly shape harmful outcomes:** Unlike neutral conduits, AI platforms embed architectural decisions that influence the type of content produced.  
**Eg: Prompt permissibility and content filters determining whether explicit deepfakes can be generated.**

5. **Safe harbour assumptions no longer hold:** Legal immunity premised on lack of editorial control weakens when platforms actively interpret and generate content.  
**Eg: AI systems transforming prompts into novel outputs**, rather than merely transmitting third-party information.

### Limitations of India's existing digital liability regime

1. **Over-reliance on safe harbour under Section 79 of the IT Act, 2000:** Section 79 protects intermediaries observing due diligence but does not account for AI systems acting as content originators.  
**Eg: Shreya Singhal v. Union of India (2015)** upheld safe harbour for neutral intermediaries, a rationale strained for generative AI platforms.
2. **User-centric penal focus under the IT Act:** Sections 66E, 67 and 67A criminalise dissemination of non-consensual or obscene content but exclude platform-level responsibility.  
**Eg: Deepfake prosecutions targeting end-users**, while AI developers remain legally insulated.
3. **Criminal law presumes identifiable human intent:** Provisions such as Sections 74 and 77 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023 are built around human agency, not autonomous systems.  
**Eg: Difficulty in attributing mens rea when AI-generated sexual imagery circulates online.**
4. **Absence of statutory duty of care for AI platforms:** Indian law lacks explicit obligations requiring AI developers to anticipate and mitigate foreseeable harms.  
**Eg: No mandatory risk-assessment or harm-prevention duty for generative AI platforms**, unlike emerging EU standards.
5. **Fragmented regulatory oversight:** Digital liability is split across criminal law, IT law, and platform guidelines without a unified AI-specific governance framework.  
**Eg: Intermediary Guidelines, 2021 focus on takedowns**, not systemic AI risk mitigation.

### Implications for accountability in cases of AI-generated harm

1. **Weak deterrence against systemic harms:** Lack of platform accountability allows harmful design choices to persist without legal consequence.  
**Eg: Repeated generation of non-consensual deepfakes despite user-level enforcement.**
2. **Burden shifts disproportionately to victims:** Victims must pursue takedowns and criminal complaints without mechanisms to compel platform reform.  
**Eg: Women targeted by AI-generated sexual imagery relying on FIRs and content removal alone.**
3. **Erosion of Article 21 guarantees:** Regulatory gaps undermine dignity, autonomy, and informational privacy recognised as part of the right to life.  
**Eg: Justice K.S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India (2017)** affirmed informational privacy, yet AI harms remain weakly regulated.
4. **Regulatory uncertainty affects enforcement agencies:** Absence of clear liability standards creates ambiguity for police and courts in attributing responsibility.  
**Eg: Law enforcement focusing on individual users due to lack of statutory platform liability.**
5. **Risk to public trust in digital governance:** Perceived impunity of AI platforms weakens confidence in the State's ability to protect citizens in digital spaces.  
**Eg: Public backlash following unchecked circulation of AI-generated deepfake content.**

## Conclusion

As generative AI systems transcend the role of passive intermediaries, India must recalibrate its liability regime towards platform responsibility grounded in constitutional values. Embedding accountability-by-design is essential to reconcile innovation with dignity, privacy, and public trust.

## **Q. “True social justice is achieved not merely through welfare expansion but through equitable access, dignity and empowerment”. Comment. (10 M)**

### **Introduction**

India’s understanding of social justice has evolved from welfare-based redistribution to a rights-centred constitutional vision. True justice today is measured by whether individuals can access opportunities with dignity and exercise agency, not merely receive benefits.

### **Body**

#### **Limits of welfare expansion alone**

- 1. Welfare without dignity:** Welfare schemes may alleviate deprivation but often fail to eliminate degrading social practices and stigma.  
**Eg: Manual scavenging** persists despite cash assistance, highlighting denial of **dignity under Article 21**, as recognised in **Safai Karamchari Andolan v. Union of India (2014)**.
- 2. Consumption relief without structural change:** Welfare transfers address short-term poverty but do not dismantle exclusion in education, health and labour markets.  
**Eg: Persistent nutrition and learning gaps among SCs and STs** show that food and health schemes alone cannot correct structural disadvantage.
- 3. Dependency over empowerment:** Excessive reliance on welfare risks creating passive beneficiaries rather than active rights-holders.  
**Eg: Long-term cash support without skill or livelihood linkage** limits **economic mobility** and self-reliance.

#### **Equitable access as a pillar of true social justice**

- 1. Access to opportunities, not just benefits:** Social justice requires equal access to education, employment and public services.  
**Eg: Articles 15(4) and 15(5)** enable affirmative action to ensure **equitable access** to educational institutions, going beyond welfare doles.
- 2. Procedural fairness and non-discrimination:** Equitable access demands fair, transparent and non-arbitrary state action.  
**Eg: EWS reservation upheld in Janhit Abhiyan v. Union of India (2022)** expanded access based on **economic vulnerability** while preserving equality principles.
- 3. Geographical and digital inclusion:** Access must bridge spatial and digital divides affecting rural and marginalised communities.  
**Eg: Expansion of digital public infrastructure** improves service reach but uneven digital literacy still limits real access.

#### **Dignity and empowerment as core to social justice**

1. **Dignity as constitutional foundation:** Social justice must treat individuals as rights-bearing citizens, not objects of charity.  
**Eg:** Supreme Court jurisprudence has consistently linked **human dignity** with **Article 21**, shaping rights-based governance.
2. **Empowerment through capabilities:** Justice is sustained when individuals gain education, skills and institutional voice.  
**Eg:** Emphasis on **education and employment inclusion** reflects empowerment-oriented approaches beyond welfare transfers.
3. **Participation and voice in governance:** Empowerment requires participation in decision-making affecting one's life.  
**Eg:** Strengthening **local self-governance and community participation** enhances agency of marginalised groups.

### Way Forward

1. **Shift from scheme-centric to capability-centric policy:** Integrate welfare with education, skilling and livelihood pathways to enable upward mobility.
2. **Strengthen access infrastructure:** Improve last-mile delivery, digital literacy and grievance redress to ensure equitable access in practice.
3. **Embed dignity and participation:** Design policies that respect dignity and institutionalise community participation, especially of vulnerable groups.

### Conclusion

True social justice is realised when welfare becomes a bridge to equality, not a substitute for it. By prioritising equitable access, dignity and empowerment, India can transform social justice from relief-based support into a durable foundation of constitutional citizenship.

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

**Q. Digital learning platforms amplify pedagogical weaknesses rather than compensate for them. Examine the validity of this statement. Discuss its relevance for state-led online education initiatives. (10 M)**

### Introduction

The rapid expansion of digital education in India has shifted the focus from classrooms to platforms. However, technology in education is only a medium; it magnifies the underlying pedagogical approach rather than correcting its flaws.

### Body

#### How digital platforms amplify pedagogical weaknesses

1. **Replication of passive pedagogy:** Lecture-centric and one-way teaching, when shifted online, intensifies disengagement due to absence of physical cues and limited interaction.  
**Eg:** **Long video-based classes on government digital platforms during the pandemic** recorded low attention spans and completion rates, reflecting the limits of passive instruction.

2. **Assessment-driven learning distortions:** Pedagogies focused on rote learning become more visible online, where digital tools favour recall-based tests over conceptual and analytical evaluation.  
**Eg: Excessive use of MCQs and worksheet-based assessments in online schooling** failed to measure higher-order learning outcomes among students.
3. **Teacher capacity gaps:** Weak instructional skills are amplified online, as digital teaching requires facilitation, questioning and feedback rather than explanation alone.  
**Eg: Early phases of digital education rollouts** saw teachers relying heavily on content delivery due to limited training in online pedagogy.
4. **Scale over learning design:** Replicating large classroom sizes online reduces individual attention and adaptive instruction, exposing existing pedagogical limitations.  
**Eg: Mass virtual classes under state-led digital education initiatives** improved access but struggled to ensure personalised learning.

### Relevance for state-led online education initiatives

1. **Right to meaningful education: Article 21A of the Constitution** mandates not just access but quality education; weak pedagogy undermines this constitutional obligation.  
**Eg: Judicial interpretation in Unni Krishnan v. State of Andhra Pradesh (1993)** linked the right to education with qualitative learning outcomes.
2. **Policy emphasis on pedagogy-first approach:** National education reforms recognise technology as an enabler, not a substitute for sound teaching methods.  
**Eg: National Education Policy, 2020** stresses experiential, competency-based and learner-centric digital education models.
3. **Equity and inclusion risks:** Weak pedagogy disproportionately affects first-generation and disadvantaged learners who depend most on public digital platforms.  
**Eg: Pandemic-era online schooling** revealed learning gaps among marginalised students despite availability of devices and connectivity.
4. **Governance and accountability concerns:** Without strong pedagogy, digital platforms risk becoming mere content distribution systems, weakening outcome-based accountability.  
**Eg: Recent shifts towards competency-linked teacher training in digital education frameworks** reflect recognition of this governance challenge.

### Conclusion

Digital platforms do not remedy pedagogical weaknesses; they amplify them. For state-led online education to achieve constitutional and policy goals, pedagogy must precede technology and guide its design.

**Q. “India’s skilling challenge is a failure of accountability, not intent”. Analyse the institutional weaknesses in India’s skilling ecosystem. Assess their implications for labour-market efficiency. Suggest reforms to restore accountability. (15 M)**

### Introduction

India has invested heavily in skilling over the past decade, creating one of the world’s largest vocational training ecosystems. Yet weak labour-market outcomes reveal that the core problem lies not in policy intent or funding, but in accountability deficits across institutions.

### Body

### Why the problem is accountability, not intent

1. **Strong policy intent and fiscal commitment:** The Union and States have consistently prioritised skilling through flagship missions and budgetary support, indicating clear intent.  
**Eg: Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana launched in 2015** trained and certified **over 1.4 crore candidates by 2025** (Source: **Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship – MSDE**), yet employability gains remain limited.
2. **Persistently weak outcomes despite scale:** Low formal vocational training penetration shows that intent has not translated into effective outcomes.  
**Eg: Only about 4.7% of India’s workforce has received formal vocational training**, up from around 2% a decade earlier (Source: **PLFS; World Bank**), pointing to systemic accountability failures rather than policy neglect.

### Institutional weaknesses in India’s skilling ecosystem

1. **Fragmented responsibility across the value chain:** Training, assessment, certification, and placement are handled by different entities, diluting outcome ownership.  
**Eg: Sector Skill Councils certify candidates**, while training partners and placement agencies operate separately, resulting in **no single institution accountable for employability** (Source: **NITI Aayog**).
2. **Weak accountability of Sector Skill Councils:** SSCs were designed as industry-facing bodies but are not held answerable for placement or wage outcomes.  
**Eg: Employer surveys in India Skills Report 2025** indicate that **SSC certifications have low signalling value** compared to degrees or prior experience.
3. **Limited industry co-ownership:** Industry participation is voluntary and weakly incentivised, reducing curriculum relevance and assessment rigour.  
**Eg: Most employers rely on internal training or private certifications**, not public skilling credentials (Source: **World Bank, NITI Aayog**).
4. **Disconnect between skilling and formal education:** Vocational training largely operates outside degree pathways, limiting aspiration and mobility.  
**Eg: NEP 2020** acknowledges the need to integrate vocational education into higher education, as skilling alone lacks social and economic legitimacy.
5. **Centre–State coordination gaps:** Skilling and education fall under shared jurisdiction, complicating uniform accountability.  
**Eg: Education under Entry 25 of the Concurrent List (Article 246)** leads to varied state capacity and uneven implementation of national skilling standards.

### Implications for labour-market efficiency

1. **Persistent skill mismatch and low productivity:** Training not aligned with demand increases onboarding costs and reduces firm productivity.  
**Eg: High attrition rates of 30–40% in sectors like retail and logistics** reflect weak job readiness (Source: **India Skills Report 2025**).
2. **Limited wage and mobility gains:** Certified skills do not consistently translate into better earnings or stable employment.

**Eg: PLFS data** show **modest and uneven wage premiums** from vocational training, especially in informal employment.

3. **Erosion of trust in public certification:** Employers discount public credentials, weakening labour-market signalling.

**Eg: Preference for degree-based hiring** over SSC certificates reduces the economic value of public skilling.

### Reforms to restore accountability

1. **Outcome-linked accountability for SSCs:** Tie SSC recognition and funding to placement, retention, and wage outcomes.

**Eg: NITI Aayog recommendations** emphasise shifting from compliance-based to **outcome-based evaluation** of skilling institutions.

2. **Deeper industry co-design and obligation:** Mandate industry participation in curriculum, assessment, and apprenticeships.

**Eg: National Apprenticeship Promotion Scheme expanded post-2016** shows better outcomes where firms directly train candidates (Source: MSDE).

3. **Integrating skilling with formal education:** Embed vocational credits within degree and diploma pathways.

**Eg: NEP 2020** advocates **credit-based vocational integration** to improve legitimacy and progression.

4. **Unified accountability framework across Centre and States:** Create clear role demarcation and shared outcome metrics.

**Eg: Cooperative federalism mechanisms under MSDE–State Skill Missions** can align targets with accountability (Source: MSDE).

### Conclusion

India's skilling challenge is fundamentally institutional. Making skilling bodies answerable for real labour-market outcomes can transform skilling from fragmented welfare delivery into a credible engine of productivity, dignity of labour, and inclusive growth.

**Q. "India's health transition is exposing the limits of a hospital-centric model of care." Explain the nature of this transition and analyse the governance challenges it poses. Suggest a reorientation towards preventive and primary healthcare. (10 M)**

### **Introduction**

India is witnessing a deep **epidemiological, demographic and risk-factor transition**, where chronic diseases, ageing, and environmental exposures now dominate health outcomes. This transition is revealing the structural limits of a **hospital-centric, curative health system**, which is ill-equipped to manage long-term, population-wide health risks.

### **Body**

#### Nature of India's health transition

1. **Epidemiological shift towards non-communicable diseases:** India's disease profile has shifted from episodic infections to chronic conditions requiring lifelong management, exposing the inadequacy of hospital-based episodic care.  
**Eg: ICMR-INDIAB Study (2023–24)** estimates **101 million people with diabetes and 136 million with pre-diabetes**, underscoring the need for continuous community-level care rather than tertiary intervention.
2. **Demographic transition and population ageing:** Rising life expectancy has increased multi-morbidity among the elderly, placing sustained pressure on hospitals designed for acute care.  
**Eg: UNFPA India Ageing Report 2023** projects **194 million elderly by 2031**, increasing demand for primary, geriatric and home-based health services.
3. **Risk-factor transition driven by environment and lifestyle:** Health risks increasingly arise from pollution, diet and sedentary behaviour, which hospitals can treat but cannot prevent.  
**Eg: Lancet Countdown on Health and Climate Change 2025** attributes **over 17 lakh deaths in 2022** in India to **PM2.5 exposure**, reflecting a shift towards policy-driven health determinants.

### Governance challenges posed by a hospital-centric model

1. **Skewed public expenditure towards tertiary care:** Budgetary priorities favour hospitals over prevention, weakening the first line of health defence.  
**Eg: National Health Accounts 2021–22** show a significant share of public health spending directed to hospitals, while **primary care remains underfunded**.
2. **Weak public health and preventive capacity:** The hospital-centric approach has marginalised public health cadres and community outreach systems.  
**Eg: Rural Health Statistics 2023** report persistent **shortages of doctors and specialists at PHCs and CHCs**, limiting early detection and follow-up care.
3. **Fragmented inter-sectoral governance:** Determinants of health such as air quality, food systems and urban mobility lie outside the health ministry, causing policy silos.  
**Eg: Under the National Clean Air Programme (2019)**, health impact assessments remain weakly embedded in transport and urban planning decisions.
4. **Regulatory inertia in preventive health policy:** Governance mechanisms have been slow to regulate lifestyle and nutrition risks despite strong evidence.  
**Eg: Front-of-Pack Nutrition Labelling**, recommended by **ICMR and WHO**, remains pending even as obesity and diet-related NCDs rise.

### Reorientation towards preventive and primary healthcare

1. **Making comprehensive primary healthcare the system's foundation:** Prevention, early diagnosis and continuity of care must anchor health delivery.  
**Eg: Ayushman Bharat – Health and Wellness Centres (2018)** have expanded to **over 1.6 lakh centres**, delivering NCD screening, mental health and geriatric services.
2. **Institutionalising population-level screening and surveillance:** Early detection reduces disease severity, costs and hospital overload.  
**Eg: NPCDCS** enables routine screening for **diabetes, hypertension and cancers** among adults aged 30+, strengthening community-based prevention.
3. **Adopting a Health-in-All-Policies governance framework:** Health outcomes must guide decisions in transport, housing, food and environment.

**Eg: Article 47 of the Constitution** mandates improvement of public health, legitimising cross-sectoral preventive governance.

4. **Anchoring prevention in constitutional and judicial accountability:** Rights-based governance strengthens state responsibility for public health outcomes.

**Eg: The Supreme Court** has read the **right to health into Article 21**, reinforcing the obligation to prioritise preventive and primary care.

## **Conclusion**

India's health transition demands a decisive move from hospital-centric cure to **governance-led prevention**, grounded in strong primary care and inter-sectoral coordination. Reorienting the system today is essential for an equitable, resilient and sustainable health architecture by 2047.

**Q. Public health failures are more often failures of intelligence than failures of information. Analyse this statement in the context of disease surveillance in India. Suggest measures required to strengthen an intelligence-driven approach to public health governance. (10 M)**

## **Introduction**

Recent disease outbreaks in Indian cities reveal that warning signals often exist well before crises escalate, yet preventive action remains weak. This exposes a governance gap where information is available, but actionable public health intelligence is missing.

## **Body**

### **Public health failures as failures of intelligence**

1. **Fragmented conversion of data into actionable insight:** Surveillance systems in India focus on data reporting rather than synthesising information into decision-ready intelligence.  
**Eg: IDSP weekly outbreak reports** flagged health events, yet **diarrhoeal outbreaks in Indore (2024)** occurred despite earlier warnings on water quality, indicating failure of intelligence translation (Source: **MoHFW, IDSP reports**).
2. **Silo-based interpretation of surveillance information:** Health data is controlled by vertical programmes, preventing holistic risk assessment across domains.  
**Eg: HMIS access protocols** restrict cross-programme analytics, limiting the ability to detect systemic risks beyond individual disease silos (Source: **National Health Mission review documents**).
3. **Reactive outbreak-centric surveillance orientation:** The system prioritises confirmation and reporting of outbreaks rather than anticipatory risk detection.  
**Eg: Economic Survey 2021–22** noted that India's surveillance architecture largely supports post-event response instead of early preventive intervention.
4. **Weak linkage between intelligence signals and administrative action:** Surveillance alerts lack institutional authority to trigger mandatory response mechanisms.  
**Eg: District surveillance units** under IDSP can report events but lack enforcement powers to compel civic or administrative action (Source: **MoHFW operational guidelines**).
5. **Limited integration of non-health intelligence inputs:** Critical signals from environment, climate and infrastructure systems remain underutilised.  
**Eg: Water contamination indicators** and **municipal service failures** are rarely integrated into disease surveillance frameworks (Source: **WHO epidemic intelligence framework, 2023**).

## Measures to strengthen an intelligence-driven approach to public health governance

1. **Creation of an integrated public health intelligence architecture:** Surveillance must shift from linear reporting to multi-source intelligence fusion.  
**Eg:** NITI Aayog's "Vision 2035: Public Health Surveillance in India" (2020) recommends a **predictive, integrated and tiered surveillance system**.
2. **Clear institutional accountability for early warning and response:** Defined authority is required to convert intelligence alerts into binding action.  
**Eg:** **Article 47 of the Constitution** places a duty on the State to improve public health, implying responsibility to act on credible intelligence signals.
3. **Strengthening human analytical capacity within surveillance systems:** Skilled public health professionals must interpret signals beyond automated dashboards.  
**Eg:** **WHO Epidemic Intelligence guidance (2023)** emphasises a **human-in-the-loop model** to contextualise algorithmic alerts.
4. **Formal integration of non-health data streams:** Intelligence systems must incorporate environmental, climate and civic data for early detection.  
**Eg:** **One Health approach** adopted in national zoonotic disease strategies highlights the value of cross-sectoral intelligence (Source: **MoHFW–DAHD frameworks**).
5. **Institutionalising pre-emptive decision-making protocols:** Surveillance intelligence must trigger predefined preventive actions rather than discretionary responses.  
**Eg:** **COVID-19 lessons (2020–21)** showed that delayed institutional response, not data absence, amplified health and economic costs (Source: **Economic Survey 2021–22**).

## Conclusion

Public health intelligence is ultimately about timely judgement and institutional response, not merely data accumulation. Strengthening integrated intelligence systems is essential for converting constitutional intent into effective preventive governance.

**Q. Anganwadis today perform a critical governance role beyond nutrition delivery. Assess this assertion in the context of social sector governance. Analyse the challenges that limit its realisation. (10 M)**

## **Introduction**

Anganwadis have evolved from being nutrition-outreach centres into frontline institutions of social sector governance, interfacing health, education, nutrition and community mobilisation. Their role is increasingly central to India's rights-based welfare architecture and human capital strategy.

## **Body**

### Anganwadis as a critical governance institution beyond nutrition

1. **Early childhood education and school readiness:** Anganwadis deliver Early Childhood Care and Education, shaping cognitive and socio-emotional foundations before formal schooling.  
**Eg:** **NEP 2020** recognises Anganwadis and Balvatikas as the primary vehicle for ECCE for children aged 3–6, linking them to **Foundational Literacy and Numeracy** outcomes.
2. **Last-mile delivery of multiple welfare entitlements:** Anganwadis act as convergence hubs for nutrition, health, immunisation and maternal care services.

**Eg: POSHAN Abhiyaan** integrates supplementary nutrition, growth monitoring and maternal counselling through Anganwadis to operationalise **Article 47** on nutrition.

3. **Women and child rights protection:** Anganwadis function as local institutions for safeguarding child development and women's health entitlements.

**Eg:** Implementation of **ICDS** supports constitutional commitments under **Articles 15(3) and 39(f)** to protect women and children.

4. **Community-level governance and data interface:** Anganwadis generate grassroots data for planning, monitoring and social audits.

**Eg: Anganwadi-level growth charts and beneficiary registers** feed into district nutrition and health reviews, strengthening evidence-based governance.

5. **Platform for social mobilisation and behaviour change:** Anganwadis enable state outreach on nutrition, sanitation and early learning practices.

**Eg: Village-level nutrition days** conducted through Anganwadis have been used to promote dietary diversity and maternal health awareness.

### Challenges limiting the realisation of this expanded role

1. **Overburdened and under-supported workforce:** Anganwadi workers handle multiple schemes without commensurate staffing or remuneration.

**Eg: ICDS review committees** have noted role overload affecting quality of ECCE and community engagement.

2. **Inadequate infrastructure and learning resources:** Many centres lack safe buildings, play-based materials and child-friendly spaces.

**Eg: ASER and MoWCD field assessments** highlight uneven physical infrastructure across states, affecting learning delivery.

3. **Fragmented inter-departmental coordination:** Weak convergence between education, health and women and child departments limits integrated outcomes.

**Eg: NITI Aayog's nutrition strategy reviews** have flagged siloed implementation despite convergence mandates.

4. **Limited training for pedagogical and governance roles:** Skill development remains focused on nutrition, not early learning or data-driven governance.

**Eg: NEP 2020** acknowledges the need for systematic ECCE-specific training for Anganwadi workers and helpers.

5. **Accountability and monitoring gaps:** Absence of clear outcome-based accountability dilutes governance effectiveness.

**Eg: Second Administrative Reforms Commission** emphasised the need for clearer performance metrics for frontline service institutions.

### **Conclusion**

Anganwadis are no longer peripheral welfare units but foundational institutions of social sector governance. Unlocking their full potential requires strengthening capacity, convergence and accountability to match their expanded mandate.

**Q. Describe the present status of healthcare quality in India. Identify the major governance and regulatory gaps influencing service delivery. Discuss the priority reforms required to improve health outcomes. (15 M)**

### Introduction

India's healthcare system has expanded access and coverage substantially, yet outcomes increasingly reflect shortcomings in service quality rather than availability. Recent assessments underline that governance, regulation and accountability now determine health performance more than infrastructure alone.

## Body

### Present status of healthcare quality in India

- Quality deficit despite expanded access:** Healthcare utilisation has increased, but outcomes remain uneven, indicating systemic quality gaps.  
**Eg: Lancet Commission on India (January 2026)** concludes that **poor quality of care**, not access constraints, is now the dominant challenge in India's health system.
- Low adherence to evidence-based protocols:** Clinical guidelines are inconsistently followed across levels of care.  
**Eg: Economic Survey 2021** estimated **around 1.6 million deaths in 2018** were attributable to **poor quality healthcare**, exceeding deaths from lack of access.
- Wide inter-state and inter-facility variation:** Healthcare quality varies sharply by region and institution, affecting equity.  
**Eg: National Health Systems Resource Centre evaluations** show large differences in **primary healthcare quality** across States.
- Weak quality of primary healthcare:** Deficient primary care quality drives patients towards higher-level facilities.  
**Eg: NITI Aayog and MoHFW reviews** note routine bypassing of **Health and Wellness Centres** for minor ailments.
- Disproportionate impact on vulnerable groups:** Poor quality care affects rural and marginalised populations more severely.  
**Eg: NFHS-5 data** reveals persistent disparities in maternal and child health outcomes across social groups.

### Major governance and regulatory gaps influencing service delivery

- Fragmented regulatory oversight:** Multiple regulators operate with limited coordination and enforcement capacity.  
**Eg: NITI Aayog's health system reform documents** highlight gaps in regulating private healthcare quality standards.
- Weak accountability mechanisms:** Limited outcome-based monitoring reduces institutional responsibility for care quality.  
**Eg: 15th Finance Commission** stressed the absence of robust performance-linked accountability in health service delivery.
- Inadequate provider competence regulation:** Licensing and continuous skill assessment remain uneven.  
**Eg: National Medical Commission reforms** seek to address long-standing gaps in medical education oversight.
- Poor grievance redressal systems:** Patients lack accessible and effective complaint resolution mechanisms.  
**Eg: Parliamentary Standing Committee on Health (2022)** flagged weak grievance redressal across public hospitals.
- Insufficient transparency and data use:** Health data is under-utilised for quality improvement.  
**Eg: Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission** is still evolving towards effective quality monitoring and feedback loops.

## Priority reforms required to improve health outcomes

1. **Strengthening primary healthcare quality:** Focus must shift from coverage to performance at the primary level.  
**Eg: Ayushman Bharat Health and Wellness Centres** emphasise comprehensive, quality-assured primary care.
2. **Outcome-based governance reforms:** Monitoring must move beyond inputs to patient outcomes and safety.  
**Eg: NITI Aayog's health outcome index** promotes performance-based assessment of States.
3. **Regulatory capacity enhancement:** Unified standards and stronger enforcement are required across sectors.  
**Eg: National Health Policy 2017** calls for improved regulation of private healthcare providers.
4. **Human resource training and ethics:** Continuous professional development and ethical standards must be institutionalised.  
**Eg: Lancet Commission recommendations** emphasise provider training and integrity as quality levers.
5. **Citizen-centric transparency mechanisms:** Empowering patients through information improves accountability.  
**Eg: Right to Health legislations at State level**, such as **Rajasthan**, stress patient entitlements and transparency.

## Conclusion

India's healthcare challenge has decisively shifted from expansion to excellence. Sustained improvement in health outcomes requires governance reforms that embed accountability, quality assurance and citizen trust at every level of service delivery.

**Q. Reversing brain drain requires reforming research governance, not merely recalling scientists. Evaluate the governance factors shaping scientific migration. Assess the limitations of return-focused schemes. Propose comprehensive systemic reforms in this regard. (15 M)**

## **Introduction**

India's persistent scientific migration reflects not just individual career choices but deeper governance weaknesses within its research and higher education ecosystem. Talent circulation depends fundamentally on the credibility, autonomy and stability of domestic research institutions.

## **Body**

### Governance factors shaping scientific migration

1. **Institutional autonomy deficit:** Excessive ministerial and bureaucratic control over universities constrains academic freedom, research agendas and decision-making.  
**Eg: National Education Policy 2020** itself acknowledges limited academic autonomy as a barrier to global competitiveness of Indian universities (Source: **MoE**).
2. **Unstable and fragmented research funding:** Short-term, scheme-based funding undermines long-horizon research and discourages risk-taking.

**Eg: Economic Survey 2022–23** noted India's **GERD at ~0.7% of GDP**, significantly below advanced research economies (Source: **DST**).

3. **Teaching and administrative overload:** Heavy teaching hours and compliance burdens leave limited time for quality research.

**Eg: University Grants Commission workload norms** combined with accreditation-related reporting have been flagged by faculty associations (Source: **UGC reports**).

4. **Weak merit-based career progression:** Promotions and leadership roles often depend on seniority and administrative discretion rather than research impact.

**Eg: Yash Pal Committee on Higher Education Reforms (2009)** highlighted stagnation of academic careers as a push factor.

5. **Limited global research integration:** Constraints on international collaboration, hiring and procurement reduce exposure to frontier science.

**Eg: OECD Science Outlook** shows Indian institutions lag in cross-border co-authorship intensity.

### **Limitations of return-focused schemes**

1. **Elite-centric design:** Schemes target a small group of high-profile scientists without addressing systemic conditions faced by the wider academic community.

**Eg: Prime Minister Research Chair proposals** focus on select IITs, leaving state universities structurally untouched (Source: **MoE announcements**).

2. **Symbolic impact without ecosystem reform:** Individual excellence cannot compensate for weak institutional support systems.

**Eg: Science Policy Forum analyses** caution against “islands of excellence” in weak systems.

3. **Temporary incentives without career security:** Chairs and fellowships often lack long-term tenure clarity and institutional integration.

**Eg: Ramakrishnan Committee (2019)** stressed the need for stable academic career tracks.

4. **Limited mentoring spillovers:** Without systemic reform, returning scientists face constraints in building sustainable research groups.

**Eg: DST evaluations** of past diaspora schemes noted modest diffusion effects.

5. **Neglect of domestic talent retention:** Overemphasis on returnees sidelines early-career researchers already in India.

**Eg: PLFS-linked academic employment data** shows rising contractualisation within universities.

### **Comprehensive systemic reforms required**

1. **Deepening institutional autonomy with accountability:** Grant academic, financial and administrative autonomy while strengthening outcome-based evaluation.

**Eg: Article 19(1)(g)** read with **Supreme Court judgments on educational autonomy** supports freedom of profession and institutional functioning.

2. **Mission-mode enhancement of research funding:** Move towards predictable, multi-year block grants for universities.

**Eg: Anusandhan National Research Foundation (NRF)** under **NEP 2020** aims to reform funding architecture (Source: **DST**).

3. **Rationalising faculty workload and governance:** Separate teaching, research and administrative career tracks within universities.

**Eg: Second Administrative Reforms Commission** recommended functional specialisation in public institutions.

4. **Merit-based academic careers and leadership:** Introduce transparent global benchmarks for recruitment, promotion and institutional leadership.

**Eg: Global best practices cited by UGC reforms committee** on faculty governance.

5. **Strengthening global research integration:** Liberalise hiring norms, procurement rules and international collaboration frameworks.

**Eg: Science, Technology and Innovation Policy Draft 2020** emphasises open science and global partnerships.

## **Conclusion**

Reversing brain drain requires rebuilding trust in India's research governance rather than episodic talent recall. A stable, autonomous and globally integrated academic ecosystem is the only durable anchor for retaining and attracting scientific talent.

## **Q. "Education funding, in the absence of adequate implementation capacity, tends to yield diminishing returns." Comment. (10 M)**

### **Introduction**

Public expenditure on education has steadily increased in India, aligned with constitutional mandates and national policy goals. However, persistent gaps in learning outcomes and institutional performance highlight that financial allocations alone are insufficient without robust implementation capacity.

### **Body**

#### **Education funding without adequate implementation capacity**

1. **Weak state-level absorption capacity:** States vary widely in their ability to utilise central education funds due to administrative shortages and procedural delays.  
**Eg: PRS Legislative Research (2024)** noted under-utilisation of **Samagra Shiksha** funds in several states due to delays in teacher recruitment and procurement bottlenecks.
2. **Institutional governance deficits:** Poor autonomy and accountability in educational institutions dilute the impact of funding on quality and innovation.  
**Eg: UGC reforms post-NEP 2020** highlighted that rigid administrative controls in many universities limit effective use of grants for research and faculty development.
3. **Teacher capacity and deployment gaps:** Funding fails to translate into outcomes when teacher availability and training remain inadequate.  
**Eg: Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISE+ 2023-24)** reported persistent subject-wise teacher shortages despite higher budgetary allocations.
4. **Implementation–outcome disconnect:** Emphasis on input spending rather than outcome metrics reduces efficiency of public expenditure.  
**Eg: NITI Aayog School Education Quality Index** showed limited correlation between higher spending and improvements in learning outcomes across states.
5. **Centre–state coordination challenges:** Education being in the **Concurrent List (Seventh Schedule)** requires effective coordination, which remains uneven.  
**Eg: 15th Finance Commission** flagged gaps in cooperative federalism affecting social sector scheme implementation, including education.

6. **Limited monitoring and feedback mechanisms:** Weak real-time monitoring leads to leakages and sub-optimal programme delivery.

**Eg: CAG audit reports on PM POSHAN (2023)** pointed to gaps in inspection and monitoring despite adequate financial provisioning.

### **Way forward**

1. **Strengthening state administrative capacity:** Invest in planning, staffing and digital systems to improve fund absorption.

**Eg: World Bank-supported STARS programme (2021-26)** focuses on capacity building of state education departments for outcome-based delivery.

2. **Enhancing institutional autonomy with accountability:** Implement governance reforms envisaged under NEP 2020 to link funding with performance.

**Eg: Higher Education Commission of India framework (proposed)** emphasises outcome-linked regulation and transparent accreditation.

3. **Outcome-based financing and monitoring:** Shift from input-centric to learning-outcome-linked funding mechanisms.

**Eg: NITI Aayog's Aspirational Districts Programme** demonstrates how performance monitoring can improve social sector outcomes, including education.

4. **Deepening cooperative federalism in education:** Institutionalise Centre–State collaboration for planning and implementation.

**Eg: Inter-State Council and sectoral working groups** recommended by 2nd ARC to improve coordination in Concurrent List subjects.

### **Conclusion**

Education spending delivers returns only when matched by strong implementation capacity and accountable institutions. Strengthening governance, coordination and outcome-orientation is essential to convert financial inputs into lasting human capital gains for India's future.

## **Issues relating to poverty and hunger.**

**Q. Stability of tenure is a prerequisite for responsible decision-making in public administration. Analyse the consequences of frequent tenure disruptions on institutional accountability. Suggest measures to ensure a balance between administrative stability and executive control. (15 M)**

### **Introduction**

Effective governance at the cutting edge of the State depends not merely on authority, but on continuity, confidence, and institutional memory. In public administration, especially at the district and field level, tenure stability provides the conditions necessary for responsible, law-bound, and outcome-oriented decision-making.

### **Body**

#### **Stability of tenure as a prerequisite for responsible decision-making**

1. **Policy continuity and long-term planning:** Stability of tenure enables officers to design, implement, and course-correct medium-term programmes rather than relying on short-term, risk-averse decisions.  
**Eg: Second Administrative Reforms Commission (ARC), 2008**, in its 10th Report on *Refurbishing of Personnel Administration*, recommended **minimum fixed tenure** to allow meaningful policy ownership and delivery.
2. **Administrative independence and professional judgement:** Secure tenure reduces vulnerability to extraneous pressures and allows officers to exercise discretion strictly within legal and procedural frameworks.  
**Eg: Supreme Court in T.S.R. Subramanian vs Union of India (2013)** held that frequent transfers undermine **neutral and fearless civil service functioning**, and directed fixed tenure norms.
3. **Institutional memory and contextual governance:** District administration deals with complex socio-economic and geographic variables that require local knowledge built over time.  
**Eg: NITI Aayog's Best Practices Reports (2022–23)** highlighted that districts with stable leadership showed better outcomes in **Aspirational Districts Programme indicators**.
4. **Enhanced accountability through ownership:** Officers with assured tenure are more willing to take responsibility for outcomes, as decisions can be traced back to their term.  
**Eg: World Bank's India Governance Diagnostic (2020)** observed that tenure stability improves **answerability for service delivery outcomes** at the sub-national level.
5. **Trust-building with stakeholders:** Continuity in leadership strengthens coordination with elected representatives, frontline workers, and citizens, improving administrative legitimacy.  
**Eg: Ministry of Panchayati Raj (2021)** noted that stable district leadership improves convergence under **Mission Antyodaya** and decentralised planning.

### Consequences of frequent tenure disruptions on institutional accountability

1. **Erosion of outcome accountability:** Rapid transfers blur responsibility, making it difficult to attribute success or failure to any single authority.  
**Eg: ARC (2008)** cautioned that frequent reshuffles create a culture of “**shared irresponsibility**” in administration.
2. **Short-termism in decision-making:** Officers focus on avoiding controversy rather than pursuing necessary but difficult reforms.  
**Eg: OECD Public Governance Review of India (2021)** flagged that unstable tenures incentivise **procedural compliance over performance**.
3. **Decline in bureaucratic morale:** Arbitrary transfers weaken motivation and professional confidence, especially among field officers.  
**Eg: Central Staffing Scheme Review (DoPT, 2022)** acknowledged morale concerns linked to unpredictable postings.
4. **Weakening of institutional credibility:** Citizens perceive governance as personality-driven rather than rule-based, undermining trust.  
**Eg: India Governance Report, IDFC Institute (2023)** linked administrative churn with declining public confidence in district institutions.
5. **Distortion of performance evaluation systems:** Lack of continuity disrupts data-driven appraisal and learning loops.  
**Eg: Performance Management System reforms under Mission Karmayogi (2020)** emphasised stable role assignments for meaningful evaluation.

## Measures to balance administrative stability and executive control

1. **Statutory fixed tenure norms:** Enforce minimum tenure for key field posts through legislation rather than executive instructions.  
**Eg: Supreme Court directives in Prakash Singh vs Union of India (2006)** mandated **minimum two-year tenure** for police leadership.
2. **Independent civil services boards:** Strengthen transfer and posting decisions through institutional mechanisms insulated from ad-hoc interference.  
**Eg: DoPT guidelines (2014, reiterated 2023)** provide for **Civil Services Boards** to ensure objective personnel management.
3. **Written and reasoned transfer orders:** Require recorded reasons for premature transfers to uphold transparency and judicial review.  
**Eg: T.S.R. Subramanian judgement (2013)** explicitly required **written directions** to protect officers from oral instructions.
4. **Link tenure with performance frameworks:** Allow flexibility in transfers only where backed by objective performance indicators.  
**Eg: Mission Karmayogi Capacity Building Framework (2020)** promotes **role-based accountability and outcome mapping**.
5. **Legislative oversight and audit:** Subject personnel administration to scrutiny through legislatures and audit institutions.  
**Eg: Public Accounts Committee observations (2021–22)** stressed oversight to prevent arbitrary administrative actions.

## Conclusion

Stability of tenure is not an administrative privilege but a governance necessity for accountable, professional, and citizen-centric administration. A rules-based balance between executive authority and institutional continuity is essential for building resilient and trustworthy public institutions.

## **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. “Anti-corruption laws fail when protection mechanisms become shields for misconduct.” Critically analyse this statement. Discuss the constitutional concerns involved. Also suggest measures to ensure a balance between protection of honest officials and accountability in public office. (15 M)**

### Introduction

Anti-corruption laws seek to enforce **probity, integrity, and public accountability**, but they also operate in complex administrative environments where honest decision-making requires protection. The debate lies in whether protective safeguards act as **enablers of good governance or barriers to accountability**.

### Body

#### Why protection mechanisms can become shields for misconduct

1. **Pre-investigation barriers weakening deterrence:** Mandatory approvals before inquiry can stall investigations at inception, reducing fear of detection.  
**Eg: Prior sanction requirements for initiating corruption probes** have been criticised for delaying scrutiny of senior officials.
2. **Executive control creating conflict of interest:** When sanctioning authority rests with the executive, neutrality is compromised in cases involving policy decisions or political actors.  
**Eg: Executive-controlled approval mechanisms** may discourage inquiry into decisions taken at the highest levels.
3. **Selective accountability undermining equality:** Enhanced procedural protection for public servants creates an impression of unequal application of law.  
**Eg: Differential investigative thresholds** for officials compared to ordinary citizens weaken public confidence.
4. **Erosion of institutional credibility:** When safeguards repeatedly block inquiries, anti-corruption institutions appear ineffective.  
**Eg: Public perception of impunity** in high-profile corruption allegations involving senior officials.

### Why protection mechanisms are necessary in anti-corruption laws

1. **Shield against frivolous and mala fide complaints:** Public servants involved in complex policy decisions face risks of harassment through motivated complaints.  
**Eg: Policy paralysis concerns** raised due to fear of retrospective criminalisation of bona fide decisions.
2. **Preservation of administrative efficiency:** Excessive investigative exposure can deter officers from taking timely and bold decisions.  
**Eg: Risk-averse bureaucratic behaviour** observed in sectors involving large public expenditure.
3. **Safeguarding independence of honest officials:** Protection mechanisms aim to ensure officials act without fear of political or personal vendetta.  
**Eg: Decision-making in regulatory and procurement roles** where outcomes affect powerful interests.
4. **Need for balance between governance and vigilance:** Absolute investigative freedom without safeguards may lead to abuse of investigative power.  
**Eg: Judicial recognition that investigation itself can be punitive** if unchecked.

### Constitutional concerns involved

1. **Article 14 and equality before law:** Differential procedural safeguards raise questions of reasonable classification and equal accountability.  
**Eg: Higher thresholds for investigating public servants** compared to private citizens.
2. **Rule of law and accountability:** Law must apply uniformly to all wielders of public power without prior insulation from scrutiny.  
**Eg: Judicial emphasis that power must remain accountable to law.**
3. **Separation of powers:** Executive control over investigative initiation intrudes into the domain of independent investigative agencies.  
**Eg: Executive veto over inquiry** affecting institutional autonomy.

4. **Constitutional morality and probity:** Laws that privilege office over accountability conflict with ethical governance principles.  
**Eg:** Judicial articulation of **probity in public life** as a constitutional expectation.

### Measures to balance protection and accountability

1. **Independent sanctioning authority:** Vest sanctioning power in neutral institutions rather than the executive.  
**Eg:** Lokpal and Lokayukta mechanisms envisaged for independent oversight.
2. **Time-bound sanction decisions:** Statutory timelines to prevent administrative delay and denial by inaction.  
**Eg:** **Mandatory decision periods** for grant or refusal of sanction.
3. **Shift safeguards to post-investigation stage:** Allow free initiation of inquiry with protections at prosecution or trial stage.  
**Eg:** **Judicial scrutiny before prosecution** to filter frivolous cases.
4. **Clear standards for policy versus corruption:** Codified criteria distinguishing bona fide policy decisions from abuse of office.  
**Eg:** **Objective decision-making records and documentation norms.**

### Conclusion

Effective anti-corruption governance demands **protection without paralysis and accountability without intimidation**. Reorienting safeguards towards independence, transparency, and proportionality can ensure honest officials are protected while corruption remains decisively punishable.

**Q. The integration of artificial intelligence into policing marks a shift from community-based law enforcement to centralised algorithmic control". Evaluate the nature of this shift. Analyse its implications for police accountability and its impact on democratic freedoms. (15 M)**

### **Introduction**

Technological mediation of policing is reshaping how coercive power is exercised in a constitutional democracy. Artificial intelligence is no longer merely an assistive tool but is beginning to reconfigure authority, discretion, and citizen–state relations in law enforcement.

### Body

#### Nature of the shift from community-based policing to centralised algorithmic control

1. **From street-level discretion to data-driven command structures:** AI relocates decision-making from beat-level judgement to centralised command-and-control centres, reducing the autonomy of local police officers.  
**Eg:** **AI-enabled CCTV command centres under Safe City projects** allow real-time monitoring and instructions from central hubs, replacing on-ground situational discretion.
2. **Expansion from reactive policing to predictive governance:** Policing increasingly relies on anticipatory risk assessment rather than complaint-based intervention.  
**Eg:** **Predictive policing platforms such as MahaCrime OS AI in Maharashtra** analyse historical crime data to flag potential suspects and locations before offences occur.
3. **Standardisation of policing through algorithms:** AI tools impose uniform behavioural templates, limiting contextual sensitivity to local socio-cultural conditions.

**Eg: Algorithmic crime pattern mapping** applies common risk parameters across diverse neighbourhoods irrespective of local variations.

4. **Technological centralisation of coercive power:** Surveillance and analytics consolidate informational power at higher echelons of the police hierarchy.  
**Eg: CCTNS, operational since 2009**, integrates FIRs and criminal records nationwide, enabling top-down operational oversight.
5. **Shift from human interaction to mediated surveillance:** Routine policing functions are increasingly performed through sensors, cameras, and software.  
**Eg: Large-scale facial recognition deployments** reduce reliance on community intelligence and informal trust-based policing.

### Implications for police accountability

1. **Dilution of individual responsibility:** Algorithm-assisted decisions blur accountability between human officers and automated systems.  
**Eg: Wrongful AI-based suspect identification cases** show difficulty in fixing responsibility when actions are software-mediated.
2. **Opacity of decision-making processes:** Proprietary algorithms function as black boxes, limiting scrutiny of policing decisions.  
**Eg: Absence of transparent algorithmic audit trails** contrasts with traditional police manuals and standing orders.
3. **Strengthening of hierarchical control:** Centralised data access enhances supervisory surveillance over lower-rung officers.  
**Eg: Geotagging and live CCTV supervision of beat personnel** intensify top-down discipline within police forces.
4. **Weak external oversight mechanisms:** Existing accountability institutions are not designed to audit AI-driven policing.  
**Eg: Police Complaints Authorities mandated in Prakash Singh v. Union of India (2006)** lack powers to review algorithmic decision-making.
5. **Risk of executive overreach:** Concentration of data and analytics increases discretionary control of the executive over policing priorities.  
**Eg: Centralised surveillance-led policing during protests** raises concerns of political misuse and selective enforcement.

### Impact on democratic freedoms

1. **Erosion of the right to privacy:** Continuous data collection expands surveillance beyond reasonable necessity.  
**Eg: Justice K.S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India (2017)** affirmed privacy as a fundamental right requiring necessity and proportionality.
2. **Chilling effect on freedoms under Article 19:** Surveillance discourages lawful protest, association, and expression.  
**Eg: AI-enabled identification and tracking of protestors** can deter citizens from exercising democratic rights.
3. **Undermining the presumption of innocence:** Predictive policing treats individuals as potential offenders based on probability scores.  
**Eg: Preventive targeting using historical crime datasets** shifts policing from evidence-based suspicion to risk profiling.
4. **Disproportionate impact on marginalised communities:** Biased datasets can reproduce structural discrimination.  
**Eg: Algorithms trained on legacy police data** risk over-policing already vulnerable social groups.

5. **Weakening of procedural safeguards:** Automation can bypass traditional requirements of warrants, human judgement, and recorded reasons.

**Eg: Data-driven identification and detention without prior judicial scrutiny** raises concerns for due process under Article 21.

### Conclusion

AI-driven policing may enhance efficiency, but unchecked centralisation risks hollowing out accountability and freedoms. Democratic policing in the future must prioritise constitutional safeguards, human oversight, and institutional reform over technological determinism.

## Role of civil services in a democracy.

### India and its neighborhood- relations.

**Q. “Asymmetric interdependence, if poorly managed, can become a source of diplomatic friction”. Evaluate its implications for India’s regional strategy. Suggest ways to mitigate such risks. (10 M)**

#### Introduction

India’s neighbourhood relations are characterised by deep but unequal economic, infrastructural and strategic linkages. If such asymmetric interdependence is not managed with sensitivity and institutional balance, it can generate diplomatic friction and undermine India’s regional strategy.

#### Body

#### Implications of asymmetric interdependence for India’s regional strategy

1. **Trust deficit due to perceived dominance:** Large asymmetries in economic size and negotiating power can create perceptions of coercion rather than partnership, weakening mutual trust.  
**Eg: India’s trade asymmetry with Nepal and Bangladesh**, where India accounts for a dominant share of imports, has periodically fuelled domestic political narratives of over-dependence, noted in **MEA Parliamentary Standing Committee reports**.
2. **Politicisation of economic and connectivity linkages:** Economic dependence can spill over into political sensitivities during bilateral disagreements.  
**Eg: Nepal–India trade and transit disruptions (2015)** reinforced perceptions of vulnerability, frequently cited in **policy analyses and MEA briefings**.
3. **Strategic hedging by smaller neighbours:** Perceived imbalance may encourage neighbours to seek alternative external partners.  
**Eg: Sri Lanka and Nepal expanding economic engagement with China** through infrastructure and investment projects, referenced in **MEA annual reports and strategic assessments**.
4. **Operational constraints on regional institutions:** Diplomatic friction limits consensus-building and effectiveness of regional groupings.  
**Eg: SAARC’s prolonged stagnation**, acknowledged by **MEA statements**, reflects how trust deficits impede regional cooperation.
5. **Erosion of India’s benign leadership image:** Persistent asymmetry-related tensions dilute India’s claim of being a net security provider and development partner.  
**Eg: Debates around India’s regional role in Track-II dialogues and ORF analyses** highlight reputational challenges.

## Ways to mitigate risks arising from asymmetric interdependence

1. **Value-based diplomacy rooted in constitutional principles:** India's regional engagement should align with its constitutional commitment to peaceful cooperation.  
**Eg: Article 51 of the Constitution of India** guides India to promote international peace and respect international law, repeatedly invoked in **MEA policy articulations**.
2. **Institutionalised and rule-based dialogue:** Predictable mechanisms reduce arbitrariness and manage asymmetries constructively.  
**Eg: Joint commissions and bilateral dialogue platforms** with neighbours, documented in **MEA annual reports**, help depoliticise sensitive issues.
3. **Partnership-oriented development cooperation:** Shifting from donor-recipient models to co-created projects enhances ownership and trust.  
**Eg: India's Development Partnership Administration** emphasises demand-driven assistance, as noted in **MEA DPA reports**.
4. **Transparency and data-sharing practices:** Open information flows reduce suspicion and misperception.  
**Eg: Cross-border power trade and connectivity data sharing** in South Asia, cited in **World Bank and MEA documents**, has improved confidence.
5. **Multilateralisation of regional cooperation:** Embedding bilateral ties within wider regional frameworks reduces asymmetry pressures.  
**Eg: India's engagement through BIMSTEC and IORA**, highlighted in **MEA strategic outlooks**, spreads responsibilities and benefits.

### **Conclusion**

Asymmetric interdependence is inevitable in India's neighbourhood, but diplomatic friction is not. Through constitutional values, institutional dialogue and partnership-based regionalism, India can transform asymmetry into a source of stability and cooperative leadership.

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

**Q. Strategic partnerships today are as much about norm-setting as they are about bilateral interests. Explain this statement in the context of India-France relations. Assess how such partnerships shape global governance debates. (10 M)**

### **Introduction**

As multilateral institutions struggle to respond effectively to new-age challenges such as climate change, emerging technologies, and geopolitical contestation, strategic partnerships have evolved into platforms for shaping global norms. The **India–France partnership** reflects this shift, combining pursuit of national interests with active participation in global rule-making.

### **Body**

#### **India–France relations as a norm-setting strategic partnership**

1. **Commitment to rules-based international order:** India and France converge on upholding international law and multilateralism as stabilising norms in global politics.

**Eg:** Both countries consistently emphasise respect for **international law, UN Charter principles, and peaceful dispute resolution**, particularly in the **Indo-Pacific**, signalling normative opposition to unilateral coercion.

2. **Climate governance leadership:** The partnership has played a pioneering role in embedding climate responsibility and equity into global governance frameworks.

**Eg:** The **International Solar Alliance launched in 2015** by India and France institutionalised the norm of **renewable energy as a shared global public good**, prioritising developing country access.

3. **Norm-setting in emerging technologies:** India–France cooperation increasingly targets ethical governance of frontier technologies beyond immediate economic interests.

**Eg:** Joint leadership in global **AI dialogues and summits** has advanced norms on **responsible innovation, safety, and accountability**, shaping early international consensus on AI governance.

4. **Maritime norms and global commons:** The partnership promotes shared standards for securing and governing common spaces.

**Eg:** Cooperation under the **Indo-Pacific framework** reinforces norms of **freedom of navigation, maritime domain awareness, and respect for international maritime law**.

5. **Strategic autonomy with value convergence:** India–France ties reflect norm-setting among democracies without rigid alliance structures.

**Eg:** France’s support for India’s **strategic autonomy and independent foreign policy choices** reinforces pluralism as a legitimate norm in international relations.

### How such partnerships shape global governance debates

1. **Broadening participation in norm creation:** Strategic partnerships help diversify global governance by incorporating perspectives of developing countries.

**Eg:** India–France collaboration ensures **Global South priorities** such as climate finance, technology access, and capacity building enter mainstream global debates.

2. **Bridging technology and ethics:** The partnership demonstrates that innovation-led growth can coexist with rights-based governance frameworks.

**Eg:** Emphasis on ethical technology aligns with India’s constitutional values under **Articles 14 and 21**, influencing global debates on technology regulation.

3. **Strengthening minilateral norm incubators:** Such partnerships act as testing grounds for norms before wider multilateral adoption.

**Eg:** India–France coordination in forums like the **G20** helps translate emerging norms into broader international acceptance.

4. **Reinforcing governance of global commons:** Cooperation shapes discourse on oceans, climate, and digital spaces as shared resources.

**Eg:** Joint focus on **sustainable maritime security and climate resilience** strengthens commons-based governance narratives.

5. **Driving reform-oriented multilateralism:** The partnership reinforces the idea that legitimacy of global institutions depends on reform and representation.

**Eg:** Consistent French backing of **UN Security Council reform** amplifies India’s normative demand for a more representative global order.

### **Conclusion**

The India–France strategic partnership illustrates how modern diplomacy blends interests with norm

entrepreneurship. As global challenges grow more complex, such partnerships will be central to shaping inclusive, ethical, and resilient global governance architectures.

**Q. Assess the role of India–Germany cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region. Analyse how such engagement complements India’s broader regional strategy. Evaluate its impact on regional stability. (15 M)**

**Introduction**

India’s Indo-Pacific engagement reflects a strategic shift towards **inclusive, rule-based regionalism**, where partnerships with like-minded middle powers enhance stability without formal alliances. Cooperation with **Germany** fits into this calibrated approach amid growing geopolitical uncertainty.

**Body**

**Role of India–Germany cooperation in the Indo-Pacific**

1. **Shared commitment to rules-based order:** India and Germany converge on **international law, UNCLOS and freedom of navigation**, reinforcing normative stability in the Indo-Pacific.  
**Eg:** Germany’s **Indo-Pacific Guidelines (2020)** emphasise **rules-based multilateralism**, aligning with India’s consistent stance in ASEAN-led forums.
2. **European strategic presence without bloc politics:** Germany provides a **non-alliance-based European engagement**, expanding India’s strategic options.  
**Eg:** German naval deployments to the Indo-Pacific in **2021 and 2024** focused on **presence and cooperation**, not military deterrence.
3. **Support for ASEAN centrality:** Cooperation reinforces **ASEAN-led regional architecture**, a core pillar of India’s Indo-Pacific approach.  
**Eg:** Joint statements repeatedly affirm **ASEAN centrality**, consistent with India’s **Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative**.
4. **Development-oriented regional engagement:** India–Germany cooperation extends to **third-country capacity-building**, linking security with development.  
**Eg:** Collaboration in **Africa and Indian Ocean littorals** reflects shared support for **Global South development**, highlighted during recent summits.
5. **Issue-based security cooperation:** Engagement focuses on **maritime security, disaster resilience and non-traditional threats**, avoiding militarisation.  
**Eg:** Emphasis on **maritime commons and HADR cooperation** complements India’s preference for non-escalatory security roles.

**How such engagement complements India’s broader regional strategy**

1. **Reinforcement of Act East and SAGAR:** Germany’s Indo-Pacific outreach adds **European economic and technological depth** to India’s **Act East Policy** and **SAGAR vision**.  
**Eg:** German support for **sustainable connectivity and maritime governance** aligns with India’s regional priorities.
2. **Diversification of strategic partnerships:** Engagement with Germany reduces dependence on a few major powers, strengthening **strategic autonomy**.  
**Eg:** India’s parallel partnerships with **France, Japan and Germany** demonstrate issue-based coalitions rather than rigid alignments.
3. **Economic-security convergence:** Germany’s focus on **resilient supply chains** complements India’s regional economic security goals.  
**Eg:** Bilateral discussions in **2024–25** highlighted **trusted supply chains and critical technologies** in the Indo-Pacific context.

4. **Normative diplomacy rooted in constitutional values:** India's engagement reflects **Article 51 of the Constitution**, promoting peaceful international relations.  
**Eg:** India's preference for dialogue-based regionalism is reinforced through cooperation with norm-focused partners like Germany.
5. **Multilateralism over unilateral dominance:** Cooperation strengthens **inclusive multilateral platforms** rather than exclusive groupings.  
**Eg:** Joint emphasis on **ASEAN-led mechanisms and UN-based norms** complements India's balanced Indo-Pacific strategy.

### Impact on regional stability

1. **Moderating influence of middle-power cooperation:** India–Germany engagement adds a **stabilising layer** between major-power rivalries.  
**Eg:** Germany's diplomatic emphasis on **peaceful dispute resolution** aligns with India's consistent regional messaging.
2. **Strengthening of regional institutions:** Support for ASEAN reduces risks of institutional marginalisation by great-power competition.  
**Eg:** Continued backing of **ASEAN centrality** helps preserve regional balance and smaller-state agency.
3. **Positive maritime security externalities:** Cooperation enhances **maritime awareness and confidence-building** without escalation.  
**Eg:** German naval port calls in the **Indian Ocean** signal commitment to **maritime commons security**.
4. **Linking development with stability:** Joint development initiatives address structural vulnerabilities that often fuel instability.  
**Eg:** India–Germany projects in the **Global South** integrate **infrastructure, sustainability and governance** goals.
5. **Limited but credible deterrence through norms:** While not a security alliance, cooperation reinforces **predictability and transparency**.  
**Eg:** Emphasis on **international law and open sea lanes** indirectly discourages coercive behaviour in the region.

### Conclusion

India–Germany cooperation strengthens **normative stability, strategic diversification and inclusive multilateralism** in the Indo-Pacific. As power rivalries intensify, such middle-power engagement can act as a **buffer against polarisation**, advancing India's vision of a **free, open and balanced regional order**.

**Q. India's engagement with Iran increasingly reflects strategic caution rather than strategic withdrawal. Examine the statement in the context of Iran's internal instability. Assess its implications for India's West Asia policy. (10 M)**

#### Introduction

India's engagement with Iran has entered a phase of calibrated restraint shaped by sanctions, regional volatility and Iran's recent internal unrest. This reflects a conscious strategy of caution to preserve long-term interests without provoking strategic costs.

#### Body

##### Strategic caution in India's engagement with Iran

1. **Maintenance of diplomatic channels:** India has kept embassy-level engagement and official communication open, signalling continuity despite instability.  
**Eg: MEA statements during Iran's 2024–25 unrest** focused on safety of Indian nationals and stability, avoiding political commentary (Source: **Ministry of External Affairs**).
2. **Selective functional cooperation:** India continues engagement only in permitted and strategically essential sectors, avoiding exposure to sanctions risk.  
**Eg: Operational continuity at Chabahar Port**, despite tightened Western sanctions, reflects cautious engagement without expansion (Source: **MEA briefings**).
3. **Avoidance of public political alignment:** India has refrained from taking sides on Iran's internal political developments, consistent with its foreign policy tradition.  
**Eg: India's stance aligns with Article 51 of the Constitution**, emphasising sovereignty and non-interference.
4. **Risk-averse economic posture:** India has limited trade and financial exposure to Iran while keeping diplomatic options open.  
**Eg: Suspension of large-scale oil imports since 2019**, despite historical energy ties, shows economic caution rather than disengagement.
5. **Balancing external pressures:** India calibrates Iran engagement carefully to avoid friction with key partners such as the U.S. and Israel.  
**Eg: India maintains strong ties with Israel and Gulf states** while sustaining minimal strategic engagement with Iran (Source: **MEA annual reports**).

### **Implications for India's West Asia policy**

1. **Strengthening of strategic autonomy:** India's Iran approach reflects an effort to preserve independent decision-making amid regional polarisation.  
**Eg: India avoids bloc-based alignment in U.S.–Israel–Iran tensions**, consistent with its autonomous foreign policy posture.
2. **Limits on connectivity ambitions:** Iran's instability constrains the pace and scope of India's westward connectivity plans.  
**Eg: Slow progress in extending Chabahar-linked routes to Central Asia** highlights the impact of internal unrest and sanctions.
3. **Shift towards multi-vector West Asia engagement:** India increasingly diversifies partnerships to reduce over-dependence on any single regional actor.  
**Eg: Deepening economic and strategic ties with UAE and Saudi Arabia** alongside limited Iran engagement.
4. **Reduced scope for economic diplomacy:** Sanctions and instability restrict India's trade, investment and energy options in Iran.  
**Eg: Absence of rupee-rial trade mechanisms at scale** limits economic engagement despite diplomatic presence.
5. **Preference for stability-centric diplomacy:** India's West Asia policy prioritises regional stability over ideological positioning.  
**Eg: India consistently calls for de-escalation and restraint** in West Asia conflicts, including Iran-related tensions (Source: **MEA statements**).

### **Conclusion**

India's Iran policy reflects strategic caution designed to preserve long-term interests without strategic overreach. For India's West Asia policy, this underscores a pragmatic emphasis on autonomy, stability and diversification in an increasingly volatile region.

**Q. "India–EU relations are increasingly shaped by strategic necessity rather than diplomatic symbolism". Assess the structural drivers behind this shift. Examine its implications for India's external engagement strategy. (10 M)**

### **Introduction**

India–EU relations are increasingly anchored in material interests rather than ceremonial engagement. Shifting global geopolitics, economic uncertainty, and strategic convergence have transformed the partnership into one driven by necessity.

### **Body**

#### **Structural drivers behind the shift in India–EU relations**

- 1. Global trade fragmentation and tariff uncertainty:** Erosion of multilateral trade norms has compelled both sides to secure stable and predictable economic partnerships.  
**Eg: Acceleration of India–EU FTA negotiations amid renewed tariff pressures from major economies** shows a shift from symbolic engagement to trade security–driven cooperation.
- 2. Supply chain diversification and de-risking:** Strategic vulnerabilities exposed by global shocks have made diversification imperative.  
**Eg: EU's pursuit of trusted partners outside China-centric supply chains** aligns with India's emergence as an alternative manufacturing and logistics hub.
- 3. Technology and investment complementarities:** Europe's technological strength complements India's scale, skills, and growth ambitions.  
**Eg: Deepening cooperation in clean energy, digital technologies, and advanced manufacturing** reflects a shift towards outcome-based strategic collaboration.
- 4. Geopolitical convergence in a multipolar order:** Shared concerns over global instability have fostered strategic alignment beyond normative dialogue.  
**Eg: Regular India–EU summits and coordination on Indo-Pacific stability** underline pragmatic convergence rooted in geopolitical necessity.
- 5. Limits of symbolic diplomacy:** Ceremonial engagement alone has proven insufficient in addressing contemporary strategic challenges.  
**Eg: Transition from value-centric rhetoric to sector-specific cooperation frameworks** indicates maturation of the partnership into a necessity-driven relationship.

#### **Implications for India's external engagement strategy**

- 1. Diversification of strategic partnerships:** India's diplomacy is increasingly multi-vector rather than alliance-centric.  
**Eg: Parallel deepening of ties with the EU alongside engagements with the US and Indo-Pacific partners** enhances strategic flexibility.
- 2. Strengthening strategic autonomy:** Interest-based partnerships reduce dependence on any single power bloc.

**Eg: Leveraging India–EU cooperation to offset pressures from protectionism and export controls** reinforces autonomous decision-making.

3. **Trade diplomacy as strategic statecraft:** Economic agreements are becoming tools of geopolitical positioning.

**Eg: Using FTAs to secure market access, technology, and standards influence** signals a strategic recalibration of India’s trade policy.

4. **Elevation of technology-led foreign policy:** External engagement increasingly supports domestic transformation goals.

**Eg: Linking external partnerships with infrastructure expansion, job creation, and green transition objectives** aligns diplomacy with development.

5. **Pragmatic multilateralism:** India’s external strategy prioritises outcomes over ideological alignment.

**Eg: Selective issue-based cooperation with the EU on trade, technology, and security** reflects a results-oriented foreign policy approach.

### Conclusion

India–EU relations now reflect strategic realism rather than diplomatic pageantry. This shift strengthens India’s external engagement by combining autonomy, diversification, and development-driven diplomacy in an increasingly uncertain world order.

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

**Q. “Soft power today functions less as passive attraction and more as an instrument of strategic communication.” Discuss this assertion. Analyse its application in India’s foreign policy. Examine the limitations of relying on soft power in contemporary international relations. (15 M)**

### Introduction

In an era marked by narrative competition, information warfare and diplomatic signalling, influence is no longer exercised only through force or economic leverage. Soft power has consequently evolved from passive attraction into a conscious instrument of strategic communication shaping global perceptions.

### Body

#### Soft power as an active instrument of strategic communication

1. **Narrative construction and messaging:** States now deploy soft power deliberately to frame their worldview, priorities and intentions in global discourse.  
**Eg: India’s projection of “Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam” during the G20 Presidency 2023** as a consistent narrative of inclusive global governance.
2. **Norm entrepreneurship:** Soft power is used to actively promote norms and ideas in international institutions rather than merely showcasing culture.  
**Eg: India’s leadership in promoting the International Day of Yoga since 2014**, embedding wellness within global normative frameworks.
3. **Issue-based agenda setting:** Countries employ soft power to draw attention to specific global challenges aligned with their interests.

**Eg: India's emphasis on climate justice and lifestyle-based sustainability through the LiFE initiative** at multilateral platforms.

4. **Strategic audience targeting:** Soft power messaging is customised for different regions and partners to convey reassurance or leadership.

**Eg: India's outreach to the Global South through development cooperation and concessional assistance.**

5. **Reputation management in contested spaces:** Soft power is increasingly used to counter adverse narratives and project credibility.

**Eg: India's consistent articulation of itself as a responsible nuclear power despite being outside the NPT.**

### Application of soft power in India's foreign policy

1. **Civilisational diplomacy:** India leverages its historical and cultural depth to reinforce legitimacy and long-term partnerships.

**Eg: Buddhist heritage diplomacy with East and Southeast Asian countries under the Act East Policy.**

2. **Diaspora diplomacy:** The Indian diaspora acts as a bridge enhancing India's influence in host countries.

**Eg: Large-scale diaspora engagements during overseas visits by Indian leadership,** strengthening people-to-people ties.

3. **Development partnership model:** India projects itself as a cooperative development partner rather than a donor imposing conditions.

**Eg: Capacity-building and training under the ITEC programme across Asia, Africa and Latin America.**

4. **Multilateral moral positioning:** India aligns soft power with constitutional and ethical commitments in global forums.

**Eg: Article 51 of the Constitution guiding India's consistent support for peaceful resolution of disputes and international law.**

5. **Humanitarian and disaster diplomacy:** India uses rapid humanitarian assistance to build goodwill and trust.

**Eg: Disaster relief operations and emergency assistance extended to neighbouring and Indian Ocean countries.**

### Limitations of relying on soft power

1. **Inadequacy in hard security contexts:** Soft power has limited influence in situations involving territorial disputes or military coercion.

**Eg: Persistent border tensions with China despite extensive cultural and civilisational linkages.**

2. **Dependence on domestic credibility:** Internal governance challenges can weaken external soft power messaging.

**Eg: Global scrutiny of democratic practices affecting the persuasiveness of India's normative claims.**

3. **Symbolism without delivery:** Excessive reliance on symbolism without tangible outcomes risks dilution of credibility.

**Eg: Delayed implementation of some overseas development projects reducing persuasive impact.**

4. **Asymmetric reception:** Soft power signals may not be interpreted uniformly across different political and cultural contexts.

**Eg: Limited resonance of India's civilisational narratives in purely interest-driven power politics.**

5. **Competition from rival narratives:** Soft power effectiveness is constrained by competing influence campaigns of other states.

**Eg: China's parallel use of economic statecraft and narrative-building in the Global South.**

## Conclusion

Soft power has become an active instrument of strategic communication in India's foreign policy toolkit, amplifying its voice in a fragmented global order. Yet, its durability depends on consistency between values, delivery and material capabilities, making it effective only as part of a balanced national power strategy.

**Q. India–US relations have entered a phase of strategic inertia rather than strategic drift. Identify the structural factors contributing to this inertia. Analyse its implications for India's foreign policy autonomy. (10 M)**

## Introduction

India–US relations are marked today not by confrontation or decline, but by a sustained absence of strategic momentum, where engagement continues without transformative direction. This phase has important consequences for India's foreign policy choices in a fluid global order.

## Nature of strategic inertia in India–US relations

1. **Continuity without strategic escalation:** Bilateral cooperation persists across defence, diplomacy, and multilateral platforms, yet without new agenda-setting initiatives.  
**Eg: Regular QUAD meetings and defence dialogues** have continued in recent years but without expansion into binding security or economic commitments.
2. **Absence of catalytic turning points:** Unlike earlier phases driven by major shocks or recalibration moments, the current phase lacks triggers for strategic redefinition.  
**Eg: No breakthrough agreement comparable to the 2005 civil nuclear cooperation framework** has emerged in the recent decade.
3. **Issue-specific and transactional engagement:** Interactions increasingly revolve around narrow, short-term issues rather than long-term strategic convergence.  
**Eg: Trade discussions dominated by tariffs and market access concerns**, instead of negotiations for a comprehensive bilateral trade framework.
4. **Reduced political centrality of India:** India does not occupy a consistently prominent position in US foreign policy priorities.  
**Eg: US strategic attention largely concentrated on China, Europe, and domestic economic issues**, with limited India-focused policy articulation.

## Structural factors contributing to this inertia

1. **Absence of a clearly articulated US India policy:** Lack of a long-term strategic framework constrains forward movement in bilateral ties.

**Eg: No formal, publicly articulated India-specific strategy** guiding US engagement across administrations.

2. **Weakening of congressional activism on India:** Legislative engagement that earlier sustained the relationship has diminished.

**Eg: Reduced frequency of substantive India-related initiatives and debates** in recent congressional terms.

3. **Over-reliance on leader-level diplomacy:** Excessive emphasis on summitry has limited the depth of institutional linkages.

**Eg: Inconsistent follow-through by working-level mechanisms and policy dialogues** beyond high-profile meetings.

4. **Mismatch in strategic expectations:** India seeks a long-term partnership, while the US often prioritises immediate transactional outcomes.

**Eg: US pressure on India over energy sourcing choices** without parallel accommodation of India's strategic and developmental needs.

### **Implications for India's foreign policy autonomy**

1. **Expanded diplomatic flexibility:** Reduced strategic pressure allows India to maintain diversified external engagements.

**Eg: Parallel deepening of ties with Russia, West Asia, and the Global South** alongside engagement with the US.

2. **Uncertainty in advanced technology cooperation:** Strategic inertia limits predictability in access to critical technologies.

**Eg: Slow progress in high-end defence and digital technology collaboration** despite existing agreements.

3. **Constraints in long-term strategic alignment:** Lack of clarity complicates India's balancing role in the Indo-Pacific.

**Eg: Careful Indian positioning within regional security initiatives** to avoid premature alignment commitments.

4. **Reinforcement of strategic autonomy as a guiding principle:** India increasingly anchors its foreign policy in independent decision-making.

**Eg: Article 51 of the Constitution**, which underscores sovereign and peaceful international engagement.

### **Way forward**

1. **Institutionalising bilateral engagement:** Strengthen bureaucratic, legislative, and Track-2 mechanisms beyond leadership-level diplomacy.

**Eg: Regularised strategic, economic, and technology dialogues** with clear mandates and outcomes.

2. **Issue-based selective convergence:** Cooperate deeply with the US where interests align, without overextension.

**Eg: Collaboration on climate action, resilient supply chains, and maritime security** on clearly defined terms.

3. **Leveraging multipolar platforms:** Use diversified partnerships to balance and stabilise India–US engagement.  
**Eg: Active leadership roles in G20, BRICS, and Indo-Pacific groupings** to shape global norms.
4. **Clear strategic signalling:** Communicate India’s priorities and red lines consistently while maintaining diplomatic restraint.  
**Eg: Explicit articulation of strategic autonomy** in official statements and policy documents.

### Conclusion

Strategic inertia in India–US relations presents neither automatic risk nor guaranteed opportunity. By reinforcing institutional depth while preserving autonomy, India can convert stagnation into strategic flexibility suited to a multipolar world.

**Q. The next global order will be shaped less by markets and more by managed coalitions. Explain this statement in the context of emerging technology alliances. Assess the strategic logic behind such coalitions. Evaluate India’s constraints and opportunities within this framework. (15 M)**

### Introduction

The international system is witnessing a structural shift where **strategic coordination among trusted states increasingly overrides market-driven outcomes**. In critical technologies, power now flows less from efficiency and more from **state-managed coalitions shaped by security, trust and control over chokepoints**.

### Body

#### Markets yielding to managed coalitions

1. **Weaponisation of interdependence:** Economic openness is now treated as a strategic vulnerability, prompting states to actively regulate technology and trade flows.  
**Eg: US export controls on advanced semiconductors since 2022** illustrate how national security considerations override free-market logic in strategic sectors.
2. **Erosion of neutral multilateralism:** Universal trade rules are increasingly ineffective in disciplining geo-economic rivalry, pushing states towards selective coalitions.  
**Eg: Paralysis of the WTO dispute settlement mechanism since 2019** has accelerated reliance on plurilateral technology and supply-chain arrangements.
3. **Strategic reclassification of technology:** Advanced technologies are no longer viewed as mere commercial goods but as assets central to national power.  
**Eg: Artificial intelligence and semiconductors designated as strategic sectors** in major national security strategies after 2021.
4. **Revival of state-led industrial policy:** Governments now actively shape production location, investment and technology choices.  
**Eg: Large-scale subsidy regimes in the US and EU for chip manufacturing** aimed at reshoring and securing critical capacities.
5. **Fragmentation of globalisation:** The integrated global market is giving way to multiple trusted production ecosystems.  
**Eg: Friend-shoring and near-shoring strategies** adopted to reduce exposure to geopolitical shocks.

## Strategic logic behind emerging technology coalitions

1. **Supply-chain resilience over cost efficiency:** Stability and continuity are prioritised even at higher economic costs.  
**Eg: Diversification of critical mineral sourcing away from concentrated geographies** despite higher production expenses.
2. **Trust-based membership criteria:** Political alignment, regulatory compatibility and data security outweigh market size alone.  
**Eg: Selective technology-sharing arrangements restricted to trusted partners** rather than all major economies.
3. **Collective leverage against adversaries:** Acting in concert enhances bargaining power and deterrence.  
**Eg: Coordinated economic responses to technology restrictions** by aligned economies to counter unilateral pressure.
4. **Rule-setting ambition:** Early coalition members seek to shape standards that later become global norms.  
**Eg: Joint initiatives to influence AI governance and digital infrastructure standards** by advanced economies.
5. **Strategic signalling through inclusion and exclusion:** Membership conveys recognition, while delay signals capability gaps.  
**Eg: Phased or delayed induction of partners into technology groupings** used as subtle diplomatic signalling.

## India's constraints and opportunities within this framework

1. **Structural constraint in critical technology nodes:** India lacks control over key chokepoints in high-tech supply chains.  
**Eg: Continued dependence on imported advanced semiconductors** despite rapidly growing domestic demand.
2. **Capability gap in capital-intensive technologies:** India's strengths remain concentrated in services rather than deep-tech manufacturing.  
**Eg: Absence of commercially mature large-scale semiconductor fabrication plants.**
3. **Geopolitical credibility as an opportunity:** Democratic credentials and Indo-Pacific centrality enhance India's acceptability as a partner.  
**Eg: India's expanding role in Indo-Pacific strategic frameworks** strengthens its coalition relevance beyond pure capability metrics.
4. **Policy alignment opportunity:** Domestic economic strategy increasingly mirrors coalition-driven security logic.  
**Eg: Targeted incentives for electronics, semiconductors and clean technologies** reflect a shift from laissez-faire approaches.
5. **Latent leverage from market scale:** India's large market can translate into bargaining power if matched with capability creation.  
**Eg: Using domestic demand to anchor trusted supply-chain relocation** by partner countries over the medium term.

## Conclusion

As managed coalitions eclipse markets in shaping the global order, India's central challenge is to **convert geopolitical trust into technological indispensability**. Sustained capability-building can enable India to move from a peripheral participant to a **rule-influencing stakeholder in the coalition-driven global system**.

**Q. The proposed Board of Peace reflects an attempt at alternative multilateralism rather than an outright rejection of the existing multilateral order. Examine the validity of this statement. Analyse its implications for global governance institutions. Also discuss the considerations that should guide India's engagement with such initiatives. (15 M)**

## Introduction

Global governance is undergoing a phase of institutional stress marked by slow decision-making and geopolitical deadlocks. In this context, newer peace mechanisms indicate adaptive responses within multilateralism rather than its abandonment.

## Body

### Validity of the claim that the Board of Peace represents alternative multilateralism

- Functional supplementation of existing institutions:** The Board of Peace seeks to perform specific governance and oversight functions without formally displacing established multilateral bodies.  
**Eg: Supervision of transitional governance in Gaza** while formal authority over peace and security remains with existing international frameworks.
- Pragmatic response to multilateral gridlock:** The initiative emerges from frustration with prolonged stalemates rather than ideological opposition to multilateralism.  
**Eg: Repeated deadlocks in consensus-based forums on West Asian conflicts** have encouraged flexible institutional experimentation.
- Issue-based coalition model:** The Board reflects selective participation focused on a defined conflict rather than universal membership.  
**Eg: Invitation-based participation of willing states** to address governance and reconstruction challenges in Gaza.
- Continuity with multilateral objectives:** The stated goals of peace, stability, and reconstruction align with core multilateral norms.  
**Eg: Emphasis on ceasefire consolidation, humanitarian relief, and redevelopment** mirrors long-standing multilateral priorities.
- Absence of formal institutional exit:** No withdrawal from existing global institutions accompanies the initiative, reinforcing its adaptive nature.  
**Eg: Continued engagement of participating states with UN-led diplomatic processes** alongside the Board.

### Implications for global governance institutions

- Dilution of universal representation:** Limited participation risks weakening the principle of inclusive global decision-making.

**Eg: Smaller and non-invited states remaining outside peace governance frameworks** affecting outcomes.

2. **Precedent for parallel governance structures:** Success of such mechanisms may normalise bypassing established institutions.

**Eg: Proliferation of ad hoc peace platforms** operating alongside formal multilateral bodies.

3. **Concentration of agenda-setting power:** Leadership by a few states may skew priorities and timelines.

**Eg: Major power dominance in steering peace initiatives** influencing resource allocation and governance design.

4. **Fragmentation of global governance:** Multiple overlapping mechanisms can reduce coherence and predictability.

**Eg: Simultaneous operation of UN mechanisms and non-UN boards** complicating coordination.

5. **Erosion of institutional legitimacy:** Perceived exclusivity can weaken acceptance of outcomes on the ground.

**Eg: Questioning of neutrality and ownership by affected populations** in externally supervised governance models.

### Considerations guiding India's engagement

1. **Commitment to principled multilateralism:** India must ensure engagement does not undermine its long-standing support for UN-centred governance.

**Eg: India's consistent advocacy of reformed multilateralism** anchored in inclusivity and rule-based order.

2. **Preservation of strategic autonomy:** Participation should not constrain India's independent foreign policy choices.

**Eg: India's cautious approach to non-UN security deployments** reflecting autonomy concerns.

3. **Consistency with normative positions:** Engagement must align with India's stated support for peaceful and negotiated conflict resolution.

**Eg: India's reiteration of the two-state solution** as the basis for West Asian peace.

4. **Clarity on scope and mandate:** India should seek clear boundaries on roles, responsibilities, and duration.

**Eg: Avoidance of open-ended commitments** in governance or security roles.

5. **Assessment of reputational and regional impact:** India must weigh diplomatic gains against potential regional sensitivities.

**Eg: Balancing ties with Israel, Palestine, and the wider West Asian region** while engaging in peace initiatives.

### **Conclusion**

The Board of Peace reflects adaptive multilateralism responding to institutional constraints rather than a rejection of global cooperation. India's engagement must remain calibrated—combining strategic pragmatism with principled commitment to an inclusive and legitimate global order.

**Q. “In a world of great power rivalry, middle powers are relevant only if they act collectively”. Assess this statement in the context of the changing global order. Analyse its implications for multilateral cooperation. (10 M)**

### **Introduction**

The contemporary international system is marked by sharpened great power rivalry, selective rule observance and weakening multilateral institutions. In this context, the relevance of middle powers increasingly depends on their ability to aggregate influence rather than act in isolation.

### **Body**

#### **In a world of great power rivalry, middle powers are relevant only if they act collectively**

1. **Asymmetric power concentration:** Great powers dominate agenda-setting through economic, military and technological leverage, reducing the standalone bargaining capacity of middle powers.  
**Eg:** UN Security Council decision-making reflects entrenched power asymmetries, as noted in repeated reform deadlocks highlighted in UN Secretary-General reports (2023–24).
2. **Erosion of rules-based predictability:** Selective compliance with international law weakens protections that middle powers traditionally relied upon.  
**Eg:** Paralysis of the WTO Appellate Body since 2019, documented by WTO annual reports, has reduced dispute resolution options for non-hegemonic states.
3. **Collective leverage through aggregation:** Acting together allows middle powers to pool markets, norms and diplomatic weight to counter coercion.  
**Eg:** Coordinated positions by G20 middle economies on debt relief during post-pandemic recovery enhanced their negotiating capacity, as noted by the IMF (2022).
4. **Risk of bilateral subordination:** Bilateral engagement with hegemon often places middle powers in structurally weaker negotiating positions.  
**Eg:** Trade and technology negotiations increasingly show “take-it-or-leave-it” dynamics, analysed in OECD Global Trade Outlook 2023.
5. **Normative relevance through coalitions:** Collective action preserves relevance by shaping norms even when enforcement is weak.  
**Eg:** Issue-based coalitions on climate finance within UNFCCC COP processes have amplified the voice of middle-income countries.

#### **Implications for multilateral cooperation**

1. **Shift towards plurilateralism:** Collective action is increasingly organised through flexible, issue-based groupings rather than universal institutions.  
**Eg:** The Quad functions as a coordination platform on maritime security and technology without formal treaty obligations, as outlined in MEA statements (2023–24).
2. **Reframing multilateral institutions:** Middle power coalitions can push incremental reforms rather than wholesale institutional overhaul.  
**Eg:** Joint reform advocacy by middle powers on UN peacekeeping mandates has influenced operational reviews cited in UN DPKO assessments.
3. **Shared strategic autonomy:** Collective resilience reduces the costs of unilateral self-reliance while preserving openness.

**Eg:** Collaborative supply chain initiatives on critical minerals among non-hegemonic states are discussed in **IEA Critical Minerals Review 2024**.

4. **Strengthening normative legitimacy:** Acting together enhances credibility when defending international norms consistently.

**Eg:** Coordinated diplomatic positions on territorial integrity align with **Article 51(c) of the Indian Constitution**, which urges respect for international law and treaty obligations.

5. **Preventing fragmentation:** Middle power cooperation mitigates the drift towards a fragmented “world of blocs”.

**Eg:** Bridge-building efforts between regional trade frameworks are emphasised in **World Economic Forum Global Risks Report 2025**.

## Conclusion

In an era of unconstrained power politics, middle powers remain relevant not through isolation but through collective action. Effective multilateral cooperation will increasingly depend on flexible coalitions that pool strength, uphold norms and preserve strategic autonomy.

**Q. The Asia-Pacific trade slowdown signals a structural realignment, not a cyclical downturn. Assess the factors driving this realignment. Analyse its impact on regional economic diplomacy. Discuss the strategic adjustments required by India. (15 M)**

## Introduction

Asia-Pacific’s trade deceleration reflects a deeper transformation in how global commerce is organised, driven by geopolitics, technology and risk considerations rather than short-term demand cycles. This shift has long-term consequences for regional diplomacy and India’s external economic strategy.

## Body

### Factors driving the structural realignment

1. **Geopolitics-driven de-risking over efficiency:** Heightened strategic rivalry and sanctions uncertainty have pushed firms to diversify supply chains instead of maximising cost efficiency, altering trade geography structurally.  
**Eg:** UN-ESCAP Asia-Pacific Trade and Investment Briefs 2025-26 note firms prioritising risk diversification and reshoring, even as merchandise trade growth slowed to a projected **0.6% in 2026**.
2. **Fragmentation of the multilateral trade order:** Weakening of the WTO dispute settlement system and tariff uncertainty have reduced predictability, embedding long-term caution in trade flows.  
**Eg:** WTO Appellate Body paralysis since 2019 has encouraged unilateral tariff actions and defensive trade policies across major economies.
3. **Shift from goods-led to services-led trade:** Structural expansion of digital and modern services has decoupled trade growth from traditional manufacturing cycles.  
**Eg:** ESCAP 2025 reports **13% growth in ICT and computer services exports**, far outpacing merchandise trade.
4. **Reorientation of FDI towards market proximity and innovation:** Investment decisions now prioritise access to markets and technology ecosystems rather than low-cost production.  
**Eg:** UNCTAD World Investment Report 2025 shows declining capital intensity of greenfield FDI alongside rising project numbers.

5. **Regionalisation through preferential trade agreements:** Expansion of mega-regionals has structurally redirected trade within blocs rather than globally.  
**Eg:** Asia-Pacific accounts for **61% of active PTAs globally**, including **RCEP** and **CPTPP** (ESCAP, 2025).

### **Impact on regional economic diplomacy**

1. **From multilateralism to plurilateralism:** Economic diplomacy increasingly revolves around selective coalitions rather than universal rules.  
**Eg:** Growth of **mini-FTAs and issue-specific agreements** on supply-chain resilience and digital trade in East and South-East Asia.
2. **Strategic use of trade as a geopolitical instrument:** Trade policies are now closely aligned with security and strategic objectives.  
**Eg:** **US-EU near-shoring policies** encouraging Asia-Pacific firms to relocate production closer to trusted markets.
3. **Rising centrality of digital trade governance:** Diplomacy now focuses on data flows, standards and digital public infrastructure.  
**Eg:** Asia-Pacific participation in **12 of the world's 16 Digital Trade Agreements** (ESCAP, 2025).
4. **Marginalisation risks for less-developed economies:** Fragmented rules and high compliance costs disadvantage smaller economies.  
**Eg:** **ESCAP 2025** highlights challenges for Pacific island states in meeting sustainability and digital standards embedded in PTAs.
5. **Re-balancing of regional leadership roles:** Countries with regulatory capacity and market depth gain diplomatic leverage.  
**Eg:** **ASEAN's convening role in RCEP** negotiations has strengthened its diplomatic centrality.

### **Strategic adjustments required by India**

1. **Adopting a calibrated trade diplomacy:** India must balance strategic autonomy with selective integration through high-quality agreements.  
**Eg:** India's engagement with **India-EU FTA negotiations (revived in 2022)** reflects this calibrated approach.
2. **Leveraging services and digital strengths:** Diplomatic focus should prioritise rules on data, services mobility and digital public goods.  
**Eg:** Promotion of **India Stack and DPI** in G20 and Indo-Pacific forums (G20 New Delhi Leaders' Declaration, 2023).
3. **Positioning as a trusted supply-chain partner:** India should align industrial policy with global de-risking trends.  
**Eg:** **Production Linked Incentive schemes** targeting electronics and green technologies to attract diversified supply chains.
4. **Strengthening regional economic institutions:** Active leadership in regional forums to mitigate fragmentation and ensure inclusivity.  
**Eg:** India's role in **BIMSTEC and IPEF supply-chain pillar** discussions.
5. **Anchoring trade policy in constitutional values:** India's external economic engagement should reflect cooperative internationalism.

**Eg: Article 51(c) of the Constitution** directs the State to foster respect for international law and treaty obligations.

## Conclusion

Asia-Pacific's trade slowdown marks a durable reordering of global commerce. India's response must blend strategic realism with rule-based engagement, leveraging its services strength and diplomatic capital to remain resilient in a fragmented trade order.

**Q. "The end of arms-control regimes marks a shift from regulated rivalry to strategic ambiguity". In this context examine the statement and analyse its impact on crisis stability. Assess its long-term implications for global security. (15 M)**

## Introduction

The erosion of Cold War-era arms-control frameworks has altered the logic of great-power competition, replacing predictable restraint with uncertainty in capabilities, intentions and thresholds. This transition has profound consequences for crisis stability and the long-term architecture of global security.

## Body

### The shift from regulated rivalry to strategic ambiguity

- 1. Loss of transparency and verification:** Arms-control regimes institutionalised data exchange, inspections and ceilings, reducing uncertainty about adversaries' capabilities. Their collapse creates opacity, heightening suspicion and worst-case planning.  
**Eg: New START (2011)** verification mechanisms limited deployed strategic warheads and launchers; its expiry risks ending mutual inspections, as highlighted in **SIPRI Yearbook 2025**.
- 2. Unconstrained force modernisation:** Absence of binding limits encourages qualitative and quantitative arms build-ups, shifting rivalry from rule-based to open-ended competition.  
**Eg: Russia's development of hypersonic systems and U.S. missile defence modernisation** reflect post-treaty strategic signalling rather than negotiated restraint.
- 3. Erosion of mutual reassurance:** Arms-control regimes acted as confidence-building measures that reassured rivals about defensive intent. Their end fuels ambiguity over red lines and escalation thresholds.  
**Eg: U.S.–Russia strategic dialogues suspension post-Ukraine war (2022)** has reduced formal reassurance channels, increasing reliance on signalling through force posture.
- 4. Normalisation of informal diplomacy:** With formal regimes weakened, back-channel diplomacy substitutes institutionalised engagement, making outcomes personality- and context-dependent.  
**Eg: Track-II and private security dialogues** increasingly discussed in global strategic forums, but lack enforceability and continuity.
- 5. Weakening of arms-control norms:** Treaty erosion undermines the normative expectation of restraint, making strategic ambiguity an accepted feature of rivalry.  
**Eg: SIPRI (2024–25)** notes declining faith in legally binding arms-control as major powers prioritise flexibility over predictability.

### Impact on crisis stability

1. **Higher risk of miscalculation:** Ambiguity about capabilities and intentions increases chances of misinterpretation during fast-moving crises.  
**Eg: Cuban Missile Crisis (1962)** lessons influenced later treaties; their absence today removes similar stabilising guardrails, as noted in **UNIDIR analyses**.
2. **Compressed decision-making time:** Advanced delivery systems without agreed limits reduce warning times, forcing leaders into rapid, error-prone decisions.  
**Eg: Hypersonic weapons debates in UN General Assembly First Committee (2023–24)** flagged reduced reaction windows as destabilising.
3. **Escalation dominance dilemmas:** States may believe they can control escalation due to technological edge, undermining mutual deterrence.  
**Eg: U.S. missile defence debates** have been criticised by **SIPRI** for incentivising adversaries to expand offensive arsenals.
4. **Breakdown of crisis communication channels:** Arms-control frameworks often carried parallel communication mechanisms that stabilised crises.  
**Eg: Suspension of several bilateral strategic dialogues after 2022** narrowed formal crisis-management avenues.
5. **Spillover into regional theatres:** Strategic ambiguity at the global level magnifies instability in regional flashpoints.  
**Eg: NATO–Russia tensions** have intensified security dilemmas in Eastern Europe, as reflected in **NATO Strategic Concept 2022**.

#### Long-term implications for global security

1. **Renewed arms-race dynamics:** Absence of ceilings encourages competitive accumulation, diverting resources from development to military spending.  
**Eg: SIPRI Military Expenditure Database 2024** records sustained increases in nuclear-armed states' defence budgets.
2. **Weakening of multilateral disarmament regimes:** Bilateral treaty collapse undermines faith in multilateral frameworks like the **NPT**, affecting compliance incentives.  
**Eg: NPT Review Conference 2022 deadlock** reflected distrust among nuclear and non-nuclear states.
3. **Increased insecurity for non-nuclear states:** Strategic ambiguity among major powers heightens existential risks for states outside deterrence umbrellas.  
**Eg: UN Secretary-General's Agenda for Disarmament** warns that treaty erosion disproportionately harms non-nuclear states.
4. **Normalisation of power-centric security:** Global security governance shifts from rules to raw capability, marginalising smaller states' voices.  
**Eg: UN General Assembly debates (2023–25)** show growing concern over declining rule-based order in security affairs.
5. **Long-term crisis-prone international system:** Persistent ambiguity institutionalises instability, making crises more frequent and harder to manage.  
**Eg: UNIDIR strategic risk assessments** caution that absence of arms-control could make escalation pathways increasingly unpredictable.

#### **Conclusion**

The transition from regulated rivalry to strategic ambiguity undermines crisis stability and entrenches long-

term global insecurity. Rebuilding restraint through adaptive arms-control frameworks and renewed strategic dialogue is essential to prevent ambiguity from becoming a permanent feature of international security.

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

**Q. Bring out the mandate and core functions of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Explain its role in strengthening the international refugee protection regime. (10 M)**

### **Introduction**

Forced displacement has become a structural feature of global politics, driven by conflict, persecution and state fragility. The **United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees**, established in **1950**, forms the institutional backbone of the international response to refugee crises.

### **Body**

#### **Mandate and core functions of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees**

1. **International protection of refugees:** The foremost function is to safeguard refugees' rights, safety and dignity, especially through enforcement of the principle of **non-refoulement**.  
**Eg:** Legal protection and monitoring for **Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh**, preventing forced return despite political pressures.
2. **Supervision of international refugee law:** UNHCR supervises the application of global refugee instruments and supports states in developing compliant domestic legal frameworks.  
**Eg:** Technical guidance to states adopting refugee laws aligned with the **1951 Refugee Convention** and the **1967 Protocol**.
3. **Humanitarian assistance and emergency response:** It delivers shelter, healthcare, education and essential services during sudden displacement crises.  
**Eg:** Emergency shelter, cash assistance and winter support extended to **Ukrainian refugees after 2022**.
4. **Promotion of durable solutions:** UNHCR works to end refugee dependency through voluntary repatriation, local integration and third-country resettlement.  
**Eg:** Facilitating **voluntary repatriation of Afghan refugees** through coordinated tripartite arrangements when conditions permit.
5. **Protection of vulnerable groups:** Special focus is given to women, children, the elderly and persons with disabilities within refugee populations.  
**Eg:** Child protection and education programmes for **South Sudanese refugee children** in East African camps.

#### **Role in strengthening the international refugee protection regime**

1. **Norm creation and interpretation:** UNHCR strengthens the regime by interpreting refugee law in new contexts and developing protection standards.  
**Eg:** Guidance frameworks addressing protection needs of **internally displaced persons** and climate-linked displacement.
2. **Global coordination and burden-sharing:** It coordinates states, UN agencies and humanitarian actors to promote equitable responsibility-sharing.

**Eg:** Mobilising international support for **developing host countries** hosting large refugee populations.

3. **Advocacy for refugee rights:** UNHCR highlights protection gaps and presses states to comply with legal and moral obligations.

**Eg:** Advocacy against **forced returns and prolonged detention** in protracted refugee situations.

4. **Capacity building of host states:** It strengthens national asylum systems, administrative capacity and refugee management institutions.

**Eg:** Support for **asylum registration and documentation systems** in low-income host countries.

5. **Linking humanitarian action with development and peace:** UNHCR increasingly integrates protection with development-oriented approaches to reduce long-term dependency.

**Eg:** Support for **livelihood and self-reliance programmes** in long-standing refugee settlements.

## Conclusion

UNHCR anchors the international refugee protection regime by combining legal guardianship with on-ground operational capacity. Its continued relevance will hinge on sustained multilateral support, predictable financing and closer integration of humanitarian action with peace-building and development efforts.

**Q. “Internal divergences pose a greater challenge to NATO than external threats.” Explain this view. Assess its relevance in the contemporary security environment. (10 M)**

## **Introduction**

The strength of NATO has always flowed from political cohesion rather than sheer military power. In the current security environment, fractures within the alliance increasingly shape its effectiveness and credibility.

## **Body**

### Internal divergences as a greater challenge

1. **Divergent threat perceptions:** NATO members do not share a uniform understanding of threats, weakening consensus on priorities and responses.

**Eg:** **Eastern flank states focus on Russia**, while **southern members emphasise terrorism, migration, and instability in West Asia and North Africa**, diluting strategic coherence.

2. **Burden-sharing disagreements:** Uneven defence spending creates resentment and undermines the sense of shared responsibility central to alliance solidarity.

**Eg:** **Repeated US pressure on European allies over defence spending targets** has generated internal friction rather than collective resolve.

3. **Domestic political constraints:** Leadership changes and populist politics within member states often limit commitment to collective obligations.

**Eg:** **Uncertainty over US commitment to Article 5 during the Trump presidency** raised doubts about the reliability of collective defence.

4. **Consensus-based decision-making bottlenecks:** NATO’s unanimity principle allows individual members to delay or block alliance-wide decisions.

**Eg:** **Prolonged delays in Sweden’s NATO accession** exposed how internal vetoes can stall strategic adaptation.

5. **Value-based divergences:** Differences over democratic norms and rule of law weaken NATO’s identity as a values-based alliance.

**Eg: Concerns over democratic backsliding in some member states** have strained political trust within the alliance.

### **Its relevance in the contemporary security environment**

1. **Credibility of collective defence:** Internal divisions directly weaken the deterrent value of **Article 5**, which depends on political unity rather than automatic response.

**Eg: Ambiguity in alliance resolve** can embolden adversaries to test NATO's red lines.

2. **Exploitation by adversaries:** Fragmentation within NATO creates opportunities for rivals to use hybrid warfare and grey-zone tactics.

**Eg: Cyber attacks and disinformation campaigns by Russia** are designed to exploit political and social cleavages among allies.

3. **Reduced strategic agility:** Internal disagreements slow NATO's ability to respond to fast-evolving security challenges.

**Eg: Delayed consensus on responses to new domains like cyber and space** reflects institutional inertia.

4. **Strain on alliance legitimacy:** Persistent internal discord undermines NATO's claim to defend sovereignty and international norms.

**Eg: Perceived inconsistencies in upholding alliance principles** weaken its moral authority globally.

5. **Pressure on smaller member states:** Internal divergences create insecurity among smaller allies, pushing them to hedge their security options.

**Eg: Smaller NATO members increasingly seek bilateral assurances** alongside alliance commitments.

### **Conclusion**

Internal divergences now pose a systemic challenge to **North Atlantic Treaty Organization**, often more corrosive than external threats. Preserving political unity and trust is therefore essential to sustaining NATO's deterrence and long-term relevance.

### **Q. Evaluate the evolving role of alternative multilateral platforms in a fragmented global order. Discuss their interaction with the United Nations. Assess whether they complement or compete with the UN system. (15 M)**

#### **Introduction**

The contemporary global order is increasingly fragmented due to great-power rivalry, selective multilateralism, and declining consensus within universal institutions. In this context, alternative multilateral platforms have emerged as critical instruments to sustain cooperation, manage crises, and redistribute influence beyond the traditional UN-centric framework.

#### **Body**

#### **Evolving role of alternative multilateral platforms in a fragmented global order**

1. **Issue-specific functional cooperation:** Alternative platforms focus on narrowly defined problems where universal consensus is difficult, enabling faster and pragmatic outcomes.

**Eg: G20** enabled coordinated macro-economic responses during the **COVID-19 pandemic**, including debt relief and financial stability measures when broader multilateral processes were slow.

2. **Enhanced agency for middle powers:** These platforms dilute structural asymmetries embedded in universal institutions and allow emerging powers to shape agendas.  
**Eg: BRICS** expansion strengthened Global South voice in development finance through the **New Development Bank**, reducing reliance on Western-dominated institutions.
3. **Flexible security and regional stability mechanisms:** Informal or regional groupings enable cooperation without rigid alliance commitments or veto politics.  
**Eg: Shanghai Cooperation Organisation** facilitates counter-terrorism coordination via joint exercises addressing regional threats beyond the Security Council.
4. **Resilience against institutional paralysis:** These platforms ensure continuity of cooperation when universal forums are gridlocked.  
**Eg:** Plurilateral climate, trade, and development coalitions continued cooperation despite political stalemates within the **United Nations** system.

### Interaction of alternative multilateral platforms with the United Nations

1. **Operational supplementation of UN mandates:** Regional and plurilateral bodies implement or finance activities aligned with UN goals.  
**Eg: African Union** peace operations, supported by partners, increasingly complement UN peacekeeping in resource-constrained environments.
2. **Decentralised implementation of global norms:** Alternative platforms translate universal UN norms into region-specific frameworks.  
**Eg:** Regional disaster-management and climate frameworks operationalise principles of the **UNFCCC** and the **Sendai Framework** at local levels.
3. **Agenda amplification and coalition-building:** These platforms elevate issues within the UN by generating consensus among smaller coalitions.  
**Eg:** Development finance and digital public infrastructure priorities raised in G20 forums later gained traction in UN deliberations.
4. **Political buffering during UN deadlock:** Alternative platforms maintain diplomatic engagement when UN decision-making stalls.  
**Eg:** Economic coordination and development cooperation continued through plurilateral forums despite Security Council divisions.

### Complementarity with the UN system

1. **Division of labour between legitimacy and execution:** The UN provides universal legitimacy, while smaller platforms deliver implementation capacity.  
**Eg:** UN norm-setting on development goals complemented by G20-led financial coordination.
2. **Reinforcement of UN principles through regional ownership:** Regional platforms increase compliance by adapting UN norms to local realities.  
**Eg:** Regional climate and disaster frameworks reinforcing UN sustainability objectives.
3. **Resource mobilisation beyond UN budgets:** Alternative platforms mobilise capital and expertise unavailable to the UN alone.  
**Eg:** Development banks linked to plurilateral groupings funding infrastructure aligned with UN goals.
4. **Preservation of multilateralism through redundancy:** Multiple platforms prevent total breakdown when one institution weakens.  
**Eg:** Continued global cooperation despite fiscal and political stress within the UN system.

### Competitive pressures vis-à-vis the UN system

1. **Norm fragmentation and selective adherence:** Parallel platforms risk weakening universal norms through differentiated standards.  
**Eg:** Divergent development finance benchmarks outside UN frameworks.
2. **Institutional bypassing:** Some platforms are used to avoid UN scrutiny or constraints.  
**Eg:** Security arrangements pursued outside the UN framework, diluting collective security principles under the **UN Charter**.
3. **Erosion of universal legitimacy:** Over-reliance on exclusive groupings may marginalise smaller or poorer states.  
**Eg:** Decision-making dominated by limited-membership forums.
4. **Agenda competition and duplication:** Overlapping mandates can reduce coherence in global governance.  
**Eg:** Parallel initiatives in development and climate governance creating coordination challenges.

### **Conclusion**

Alternative multilateral platforms are neither substitutes nor adversaries of the United Nations but adaptive extensions of global governance. Their long-term value lies in complementing the UN's universal legitimacy while avoiding competitive fragmentation that could weaken the rule-based international order.