



Secure Synopsis compilation for February-2026

General Studies-2

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

Q. The right to life under Article 21 is infringed as much by social exclusion as by physical deprivation”. Justify this statement with reference to menstrual hygiene. Highlight its implications for dignity and bodily autonomy. (10 M)

Introduction

Article 21 has been judicially transformed into a guarantee of **dignified, autonomous and meaningful human existence**, not mere physical survival. Within this framework, **social exclusion that systematically marginalises individuals on the basis of natural bodily processes constitutes an infringement of the right to life.**

Body

Social exclusion as an infringement of Article 21 in menstrual hygiene

- Dignity as a core element of life:** The right to life includes living with dignity, free from humiliation and stigma, which is violated when menstruation leads to forced absenteeism.
Eg: Francis Coralie Mullin v. UT of Delhi (1981) held that Article 21 includes dignity and conditions necessary for a meaningful life.
- Institutional neglect converting biology into exclusion:** Failure of schools to provide menstrual facilities converts a biological reality into a structural barrier to participation.
Eg: Supreme Court judgment, January 2026 held that absence of menstrual hygiene facilities entrenches gendered disadvantage in schools.
- Social exclusion operating as indirect deprivation:** Exclusion from classrooms, examinations and peer interaction deprives girls of life opportunities without physical restraint.
Eg: The Court recognised that **menstruation-linked absenteeism** amounts to denial of equal educational access under Article 21.
- Substantive inequality undermining equal enjoyment of rights:** Uniform institutional standards that ignore menstruation disproportionately burden girls, producing unequal life outcomes.
Eg: The Court applied **substantive equality under Article 14**, rejecting identical treatment that perpetuates disadvantage.

5. **Psychological harm as constitutional injury:** Persistent shame, fear of leakage and ridicule create mental distress incompatible with dignified living.
Eg: The judgment noted that stigma and humiliation linked to menstruation violate the psychological dimension of Article 21.

Linkage with dignity and bodily autonomy

1. **Bodily autonomy over natural biological processes:** Managing menstruation safely and privately is integral to control over one's body.
Eg: **Justice K.S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India (2017)** recognised bodily autonomy as an inseparable facet of Article 21.
2. **Decisional privacy in intimate matters:** Menstruation concerns intimate bodily functions where forced disclosure or dependence violates privacy.
Eg: Puttaswamy affirmed privacy in matters relating to the body, health and personal decision-making.
3. **Freedom from coercive choices:** Lack of facilities compels girls to choose between education and bodily comfort, undermining autonomy.
Eg: The Court observed that forced absence due to menstruation compromises free choice and self-determination.
4. **Dignity through continued educational participation:** Dignity is eroded when girls are compelled to withdraw from school during menstruation.
Eg: The Court read menstrual hygiene obligations into **Article 21-A and the RTE Act, 2009**, emphasising meaningful access to education.
5. **State obligation to create enabling conditions:** Article 21 imposes positive duties where inaction foreseeably leads to loss of dignity.
Eg: The 2026 ruling imposed affirmative obligations on the State to ensure sanitary products and functional toilets in schools.

Conclusion

By recognising **social exclusion rooted in biological neglect as a violation of dignity and autonomy**, Article 21 now mandates proactive inclusion. This constitutional shift redefines the right to life as a guarantee of **equal participation, bodily respect and substantive freedom**, especially for the girl child.

Q3. What are the key provisions of the Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991? Discuss how it seeks to balance religious freedom with public order. (10 M)

Introduction

Independent India adopted constitutional reconciliation to prevent historical disputes from destabilising a plural society. The **Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991** reflects this by legally insulating religious sites from post-Independence contestation.

Body

Key provisions of the Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991

1. **Freezing religious character (15 August 1947):** The Act mandates that the **religious character** of a place of worship shall remain as it existed on **Independence Day**.
Eg: **Section 4(1)** fixes the cut-off as **15 August 1947**, preventing reopening of disputes over religious identity of sites.

2. **Ban on conversion of religious character:** It prohibits conversion of a place of worship from one religion/sect to another.
Eg: Section 3 makes conversion unlawful, aimed at stopping escalation of identity-based contestations.
3. **Abatement of pending proceedings:** All pending legal proceedings concerning conversion stood terminated on commencement of the Act.
Eg: Section 4(2) abated pending suits, with the **Ayodhya dispute** carved out as an exception.
4. **Bar on fresh suits:** Courts are prohibited from entertaining new proceedings seeking conversion of religious character.
Eg: Section 4(2) blocks fresh litigation on conversion, ensuring legal finality and avoiding repeated mobilisation.
5. **Exception for Ram Janmabhoomi–Babri Masjid:** The Act excludes the Ayodhya dispute from its scope.
Eg: The statute explicitly exempted the **Ram Janmabhoomi–Babri Masjid** case due to its special pendency.

How the Act balances religious freedom with public order

1. **Protection of worship rights:** Stability of religious sites supports freedom of religion under **Articles 25–26**.
Eg: Communities retain continuity of worship without fear of legal displacement, consistent with **Article 25** protections.
2. **Secularism as constitutional commitment:** The Act operationalises the State’s duty to uphold **secularism**.
Eg: In the **Ayodhya judgment (2019)**, the Supreme Court termed it a “**non-derogable obligation**” to enforce secularism.
3. **Prevention of communal escalation:** By restricting legal triggers, it reduces risks to **public order**.
Eg: Recent disputes like **Gyanvapi (Varanasi)** and **Shahi Idgah (Mathura)** show how litigation can fuel polarisation.
4. **Judicial economy and finality:** It prevents courts from becoming arenas of perpetual historical contestation.
Eg: The Act reduces scope for endless litigation that can burden trial courts and law-enforcement machinery.
5. **Promotion of fraternity and constitutional morality:** It reinforces that historical wrongs cannot justify present-day oppression.
Eg: The Supreme Court in **Ayodhya (2019)** observed that **history cannot be used to oppress the present and the future**.

Conclusion

The Act serves as a constitutional firewall that protects religious freedom through stability and safeguards public order by preventing recurring disputes. Its continued relevance lies in strengthening **fraternity** and preventing democracy from being trapped in endless historical litigation.

Q. “Privacy cannot become a cloak for opacity in public administration.” Examine whether the amendment introduced through the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 to the Right to Information Act, 2005 disturbs the constitutional balance between transparency and privacy. (15 M)

Introduction

India’s constitutional democracy rests on two co-equal guarantees — **transparency as a facet of Article 19(1)(a)** and **privacy as part of Article 21**, affirmed in **Justice K.S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India (2017)**. The amendment to the **Right to Information Act, 2005** through the **Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023** has reignited debate on whether the equilibrium between openness and privacy is being structurally altered.

Body

Arguments that the amendment disturbs the constitutional balance

- 1. Dilution of the public interest override:** The earlier **Section 8(1)(j) of the RTI Act, 2005** permitted disclosure of personal information if larger public interest justified it, embodying proportionality. The amendment removes this explicit balancing clause, potentially weakening transparency.
Eg: Prior to 2023, disclosure of **assets and liabilities of public servants** was allowed where allegations of corruption existed, strengthening accountability; such disclosures may now face blanket rejection on grounds of **personal information**.
- 2. Impact on anti-corruption jurisprudence:** The Supreme Court in **State of U.P. v. Raj Narain (1975)** and later cases recognised the citizen’s right to know as essential to democratic oversight. Blanket exemptions may impair scrutiny of executive functioning.
Eg: Access to information relating to **public procurement and audit findings**, earlier examined under RTI in cases of alleged irregularities, could be denied if categorised broadly as personal data.
- 3. Overbreadth and vagueness in ‘personal information’:** Absence of statutory guidelines defining personal information may lead to expansive interpretation by public authorities, undermining Article 19(1)(a).
Eg: The Supreme Court has referred challenges to a **Constitution Bench (2026)** to clarify constitutional validity, indicating serious questions regarding the scope of the amendment.
- 4. Doctrine of proportionality concerns:** In **Puttaswamy (2017)**, the Court mandated that restrictions on fundamental rights must satisfy legality, necessity and proportionality. A blanket exemption may fail the least restrictive means test.
Eg: The **B.N. Srikrishna Committee Report (2018)** recommended balancing privacy with transparency rather than absolute exclusion, reflecting proportional safeguards.

Arguments supporting the amendment as constitutionally defensible

- 1. Strengthening informational privacy:** Privacy was declared intrinsic to dignity and liberty under **Article 21 in Puttaswamy (2017)**; the amendment seeks to prevent misuse of personal data of public officials.

Eg: Instances of misuse of personal details obtained through RTI, including **harassment or targeted exposure**, have been cited in policy debates to justify stronger safeguards.

2. **Harmonisation with global data protection norms:** Modern data regimes such as the **EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)** emphasise strict protection of personal data, influencing India's legislative approach.

Eg: The **Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023** introduces obligations on data fiduciaries, aligning India with international data governance standards.

3. **Existence of Section 8(2) override:** Section 8(2) of the RTI Act still permits disclosure where public interest outweighs harm, which the government argues preserves balancing.

Eg: Parliamentary debates in **2023** emphasised that Section 8(2) remains intact, allowing discretionary disclosure in exceptional public interest cases.

4. **Protection of administrative efficiency and confidentiality:** Safeguarding sensitive personal information may prevent chilling effects on public officials' willingness to serve.

Eg: The Supreme Court in **Girish Ramchandra Deshpande v. CIC (2013)** held that service records may constitute personal information unless public interest justifies disclosure.

Way forward to restore constitutional equilibrium

1. **Judicial clarification on scope of 'personal information':** The Supreme Court can lay down structured guidelines to distinguish private data from information related to public functions.

Eg: The Court's reference to a **Constitution Bench (2026)** signals potential doctrinal refinement to reconcile Articles 19 and 21.

2. **Legislative reinstatement of explicit public interest test:** Parliament may amend Section 8(1)(j) to restore the earlier proportionality-based language ensuring transparency in cases involving public duty.

Eg: The **Second Administrative Reforms Commission (2006)** recommended strengthening RTI safeguards to enhance accountability without compromising legitimate privacy.

3. **Independent oversight by Information Commissions:** Strengthening the autonomy and capacity of **Central and State Information Commissions** can ensure balanced interpretation.

Eg: The **RTI Act, 2005** envisages quasi-judicial review by Information Commissions, which can evolve jurisprudence harmonising privacy and transparency.

4. **Codification of proportionality framework:** Incorporating a statutory proportionality clause aligned with **Puttaswamy (2017)** would prevent absolute exemptions while protecting genuine privacy interests.

Eg: Comparative constitutional practice in jurisdictions like **South Africa** integrates balancing tests in access-to-information statutes.

Conclusion

Transparency and privacy are not competing silos but complementary constitutional guarantees. A calibrated proportionality framework — rather than blanket exclusions — is essential to ensure that privacy safeguards dignity without weakening democratic accountability.

Q. “The essential religious practices test undermines both secularism and religious autonomy”. Critically examine this statement. Analyse the practical and doctrinal difficulties inherent in the test. Suggest an alternative constitutional framework. (15 M)

Introduction

India’s constitutional secularism is premised on principled engagement rather than strict separation between State and religion. The judiciary’s evolution of the **Essential Religious Practices (ERP) doctrine** has significantly shaped the balance between **Articles 25–26** and the guarantees of **Articles 14, 15 and 21**.

Body

Whether the essential religious practices test undermines secularism and religious autonomy

A. Arguments supporting the statement

1. **Judicial theological adjudication:** The ERP test compels courts to determine what is “essential” to a religion, effectively assuming a theological role inconsistent with secular constitutionalism.
Eg: In **Sastri Yagnapurushadji v. Muldas Bhudardas Vaishya (1966)**, the Supreme Court interpreted Hindu scriptures to determine denominational identity, reflecting judicial engagement with doctrinal content rather than constitutional limits.
2. **Curtailed denominational autonomy:** By subjecting practices to judicial certification of essentiality, the doctrine restricts the autonomy guaranteed under **Article 26(b)** to manage religious affairs.
Eg: In **Indian Young Lawyers Association v. State of Kerala (2018)**, the majority held that Ayyappa devotees did not constitute a separate denomination, narrowing denominational protection.
3. **Conditional equality protection:** Constitutional protection becomes dependent on essentiality rather than on compatibility with fundamental rights, potentially diluting dignity-based scrutiny.
Eg: The Sabarimala majority prioritised **Articles 14 and 25 rights of women**, illustrating how essentiality can conflict with equality jurisprudence.
4. **Inconsistent secular reasoning:** Different benches have applied ERP differently, leading to doctrinal unpredictability and undermining neutral constitutional adjudication.
Eg: Variations between **Shirur Mutt (1954)** and later rulings reveal inconsistent thresholds for determining essentiality.

B. Arguments against the statement

1. **Shield against excessive state control:** The ERP test protects core religious practices from unwarranted State interference, preserving pluralism.
Eg: In **Commissioner, Hindu Religious Endowments v. Sri Lakshmindra Thirtha Swamiar (Shirur Mutt, 1954)**, the Court held that essential religious matters are immune from State regulation under **Article 26**.
2. **Facilitates social reform:** By distinguishing essential from non-essential practices, the doctrine enables reform legislation under **Article 25(2)(b)**.
Eg: In **Durgah Committee v. Syed Hussain Ali (1961)**, the Court excluded superstitious accretions from constitutional protection to enable regulatory reform.

3. **Operationalises constitutional limitations:** ERP helps give meaning to “public order, morality and health” limitations embedded in **Articles 25 and 26**.
Eg: Courts have used the doctrine to assess whether practices conflict with constitutional morality.
4. **Maintains judicial oversight:** Without ERP, courts may lack doctrinal tools to assess whether claimed practices genuinely fall within religious freedom.
Eg: In temple entry and denominational disputes, courts have relied on ERP to define scope of protection before balancing competing rights.

Practical and doctrinal difficulties inherent in the test

1. **Absence of objective criteria:** The Constitution does not define “essential,” leaving courts to develop subjective benchmarks.
Eg: Divergent interpretations in **Shirur Mutt (1954)** and **Sabarimala (2018)** demonstrate lack of uniform doctrinal standards.
2. **Evidentiary constraints in constitutional litigation:** Determination of essentiality occurs largely on affidavits without structured theological evidence.
Eg: In **Sabarimala review proceedings (2019 reference to nine-judge Bench)**, broader questions on religious freedom architecture were raised due to such limitations.
3. **Conflict with dignity jurisprudence:** A practice may be deemed essential yet undermine equality and dignity under **Articles 14 and 21**.
Eg: The majority in **Sabarimala (2018)** invalidated exclusion despite claims of custom, foregrounding dignity.
4. **Risk of judicial overreach:** ERP centralises interpretative authority in courts, potentially reshaping religious identity rather than merely assessing constitutional compatibility.
Eg: Judicial scrutiny of denominational status in **Sabarimala** altered the understanding of community autonomy.

Alternative constitutional framework

1. **Anti-exclusion test grounded in dignity:** Focus on whether a practice results in exclusion impairing equal moral membership rather than on theological essentiality.
Eg: Justice D.Y. Chandrachud in **Sabarimala (2018)** proposed that practices causing systematic exclusion must yield to constitutional guarantees of equality and dignity.
2. **Application of proportionality doctrine:** Adopt structured proportionality analysis to balance religious autonomy with competing fundamental rights.
Eg: In **K.S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India (2017)**, the Court affirmed proportionality as a constitutional standard for rights adjudication.
3. **Deference with constitutional outer limits:** Recognise denominational autonomy as the starting point but intervene only where non-derogable rights are infringed.
Eg: In **Shayara Bano v. Union of India (2017)**, the Court struck down instant triple talaq as manifestly arbitrary under **Article 14**.
4. **Institutional dialogue and legislative reform:** Encourage democratic reform processes alongside judicial review to reduce over-judicialisation of faith disputes.
Eg: Social reform legislations enacted under **Article 25(2)(b)** illustrate how Parliament can address exclusion while respecting religious freedom.

Conclusion

While the essential religious practices doctrine once offered a workable filter, its theological orientation and doctrinal inconsistency have exposed structural limits. A dignity-centred, proportionality-based framework can better reconcile faith autonomy with the Constitution's transformative promise of equal moral membership.

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. Explain how cesses and surcharges alter the effective working of vertical devolution in India. Discuss why this has become a major Centre–State dispute despite an unchanged devolution percentage. Suggest reforms to restore predictability and fairness in fiscal federalism. (15 M)

Introduction

India's fiscal federalism depends not just on the devolution percentage, but on the size of the divisible pool itself. The rising reliance on **cesses and surcharges** has therefore become a subtle tool of fiscal centralisation, even without changing formal devolution rates.

Body

How cesses and surcharges alter the effective working of vertical devolution

- Divisible pool shrinkage despite stable devolution rate:** Since cesses and surcharges are kept outside the divisible pool, the States' effective share declines even when the vertical devolution percentage remains unchanged.
Eg: Post-2019, the non-shareable component of the Centre's revenues has risen sharply, reducing what is actually available for sharing despite the 41% rate.
- Bypassing Article 270-based sharing design:** **Article 270** governs distribution of the net proceeds of Union taxes, but expanding collections through non-shareable levies allows the Centre to raise revenues outside the constitutional sharing framework.
Eg: The growing dominance of levies like the **Health and Education Cess** has increased Centre-only revenues while shrinking the constitutionally shareable base.
- Shift from unconditional devolution to conditional transfers:** As tax devolution becomes constrained, States become more dependent on Centrally Sponsored Schemes with conditions, limiting fiscal and policy autonomy.
Eg: In sectors like **health and education**, States often face rigid scheme norms and delayed releases, reducing their flexibility to tailor spending to local needs.
- Weaker fiscal planning and higher volatility for States:** Non-shareable revenues reduce predictability, making it harder for States to plan medium-term expenditure on salaries, pensions, welfare, and infrastructure.
Eg: Several States have repeatedly flagged uncertainty in transfer flows while preparing annual budgets, especially in years of fiscal stress.

5. **Distortion of federal accountability:** When States are squeezed fiscally, citizens often blame State governments for service gaps, while the underlying revenue design remains centralised.
Eg: Delivery shortfalls in State subjects like primary healthcare or school infrastructure are politically attributed to States despite constrained fiscal space.

Why this became a major Centre–State dispute despite unchanged devolution percentage

1. **Effective devolution is falling even if headline devolution is constant:** The dispute is driven by the gap between the announced share (41%) and the shrinking shareable pool.
Eg: States argue that the “share” is stable only on paper, while the actual amount devolved is reduced by a smaller divisible pool.
2. **States face rising expenditure burdens without matching revenue powers:** States bear the main responsibility for welfare delivery, but their own-tax base is limited and increasingly constrained in the GST era.
Eg: Health, education, and law-and-order pressures have grown, while fiscal flexibility has narrowed due to limited buoyant tax handles.
3. **Consensus among States reflects systemic stress, not partisan politics:** When States across political lines demand higher devolution, it signals a structural imbalance rather than isolated grievances.
Eg: Multiple States have demanded raising vertical devolution beyond 41%, indicating broad-based fiscal pressure.
4. **Central priorities are being financed through non-shareable instruments:** Defence, infrastructure, and emergency spending are cited as reasons for higher Centre fiscal space, intensifying the dispute over who bears adjustment costs.
Eg: The Centre’s argument for fiscal flexibility clashes with States’ need for predictable untied resources.
5. **Finance Commission is seen as avoiding mediation on cesses and surcharges:** The dispute deepens because the FC acknowledges the problem but does not impose binding discipline on non-shareable levies.
Eg: States perceive this as institutional reluctance to correct an imbalance that is increasingly policy-driven.

Reforms to restore predictability and fairness in fiscal federalism

1. **Define a rule-based ceiling or glide path for non-shareable levies:** A constitutional or statutory framework can prevent permanent expansion of cesses and surcharges while allowing emergency flexibility.
Eg: A rule that limits cess dependence in normal years but permits temporary relaxation during disasters would reduce federal mistrust.
2. **Bring major cesses into the divisible pool after a sunset period:** Cesses should be time-bound and merged into standard taxes once the stated objective is met.
Eg: Time-limited cess design would prevent routine fiscal bypassing and restore the spirit of shared taxation.
3. **Strengthen parliamentary scrutiny over cesses and surcharges:** Parliamentary committees should scrutinise purpose, duration, and utilisation, and require periodic review of continuation.

Eg: Mandatory annual reporting on cess collections and spending outcomes would reduce opacity and improve accountability.

4. **Increase untied transfers and reduce conditionality in State subjects:** States need greater unconditional resources to discharge constitutional responsibilities in health, education, and welfare.

Eg: Converting part of CSS funding into block grants would allow States to innovate and tailor delivery models.

5. **Institutionalise a permanent Centre–State fiscal dialogue mechanism:** Beyond periodic FC cycles, a standing forum is needed to negotiate fiscal stress, transfer volatility, and tax design issues.

Eg: A strengthened intergovernmental fiscal council-like mechanism can reduce ad hoc bargaining and improve cooperative federalism.

Conclusion

The real federal conflict is no longer about the devolution percentage alone, but about control over the shareable tax base. Restoring trust requires making revenue-sharing more rule-based, time-bound, and transparent so that India's fiscal federalism remains both stable and fair.

Q. “The Union’s expanding footprint in concurrent and State subjects signals a shift from cooperative to controlled federalism”. Examine the constitutional scheme of legislative distribution. Analyse recent sectoral centralisation trends. Suggest mechanisms to safeguard federal spirit. (15 M)

Introduction

India's federal design was crafted to balance **national unity with regional autonomy**, but constitutional asymmetry was never meant to erase State agency. Contemporary trends indicate a movement from **cooperative federalism** towards a more centralised and directive model of governance.

Body

Constitutional scheme of legislative distribution

1. **Article 246 and seventh schedule framework:** Article 246 read with the **Seventh Schedule** distributes powers between the **Union List, State List and Concurrent List**, establishing a quasi-federal structure with clear demarcation of legislative fields.
Eg: In **State of West Bengal v. Union of India (1963)**, the Supreme Court upheld the supremacy of Parliament within its sphere but acknowledged the constitutional existence of States as integral units of the federation.
2. **Residuary powers with the Union under article 248:** Unlike classical federations, India vests **residuary legislative powers** in Parliament under **Article 248** and Entry 97 of Union List, strengthening central authority.
Eg: In **Union of India v. H.S. Dhillon (1972)**, the Court affirmed Parliament's competence over matters not enumerated in State List, reinforcing the Union's expansive legislative reach.
3. **Union override in concurrent list under article 254:** In case of repugnancy, **Article 254** gives primacy to Union law, even in concurrent subjects, unless Presidential assent protects State legislation.

Eg: The constitutional design was examined in **M. Karunanidhi v. Union of India (1979)**, which clarified the doctrine of repugnancy and Union predominance in overlapping domains.

4. **Parliament's power over state list in special circumstances:** Articles **249, 250 and 252** enable Parliament to legislate on State subjects in national interest, during emergency, or with State consent, reflecting built-in central tilt.

Eg: The **42nd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1976** shifted **education and forests** from State List to Concurrent List, structurally expanding Union competence.

5. **Basic structure doctrine and federalism:** The Supreme Court has recognised **federalism as part of the basic structure** under **Kesavananda Bharati (1973)** and reiterated in **S.R. Bommai (1994)**, placing substantive limits on central encroachment.

Eg: In **S.R. Bommai v. Union of India (1994)**, misuse of **Article 356** was judicially circumscribed to preserve federal balance.

Recent sectoral centralisation trends

1. **Fiscal centralisation through GST regime:** The **101st Constitutional Amendment Act, 2016** introduced GST, subsuming multiple State taxes and altering fiscal autonomy through a harmonised national tax structure.

Eg: The **GST compensation dispute (2020)** during the pandemic highlighted States' dependence on Union borrowing decisions, raising concerns on fiscal asymmetry as noted in reports of the **Comptroller and Auditor General**.

2. **Expansion in education policy domain:** Though education is in the Concurrent List, increasing regulatory standardisation through national bodies indicates stronger Union influence.

Eg: The **National Education Policy 2020** emphasises centralised frameworks like **National Curriculum Framework**, drawing debates in States such as **Tamil Nadu** over curriculum autonomy.

3. **Health sector coordination and central schemes:** Health is primarily a State subject (Entry 6, State List), yet centrally sponsored schemes and regulatory frameworks shape State policy choices.

Eg: The implementation of **Ayushman Bharat (2018)** involves conditional funding patterns that influence State health models, as discussed in analyses by **NITI Aayog**.

4. **Role of Governors in legislative processes:** Increasing instances of delayed assent to State Bills have raised concerns about central leverage in State governance.

Eg: In **State of Punjab v. Governor of Punjab (2023)**, the Supreme Court held that Governors cannot indefinitely withhold action on Bills, reaffirming constitutional limits.

5. **Territorial restructuring and Union power:** Parliament's power under **Article 3** allows reorganisation of States without mandatory consent, reflecting structural central authority.

Eg: The **Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act, 2019** converted a State into two Union Territories, prompting debates on the robustness of federal safeguards.

Mechanisms to safeguard federal spirit

1. **Strengthening inter-state council under article 263:** Activating the **Inter-State Council** as recommended by the **Sarkaria Commission (1988)** and **Punchhi Commission (2010)** can institutionalise structured consultation.

Eg: The **Punchhi Commission Report (2010)** recommended regular meetings and a permanent secretariat to enhance cooperative federal dialogue.

2. **Reforming gubernatorial appointment process:** Ensuring neutrality in appointments as advised by the **Sarkaria Commission** can reduce friction in State legislation.
Eg: The **Sarkaria Commission** recommended consultation with the Chief Minister before appointing Governors to enhance trust in Centre–State relations.
3. **Revisiting fiscal federal balance:** Enhancing untied transfers through the **Finance Commission** and rationalising centrally sponsored schemes can restore fiscal space.
Eg: The **14th Finance Commission (2015–20)** increased States’ share in divisible pool to **42%**, strengthening fiscal autonomy in line with cooperative federal principles.
4. **Clear timelines for assent to state bills:** Codifying procedural timelines, as implied in recent Supreme Court observations, would prevent constitutional ambiguity.
Eg: The Supreme Court in **2023–24 proceedings concerning Tamil Nadu and Punjab Bills** emphasised that Governors must act within a reasonable time, reinforcing constitutional accountability.
5. **Promoting asymmetrical federalism where necessary:** Recognising regional diversity through constitutional accommodation sustains unity without uniformity.
Eg: The constitutional recognition of special arrangements earlier under **Article 371 provisions** demonstrates how calibrated asymmetry can preserve federal harmony.

Conclusion

India’s federalism was designed as a dynamic equilibrium, not a hierarchical command structure. Safeguarding its spirit requires deepening consultation, fiscal balance and constitutional restraint so that unity is strengthened through empowered States, not subordinated ones.

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

Q. Discuss the need for a new federal compact in India. Assess the structural weaknesses in the existing Centre–State framework. Suggest constitutional and institutional reforms. (15 M)

Introduction

India’s federal design was crafted in **1950** under extraordinary nation-building anxieties, tilting towards centralisation to preserve unity. Seven decades later, evolving political pluralism, fiscal transformations and regional assertions demand a renewed federal compact rooted in trust, subsidiarity and cooperative balance.

Body

Need for a new federal compact

1. **Centralisation beyond constitutional intent:** Expansive interpretation of **Article 256, 257 and 249** and growing use of central legislation in State List domains have altered the federal equilibrium envisioned in **Article 246** and the **Seventh Schedule**.
Eg: The **Supreme Court in State of West Bengal v. Union of India (1963)** upheld Parliament’s supremacy in certain matters, but contemporary debates around centrally designed schemes in agriculture and health have revived concerns of structural imbalance, as noted in reports of the **Punchhi Commission (2010)**.

2. **Fiscal asymmetry and vertical imbalance:** Despite recommendations of successive **Finance Commissions under Article 280**, States increasingly depend on tied grants and centrally sponsored schemes, constraining fiscal autonomy.
Eg: The **15th Finance Commission (2020–21 to 2025–26)** retained vertical devolution at **41%**, yet rising cesses and surcharges (not shareable under **Article 270**) have reduced the divisible pool, a concern highlighted in its report.
3. **Governor’s discretionary role and political friction:** The expanding use of discretionary powers under **Article 163** and reservation of bills under **Article 200** has intensified Centre–State tensions.
Eg: In **Shamsher Singh v. State of Punjab (1974)** and recently in **State of Punjab v. Principal Secretary to Governor (2023)**, the **Supreme Court** reaffirmed that Governors must act on aid and advice, underscoring the need for clearer conventions.
4. **Representation concerns linked to delimitation:** The freeze on delimitation under the **42nd Amendment (1976)**, extended by the **84th Amendment (2001)** until 2026, has generated debate over future political balance among States.
Eg: Parliamentary debates and Law Commission discussions reflect concerns that post-2026 delimitation may shift representational weight towards high-population States, affecting federal equilibrium.
5. **One nation policy template and diversity management:** Uniform policy approaches risk overlooking India’s heterogeneity in language, culture and development levels.
Eg: The debate around **One Nation, One Election**, examined by a **High-Level Committee on Simultaneous Elections (2023)**, has triggered discussions on its federal implications in multiple State Assemblies.

Structural weaknesses in the existing Centre–State framework

1. **Residuary powers with the Union:** Under **Article 248** and Entry 97 of the Union List, residuary powers lie with Parliament, structurally strengthening the Centre compared to classical federations.
Eg: The design differs from the U.S. model where residuary powers lie with States, as recognised in constitutional scholarship and debates of the **Constituent Assembly (1946–49)**.
2. **Emergency provisions and potential misuse:** Articles **352, 356 and 360** empower the Centre during crises, but historical misuse weakened federal trust.
Eg: The **S.R. Bommai v. Union of India (1994)** judgment imposed judicial safeguards against arbitrary use of **Article 356**, acknowledging earlier excesses.
3. **Concurrent list expansion and overlap:** Frequent central legislation under the **Concurrent List (List III)** has led to functional encroachment and implementation conflicts.
Eg: The transfer of **education to the Concurrent List by the 42nd Amendment (1976)** reshaped federal dynamics, creating shared but contested jurisdiction.
4. **Weak institutionalisation of Inter-State coordination:** The **Inter-State Council under Article 263** has not been consistently empowered as a robust dispute-resolution forum.
Eg: The **Sarkaria Commission (1988)** recommended regular meetings of the Inter-State Council, but institutionalisation remains uneven as per official government records.
5. **Fragmented fiscal federal architecture post-GST:** The **101st Constitutional Amendment Act, 2016** created the **GST Council under Article 279A**, but voting structures and compensation disputes revealed friction.
Eg: The end of **GST compensation in 2022** led several States to formally record concerns in GST Council meetings, as per Union Finance Ministry press releases.

Constitutional and institutional reforms

1. **Codifying limits on gubernatorial discretion:** Amend **Article 200** to prescribe time limits and narrow grounds for reservation of bills, strengthening accountability.
Eg: The **Punchhi Commission (2010)** recommended clearer guidelines for Governors to prevent partisan conduct.
2. **Rebalancing fiscal federalism:** Rationalise cesses and surcharges to expand the divisible pool under **Article 270** and institutionalise GST dispute resolution.
Eg: The **15th Finance Commission** emphasised greater transparency in fiscal transfers and recommended strengthening local government finances.
3. **Strengthening Inter-State Council and Zonal Councils:** Activate **Article 263** mechanisms with mandatory periodic meetings and structured agenda-setting.
Eg: The **Sarkaria Commission** recommended making the Inter-State Council a permanent consultative body for policy harmonisation.
4. **Delimitation safeguards for federal balance:** Consider calibrated criteria balancing population with equity to preserve inter-regional power balance post-2026.
Eg: The extension of freeze by the **84th Amendment (2001)** demonstrates Parliament's ability to address representational asymmetry through constitutional amendment.
5. **Embedding principle of subsidiarity:** Clarify legislative and administrative boundaries to ensure that governance functions are exercised at the lowest effective level.
Eg: The spirit of the **73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments (1992)**, strengthening local self-government, reflects subsidiarity as a constitutional value.

Conclusion

A renewed federal compact must move from competitive suspicion to cooperative trust anchored in constitutional morality. Deepening federal balance is not dilution of unity, but the surest guarantee of a resilient and plural republic.

Q. Institutional autonomy is meaningful only when insulated from partisan pressures. Discuss the constitutional foundations of institutional independence. Examine challenges in preserving autonomy in practice. (10 M)

Introduction

Institutional autonomy is a constitutional safeguard designed to prevent concentration of power and ensure objective decision-making. In a parliamentary democracy like India, insulation from partisan pressures is essential to preserve constitutional morality, rule of law and public trust in governance institutions.

Body

Constitutional foundations of institutional independence

1. **Separation of powers under the basic structure doctrine:** Although not rigidly codified, functional separation between legislature, executive and judiciary is a foundational principle upheld by the Supreme Court.
Eg: In **Kesavananda Bharati v. State of Kerala (1973)**, the Court held that the **basic structure**

doctrine limits Parliament's amending power, thereby protecting institutional independence as part of constitutional design.

2. **Judicial independence through constitutional safeguards:** Security of tenure, fixed service conditions and protected removal procedures ensure insulation from executive interference.
Eg: Articles 124 and 217 provide that judges of the **Supreme Court and High Courts** can be removed only by impeachment, and in **Supreme Court Advocates-on-Record Association v. Union of India (1993)**, judicial primacy in appointments was affirmed.
3. **Independent constitutional bodies with protected status:** The Constitution establishes bodies with autonomy to prevent partisan capture in critical democratic functions.
Eg: Article 324 vests superintendence of elections in the **Election Commission of India**, and in **T.N. Seshan v. Union of India (1995)**, the Supreme Court upheld its independent constitutional authority.
4. **Financial autonomy and charged expenditure:** Certain institutions are insulated through financial provisions to reduce executive control.
Eg: Expenditure of bodies like the Comptroller and Auditor General under Article 148 is charged on the **Consolidated Fund of India**, limiting parliamentary manipulation of finances.
5. **Directive principle promoting judicial-executive separation:** The Constitution explicitly mandates functional separation at the subordinate level.
Eg: Article 50 directs the State to separate judiciary from executive in public services, reinforcing structural autonomy.

Challenges in preserving autonomy in practice

1. **Appointment processes and perceived executive influence:** Delays and disagreements in appointments may create friction affecting perceived independence.
Eg: Ongoing debates over the collegium system and Memorandum of Procedure, as reflected in recent judicial observations in 2022–2023, highlight tensions between judiciary and executive regarding appointments.
2. **Financial and administrative dependence:** Despite constitutional safeguards, many statutory and regulatory bodies depend on executive allocations and staffing.
Eg: The Second Administrative Reforms Commission (2007) recommended clearer financial autonomy mechanisms for regulatory institutions to prevent subtle executive influence.
3. **Post-retirement appointments and conflict of interest concerns:** Movement of officials to executive positions may raise questions about institutional neutrality.
Eg: Public debates around post-retirement appointments of constitutional functionaries have led to demands for a statutory cooling-off period, reflecting concerns about maintaining credibility.
4. **Public perception shaped by political discourse:** Persistent partisan criticism or narratives can erode trust even if legal independence exists.
Eg: Observations in S.P. Gupta v. Union of India (1981) emphasised that independence of judiciary is essential not only in fact but also in public perception.
5. **Legislative changes altering service conditions:** Amendments affecting tenure or removal procedures of statutory bodies may impact autonomy.
Eg: The Supreme Court in Madras Bar Association v. Union of India (2021) struck down provisions affecting tribunal tenure, reaffirming that independence cannot be compromised through structural changes.

Conclusion

Institutional autonomy is not merely a constitutional formality but a democratic necessity that sustains accountability and public trust. Strengthening transparent appointments, financial insulation and ethical safeguards will ensure that independence remains substantive rather than symbolic.

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. “Parliamentary privilege is not absolute and operates within the discipline of procedural rules.” Explain the constitutional foundations of parliamentary privilege. Bring out how rules of procedure regulate and constrain its exercise in legislative functioning. (10 M)

Introduction

Parliamentary privilege exists to secure the independence and dignity of the legislature, not to place it above constitutional discipline. In a constitutional democracy governed by the rule of law, privilege functions within clearly defined procedural and institutional boundaries.

Body

Constitutional foundations of parliamentary privilege

- Article 105 as the primary source:** Article 105(1) and 105(2) confer freedom of speech in Parliament and immunity from judicial proceedings for speeches and votes, ensuring uninhibited legislative deliberation.
Eg: Supreme Court in Raja Ram Pal vs Speaker (2007) affirmed that privileges exist to protect institutional functioning, not individual immunity.
- Inherited privileges under Article 105(3):** Privileges are derived from those of the **House of Commons** until defined by law, embedding parliamentary convention into constitutional practice.
Eg: Constituent Assembly Debates (1949) clarified that privileges were retained to safeguard legislative authority, not to create legislative supremacy.
- Collective rather than individual character:** Privileges primarily vest in the House as an institution, reinforcing collective legislative dignity over personal discretion.
Eg: Keshav Singh case (1965) held that legislative privilege cannot override constitutional supremacy or fundamental rights.
- Link with separation of powers:** Privilege protects legislative autonomy against executive or judicial encroachment, maintaining institutional balance.
Eg: Raja Ram Pal judgment recognised limited judicial review to prevent constitutional transgression while respecting legislative autonomy.
- Subordination to constitutional morality:** Parliamentary privilege operates within the broader framework of **constitutional supremacy**, not parliamentary absolutism.
Eg: Supreme Court jurisprudence consistently holds that no constitutional authority is above the Constitution itself.

Role of procedural rules in regulating and constraining privilege

1. **Article 118 and rule-making power:** Article 118 empowers each House to frame rules regulating conduct of business, placing procedural discipline over privilege.
Eg: Rules of Procedure of Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha govern admissibility of speeches, references, and documents.
2. **Authority of the Presiding Officer:** The **Speaker/Chairman** enforces procedural rules, acting as the first institutional check on misuse of privilege.
Eg: Speaker's rulings under Rules of Procedure routinely restrict references not connected with listed business.
3. **Restrictions on admissible material:** Procedural rules bar references to documents not formally before the House, ensuring deliberative discipline.
Eg: Lok Sabha Rule 349 limits quotations from external material unrelated to parliamentary business.
4. **Disciplinary mechanisms within the House:** Rules provide for naming, suspension, and expunction, preventing privilege from shielding disorderly conduct.
Eg: Rule-based suspensions of members have been upheld as internal matters essential for orderly functioning.
5. **Codification demands and reform debates:** Institutional bodies emphasise clearer procedural regulation to prevent arbitrariness.
Eg: National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution (2002) recommended defining privileges by law to enhance clarity and accountability.

Conclusion

Parliamentary privilege is a functional safeguard, not a constitutional exemption. Its legitimacy lies in disciplined exercise through procedural rules that preserve both legislative freedom and constitutional order in a democratic polity.

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. "Inconsistent interim orders pose a greater threat to constitutional legitimacy than delayed justice". Discuss. (15 M)

Introduction

In a constitutional democracy, interim judicial orders often shape governance long before final adjudication. When such orders lack coherence, they risk weakening the Supreme Court's institutional credibility more than the delays inherent in constitutional adjudication.

Body

Inconsistent interim orders as a threat to constitutional legitimacy

1. **Erosion of predictability in constitutional adjudication:** Inconsistency in interim orders creates uncertainty about legal outcomes, undermining the rule of law and the Court's normative authority.

Eg: Justice R F Nariman in public lectures has cautioned that unpredictability in interim relief weakens **constitutional discipline**, as litigants cannot anticipate judicial standards.

2. **Perception of arbitrariness in judicial discretion:** Divergent interim approaches in similar constitutional contexts raise concerns of subjectivity rather than principle-based adjudication.
Eg: Shayara Bano v. Union of India (2017) contrasted with later selective interim interventions in personal law matters, leading scholars to flag **uneven application of constitutional scrutiny**.
3. **Undermining separation of powers:** Selective stays can distort the balance between judiciary and legislature by halting democratic processes without final constitutional determination.
Eg: Supreme Court in State of Rajasthan v. Union of India (1977) warned against premature judicial interference that disrupts **constitutional equilibrium**.
4. **Institutional credibility deficit:** Inconsistency fuels public perception that outcomes depend on benches rather than constitutional principles, weakening trust in judicial neutrality.
Eg: Second Administrative Reforms Commission (ARC) highlighted that **institutional consistency** is essential for sustaining public confidence in constitutional bodies.
5. **Creation of irreversible consequences:** Interim orders often operate for years, effectively becoming final outcomes without full adjudication, compromising democratic legitimacy.
Eg: Kihoto Hollohan v. Zachillhu (1992) recognised that interim judicial actions can have **lasting political consequences**, necessitating heightened caution.

Implications of inconsistent interim orders

1. **Governance paralysis:** Frequent or selective stays can stall executive implementation, leading to administrative uncertainty and policy stagnation.
Eg: Economic Survey 2021-22 noted that prolonged legal uncertainty hampers **policy execution and regulatory clarity**.
2. **Distortion of federal balance:** Uneven interim relief in Centre–State disputes can skew federal relations before constitutional issues are conclusively resolved.
Eg: S R Bommai v. Union of India (1994) underscored that premature judicial actions can **irreversibly affect federal dynamics**.
3. **Encouragement of strategic litigation:** Inconsistent interim jurisprudence incentivises forum shopping and litigation aimed at obtaining temporary relief rather than final justice.
Eg: Law Commission of India, 230th Report (2009) flagged misuse of interim orders as a tool for **delay and strategic obstruction**.
4. **Dilution of democratic accountability:** Staying laws without final adjudication weakens the accountability of elected legislatures to the electorate.
Eg: Kesavananda Bharati (1973) emphasised that constitutional courts must respect **democratic legitimacy** while exercising judicial review.
5. **Marginalisation of substantive justice:** Excessive focus on interim control can delay final resolution, affecting rights enforcement and legal certainty.
Eg: Hussainara Khatoon v. State of Bihar (1979) stressed that justice delayed undermines **constitutional morality**, even when judicial intent is protective.

Way forward

1. **Principle-based interim jurisprudence:** The Court should articulate clear constitutional thresholds for granting interim relief in legislative matters.

Eg: Madras Bar Association v. Union of India (2021) reiterated that interim interference must satisfy **strong prima facie constitutional violation**.

2. **Time-bound adjudication of stayed matters:** Matters involving interim stays should be prioritised for final disposal to prevent de facto law-making by courts.

Eg: Supreme Court Rules, 2013 empower benches to adopt **expedited hearings** in constitutionally sensitive cases.

3. **Greater deference to legislative wisdom:** Presumption of constitutionality should guide interim restraint unless irreparable harm is clearly established.

Eg: R K Garg v. Union of India (1981) emphasised judicial deference in matters involving **policy and experimentation**.

4. **Institutional consistency through larger benches:** Conflicting interim approaches should be resolved by reference to larger benches to maintain coherence.

Eg: Central Board of Dawoodi Bohra Community v. State of Maharashtra (2005) laid down binding value of **bench strength discipline**.

5. **Transparent reasoning in interim orders:** Detailed constitutional reasoning even at interim stages enhances legitimacy and public trust.

Eg: PUDR v. Union of India (1982) demonstrated how reasoned orders strengthen **judicial accountability**.

Conclusion

Judicial authority rests not merely on power but on consistency, restraint, and principled reasoning. A coherent interim jurisprudence, coupled with timely final adjudication, is essential to preserve constitutional legitimacy and democratic trust in the Supreme Court.

Q. “Institutional dissent is the judiciary’s most potent safeguard against democratic backsliding”. Critically examine this statement. Analyse how dissent shapes constitutional morality. Evaluate its role in preserving public confidence. (15 M)

Introduction

In constitutional democracies, courts function as guardians of **rule of law, fundamental rights and constitutional morality**. Institutional dissent, though non-binding, often becomes the moral archive of constitutional conscience, especially when majoritarian impulses threaten democratic balance.

Body

Institutional dissent as safeguard against democratic backsliding

1. **Check against majoritarian judicial conformity:** Dissent prevents homogenisation of judicial reasoning and records constitutional alternatives when majority opinions expand state power.
Eg: Justice H R Khanna’s dissent in ADM Jabalpur v. Shivkant Shukla (1976) upheld the inviolability of **Article 21**, later vindicated in **K S Puttaswamy (2017)** which formally overruled the Emergency-era ruling.
2. **Protection of civil liberties during crises:** Dissent foregrounds proportionality and due process when security or economic measures test constitutional limits.
Eg: Justice D Y Chandrachud’s dissent in Aadhaar (2018) questioned excessive data collection

and surveillance risks, influencing later legislative discourse including the **Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023**.

3. **Strengthening deliberative transparency:** Public articulation of disagreement enhances institutional credibility by demonstrating reasoned internal debate.
Eg: Justice **B V Nagarathna's dissent in Vivek Narayan Sharma v. Union of India (2023, Demonetisation case)** questioned procedural legality under **Article 14**, reinforcing judicial accountability.
4. **Foundation for future doctrinal evolution:** Dissent often becomes the jurisprudential seed for later constitutional developments.
Eg: Justice **Subba Rao's dissent in Kharak Singh v. State of U P (1962)** later shaped the recognition of the **Right to Privacy in Puttaswamy (2017)**.

Limitations of dissent as a safeguard

1. **Non-binding and immediate ineffectiveness:** Dissent does not alter the operative judgment and may fail to prevent democratic erosion in real time.
Eg: Justice **Khanna's dissent (1976)** did not stop suspension of civil liberties during the **National Emergency (1975–77)**.
2. **Perception of institutional fragmentation:** Frequent and sharp disagreements may create a narrative of judicial disunity in politically charged matters.
Eg: Divergent opinions in constitution bench cases sometimes generate public debate about coherence of judicial reasoning.
3. **Inability to substitute structural reform:** Dissent cannot compensate for opaque procedures in appointments or transfers that affect judicial independence.
Eg: Continuing debates over the **Collegium system** show that strong individual opinions alone cannot resolve concerns about transparency.
4. **Risk of perceived ideological positioning:** In polarised environments, dissent may be viewed through political lenses, affecting public reception of judicial neutrality.
Eg: Academic commentary on divided verdicts in sensitive constitutional cases highlights concerns about perceived ideological divides.

How dissent shapes constitutional morality

1. **Embedding transformative constitutionalism:** Dissent articulates higher constitutional values beyond immediate precedent, reinforcing dignity and equality.
Eg: In **Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India (2018)**, separate opinions invoked **constitutional morality**, drawing from **Dr B R Ambedkar's Constituent Assembly Debates (1949)** to protect individual autonomy under **Article 21**.
2. **Refinement of constitutional doctrines:** Minority reasoning sharpens principles like proportionality, reasonableness and separation of powers.
Eg: Observations in privacy and free speech cases have progressively strengthened the doctrine of **proportionality**, now central to rights adjudication.
3. **Reinforcement of separation of powers:** Dissent resists executive intrusion and preserves institutional boundaries envisaged under **Article 50**.
Eg: Separate opinions in cases concerning federalism and emergency powers have reinforced judicial scrutiny over executive action under **Article 356**.

Role in preserving public confidence

1. **Enhancing credibility through openness:** Citizens perceive dissent as evidence that the judiciary is not monolithic or compliant.
Eg: Public appreciation of Justice **Khanna's legacy** illustrates how principled dissent strengthens long-term institutional respect.
2. **Creating constitutional continuity:** Minority views often guide future benches, signalling evolutionary rather than abrupt jurisprudence.
Eg: The shift from **Kharak Singh (1962)** to **Puttaswamy (2017)** demonstrates how dissent builds doctrinal continuity over decades.
3. **Mitigating allegations of institutional capture:** In high-stakes political cases, dissent provides assurance that alternative constitutional visions were considered.
Eg: Divergent opinions in federalism-related cases have reinforced public trust in judicial review of executive power.

Conclusion

Institutional dissent is not judicial discord but constitutional vigilance. While it cannot alone arrest democratic decline, it preserves constitutional conscience, sustains doctrinal evolution and reinforces public trust in the long arc of democratic governance.

Salient features of the Representation of People's Act.

Q. Complete neutrality in adjudication is impossible, but neutrality in justification is non-negotiable. Critically examine this statement. Discuss its implications for judicial legitimacy in India. Suggest institutional measures to strengthen reasoned adjudication. (15 M)

Introduction

In a plural constitutional democracy like India, judges cannot fully detach from their personal horizons, but courts must still remain legitimate in the eyes of all citizens. Hence, while perfect neutrality of mind is unrealistic, neutrality in **public constitutional justification** is indispensable.

Complete neutrality in adjudication is impossible, but neutrality in justification is non-negotiable

1. **Human limitations in adjudication:** Judges inevitably carry influences of upbringing, education, social context and professional experience, making complete neutrality practically unattainable.
Eg: In **Kesavananda Bharati (1973)**, different judges reached varying conclusions on constitutional limits despite relying on the same text.
2. **Public reason in a secular state:** Judicial decisions must be defended through reasons accessible to all citizens, not through religious doctrine or private moral authority.
Eg: **S.R. Bommai (1994)** held **secularism** as part of the **basic structure**, requiring constitutional reasoning for State action.
3. **Equality and non-arbitrariness under Article 14:** Neutral justification ensures decisions are not personal preferences and remain reviewable within the discipline of law.
Eg: **Shayara Bano (2017)** invalidated **instant triple talaq** using the doctrine of **manifest arbitrariness** under **Article 14**.
4. **Constitutional morality as the neutral anchor:** Neutrality does not mean value-emptiness; it means fidelity to constitutional values like dignity, liberty and equality.
Eg: **Navtej Johar (2018)** grounded decriminalisation in **dignity and autonomy under Article 21** and constitutional morality.

5. **Reason-giving as democratic accountability:** Even contested outcomes become legitimate when the court demonstrates structured reasoning, transparency and consistency.
Eg: Puttaswamy (2017) justified privacy through **dignity, liberty** and proportionality, enabling scrutiny by citizens and institutions.

Implications for judicial legitimacy in India

1. **Strengthens public trust in the judiciary:** Reasoned neutrality signals fairness and reduces perceptions of ideological judging.
Eg: Vishaka (1997) earned legitimacy through clear constitutional reasoning and workable guidelines.
2. **Reinforces India's model of secularism:** Courts protect pluralism when they adjudicate religion-linked disputes through rights and constitutional limits.
Eg: Bijoe Emmanuel (1986) protected freedom of conscience under **Article 25** against majoritarian pressure.
3. **Improves predictability and rule of law:** Consistent reasoning reduces contradictory outcomes and strengthens executive compliance.
Eg: Conflicting judicial approaches in **bail jurisprudence** have often weakened uniformity and confidence.
4. **Constrains judicial overreach:** Neutral justification forces courts to explain why intervention is constitutionally necessary rather than policy-driven.
Eg: Common Cause (2018) on passive euthanasia relied on **Article 21** while prescribing procedural safeguards.
5. **Balances independence with legitimacy:** Judicial independence needs liberty of thought, but legitimacy needs visible constitutional discipline.
Eg: The debate around **NJAC (2015)** showed how institutional legitimacy depends heavily on transparency and reasoning.

Institutional measures to strengthen reasoned adjudication

1. **Structured reasoning norms:** Standardise proportionality, balancing and rights-review frameworks for constitutional adjudication.
Eg: Modern Dental College (2016) and **Puttaswamy (2017)** strengthened proportionality as a structured test.
2. **Precedent discipline and bench consistency:** Ensure conflicts are promptly referred to larger benches and avoid parallel contradictory rulings.
Eg: Frequent larger-bench references in sensitive areas show the need for stronger precedent management.
3. **Transparent roster and listing reforms:** Reduce the perception of selective bench assignment in politically sensitive cases.
Eg: Concerns raised around the “**Master of the Roster**” principle underline legitimacy risks.
4. **Codified recusal and disclosure framework:** Uniform standards for conflicts of interest can reduce doubts about impartiality.
Eg: The **Restatement of Values of Judicial Life (1997)** provides ethical standards that can be operationalised.
5. **Strengthen research and clerking capacity:** Improve judicial reasoning in complex governance, economic and technology matters.
Eg: Cases involving **data protection, environment, telecom regulation** require deeper institutional research support.
6. **Reduce fragmented plurality judgments:** Encourage clearer majority opinions to strengthen legal certainty and governance clarity.
Eg: Fragmentation in cases like **Sabarimala (2018)** created uncertainty and repeated litigation.

Conclusion

Courts may not achieve perfect neutrality in perspective, but they must uphold neutrality in **constitutional justification** to preserve public trust. Strengthening reasoning standards, transparency and institutional capacity is the most sustainable path to protect both **judicial independence** and **judicial legitimacy**.

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

Q. “The impartiality of the Speaker is the keystone of parliamentary democracy.” Discuss the institutional safeguards available in India to protect this neutrality. Analyse the key challenges that weaken the Speaker’s impartiality in practice. (10 M)

Introduction

In a parliamentary democracy, the Speaker is not merely a presiding officer but the constitutional guardian of fair debate and equal opportunity inside the House. If the Chair is seen as partisan, Parliament risks turning from a deliberative forum into a majoritarian instrument.

Body

Institutional safeguards to protect Speaker’s neutrality

1. **Constitutional status and authority of the Chair:** The Speaker derives legitimacy from the Constitution, not from the executive, strengthening institutional independence.
Eg: Articles 93–97 provide for the Speaker/Deputy Speaker and their removal through a special process, signalling constitutional importance.
2. **Security of tenure through special removal procedure:** Removal requires a resolution passed by a majority of all the then members, preventing arbitrary ouster.
Eg: Article 94(c) ensures the Speaker cannot be removed by executive pressure or a simple party decision.
3. **Rules-based decision-making framework:** The Speaker’s powers are exercised through codified rules of procedure, limiting personal arbitrariness.
Eg: The Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in Lok Sabha provide structured processes for motions, suspensions and debate time.
4. **Judicial review in limited constitutional domains:** Speaker’s decisions are not beyond scrutiny where constitutional violations occur.
Eg: In Kihoto Hollohan v. Zachillhu (1992), the Supreme Court held that the Speaker’s decisions under the anti-defection law are subject to judicial review on limited grounds.
5. **Convention of political restraint and impartial conduct:** Parliamentary ethics expects the Speaker to rise above party loyalties once elected.
Eg: The Speaker traditionally stops participating in party meetings and electoral campaigning, reinforcing neutrality as a convention.

Key challenges weakening Speaker’s impartiality in practice

1. **Continuing party membership and political dependence:** The Speaker usually remains formally linked to the ruling party, creating perceived conflict of interest.
Eg: Unlike the UK convention, Indian Speakers often return to party politics after tenure, reducing credibility of neutrality.

2. **Discretionary control over agenda and recognition:** Powers to admit motions, recognise speakers, and decide discussion time can be used selectively.
Eg: Opposition frequently alleges denial of debate time on sensitive issues, raising concerns about procedural fairness.
3. **Anti-defection adjudication creates structural bias:** The Speaker deciding disqualification petitions can incentivise partisan delay or selective action.
Eg: In **Keisham Meghachandra Singh v. Speaker, Manipur (2020)**, the Supreme Court criticised delays and suggested an independent tribunal for disqualification matters.
4. **Use of disciplinary powers against dissent:** Suspension and disorder-control powers can be applied unevenly, shrinking opposition space.
Eg: Mass suspensions of MPs in recent sessions have raised concerns about weakening legislative scrutiny (reported widely in parliamentary proceedings and media).
5. **Executive dominance and reduced deliberative culture:** When Parliament functions with low consultation, the Speaker's neutrality becomes harder to sustain.
Eg: Frequent resort to voice votes and rushed passage of Bills has been criticised in parliamentary commentary, affecting the Chair's perceived fairness.

Conclusion

Speaker neutrality cannot rely only on constitutional text; it needs institutional insulation and strong conventions. Strengthening transparency in rulings and reforming anti-defection adjudication can restore the Speaker as the trusted “umpire” of India’s parliamentary democracy.

Statutory, regulatory and various quasi-judicial bodies.

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. Examine the implications of persistent underspending in Centrally Sponsored Schemes. Analyse the reasons behind such underspending. Discuss its consequences for welfare governance. (15 M)

Introduction

India's welfare architecture increasingly relies on Centrally Sponsored Schemes (CSS) to operationalise socio-economic rights, yet persistent underspending has emerged as a systemic governance concern. This gap between legislative intent and fiscal execution raises serious questions about accountability, federal balance, and last-mile service delivery.

Body

Implications of persistent underspending in Centrally Sponsored Schemes

1. **Erosion of welfare entitlements:** Chronic underspending weakens the State's ability to realise socio-economic rights implicit under **Article 21** and **Directive Principles of State Policy**, especially for vulnerable groups.
Eg: CAG Reports (2022–24) on nutrition and social security schemes repeatedly flagged fund shortfalls affecting **children, pregnant women, and the elderly**, despite statutory commitments.
2. **Distortion of federal fiscal balance:** Underspending effectively transfers welfare obligations to States without formal renegotiation of fiscal responsibility, undermining **cooperative federalism**.
Eg: 15th Finance Commission highlighted that CSS-heavy expenditure with weak fund flow strains State finances and reduces fiscal predictability.
3. **Weakening of outcome-based governance:** Low utilisation breaks the link between policy design and outcomes, defeating the shift towards **performance budgeting**.
Eg: NITI Aayog's Output–Outcome Monitoring Framework noted that several CSS showed poor outcome indicators despite budgetary allocations.
4. **Loss of public trust in welfare institutions:** Repeated announcements without delivery foster credibility deficits and reduce citizen engagement with State institutions.
Eg: Second Administrative Reforms Commission warned that non-delivery of promised services corrodes democratic legitimacy.
5. **Inefficient public financial management:** Persistent gaps between **Budget Estimates (BE)** and **Revised Estimates (RE)** reflect weak expenditure planning and coordination.
Eg: Controller General of Accounts (CGA) data shows systematic year-end expenditure compression across multiple CSS heads, indicating structural inefficiencies.

Reasons behind persistent underspending

1. **Rigid scheme design and centralised norms:** Uniform guidelines under **Article 282**-based CSS limit State flexibility, slowing implementation.
Eg: PRS Legislative Research notes that centrally fixed components and timelines often mismatch State-specific administrative capacity.
2. **Rising State share under cost-sharing norms:** Increased State contribution requirements delay fund release when States face fiscal stress.
Eg: 15th Finance Commission observed that higher matching requirements disproportionately affect fiscally weaker States.
3. **Administrative capacity constraints:** Limited staffing, delayed approvals, and weak inter-departmental coordination hinder absorption of funds.
Eg: Second ARC (Public Finance chapter) highlighted capacity gaps at district and block levels as a major cause of underspending.

4. **Unpredictable fund flow and late releases:** Delays from the Centre compress the implementation window, forcing States to surrender funds.
Eg: CAG audits repeatedly flag late release of CSS instalments, reducing effective utilisation.
5. **Over-emphasis on compliance over outcomes:** Procedural complexity discourages proactive spending and innovation.
Eg: NITI Aayog evaluation studies show that excessive reporting requirements divert administrative effort away from service delivery.

Consequences for welfare governance

1. **Fragmented service delivery:** Underspending disrupts continuity of essential services, particularly in health, nutrition, and social security.
Eg: National Health Policy 2017 review assessments underline that uneven CSS funding weakens primary healthcare outreach.
2. **Growing inter-State disparities:** States with stronger fiscal capacity compensate for gaps, while poorer States fall behind.
Eg: Finance Commission analyses highlight widening regional divergence in social sector outcomes linked to uneven CSS absorption.
3. **Reduced accountability clarity:** When outcomes suffer, responsibility is blurred between Centre and States, weakening democratic oversight.
Eg: Second ARC stressed that shared schemes often dilute clear lines of accountability.
4. **Policy centralisation without fiscal responsibility:** The Centre retains agenda-setting power while States bear execution risks.
Eg: Constitutional scholars cite tension with the spirit of **Articles 246 and 256**, which envisage balanced legislative and executive roles.
5. **Undermining of rights-based welfare framework:** Persistent underspending weakens the enforceability of welfare as a public obligation rather than discretionary charity.
Eg: Supreme Court jurisprudence on socio-economic rights has repeatedly emphasised the State's duty to ensure effective implementation, not merely policy intent.

Conclusion

Persistent underspending in Centrally Sponsored Schemes reflects a deeper governance failure rather than fiscal scarcity. Restoring credibility to India's welfare state requires aligning fiscal design, federal responsibility, and administrative capacity with the constitutional promise of social justice.

Q. Discuss why bonded labour persists in India despite a comprehensive legal framework. Evaluate the major bottlenecks in detection and prosecution. Also suggest measures to resolve the problem in a time-bound manner. (15 M)

Introduction

Bonded labour is not only a labour-market failure but a **constitutional governance failure**, where coercion replaces consent and vulnerability replaces citizenship. Its persistence shows that **rights on paper do not automatically become rights in practice**.

Body

Why bonded labour persists despite a legal framework

1. Structural poverty and debt traps: Chronic income insecurity pushes families into advance-debt arrangements where repayment is made impossible through inflated interest and deductions.
Eg: Global Slavery Index 2023 estimates **49.6 million** people in modern slavery worldwide, with **India around 11 million**, indicating scale beyond formal enforcement.
2. Informal labour markets and contractor control: Recruitment is increasingly mediated by contractors who keep workers undocumented, mobile and dependent, making the crime harder to detect.
Eg: The article notes bonded labour shifting from agriculture to **construction, textiles, hotels and brick kilns**, often through **advance debt** and intermediaries.
3. Caste and social exclusion as enabling conditions: Bondage survives where discrimination normalises exploitation and weakens access to justice for marginalised groups.
Eg: Bandhua Mukti Morcha v. Union of India (1984) treated bonded labour as a violation of **Article 21**, linking dignity with freedom from forced labour.
4. Weak last-mile State presence in remote areas: In tribal and remote regions, lack of livelihood options and weak inspections allow employers to exploit isolation.
Eg: The article highlights bonded labour in remote tribal belts such as **Jawadhu Hills** in Tamil Nadu, where remoteness enables coercion.
5. Rehabilitation gaps leading to re-bondage: Rescue without timely compensation, identity documents and livelihood support pushes released workers back into the same cycle.
Eg: The article documents cases where released workers received **only partial initial assistance**, increasing risk of **re-bondage**.

Major bottlenecks in detection and prosecution

1. Under-registration under the Bonded Labour Act: Authorities often book cases under general labour provisions instead of the bonded labour law, weakening seriousness and victim entitlements.
Eg: The article notes official reluctance to register cases specifically under the **Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1976**, diluting legal response.
2. Poor identification and weak frontline capacity: Labour inspections remain episodic and predictable, while officials often fail to recognise new forms of coercion in modern supply chains.
Eg: Despite the law, Tamil Nadu reported only **120 rescues in 2024–25**, while activists argue prevalence is much higher (article).
3. Investigation and chargesheet delays: Slow investigation, weak evidence collection and procedural lapses delay justice and reduce conviction probability.
Eg: The article notes that even after SOP reforms, chargesheeting reduced only marginally, from around **two years to about one year**.
4. Non-convergence of legal provisions: Failure to apply linked laws like **SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989** and **POCSO Act, 2012** leads to rework and further delays.
Eg: The article reports that courts often return chargesheets for adding missing provisions, prolonging trials and compensation.
5. Trial delays and weak deterrence: Without time-bound trials, employers face low risk, while victims remain stuck without final rehabilitation linked to conviction.
Eg: The article records cases dragging for over a decade; one case achieved conviction only in **2025**, enabling final compensation.

Measures to resolve the problem in a time-bound manner

1. **Fast-track justice and time limits:** Create fast-track courts in high-incidence districts and enforce strict timelines for investigation, trial and compensation.
Eg: The **Parliamentary Standing Committee on Labour (2024–25)** recommended exploring **fast-track courts** for bonded labour-prone regions.
2. **Single digital case-tracking system:** Build a State-level dashboard linking police, labour and welfare departments to track FIR, chargesheet, trial and rehabilitation payments.
Eg: The article notes absence of a **State-level database**, causing delays in disbursal and weak accountability.
3. **Strengthen district vigilance and proactive inspections:** Make vigilance committees outcome-driven, with surprise inspections and sector-specific monitoring of high-risk industries.
Eg: Tamil Nadu's **2017 SOP** improved rescue processes, showing how standardisation can reduce procedural delays.
4. **Decouple immediate relief from conviction:** Ensure time-bound interim rehabilitation as a right after rescue, while final compensation remains linked to conviction.
Eg: The article highlights that rehabilitation dependent on verdict increases **re-bondage risk**, undermining abolition goals.
5. **Inter-State migrant protection protocol:** Establish joint enforcement protocols between source and destination States, including helplines, labour helpdesks and safe reporting mechanisms.
Eg: The article cites growing bonded labour among **inter-State migrants**, and experts suggesting helpdesks at **railway stations**.

Conclusion

Bonded labour persists because enforcement, justice and rehabilitation do not operate as one pipeline. A time-bound governance approach—combining proactive detection, fast prosecution and assured rehabilitation—can convert abolition from a legal promise into a lived reality.

Q. Discuss the continuing impact of colonial criminalisation on the present-day treatment of Denotified, Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Tribes (DNTs). Analyse how this legacy shapes state capacity and citizen trust. Suggest measures for restorative governance. (15 M)

Introduction

India's constitutional democracy cannot fully claim "equal citizenship" as long as entire communities remain trapped in the shadow of colonial criminalisation. For **Denotified, Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Tribes (DNTs)**, historical stigma has not ended with legal repeal; it has merely changed its administrative form.

Body

Continuing impact of colonial criminalisation on present-day treatment of DNTs

1. **Stigma-driven policing and profiling:** The colonial logic of "born criminal" continues through habitual suspicion, routine detention, and biased surveillance of DNT settlements.
Eg: Police practices under **state Habitual Offenders laws** often disproportionately target mobile communities, recreating the **Criminal Tribes Act, 1871** mindset in modern form.

2. **Civic invisibility and undercounting:** The failure to explicitly enumerate DNTs in regular state data systems keeps them statistically invisible, weakening their bargaining power in welfare and rights.
Eg: The **National Commission for Denotified, Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Tribes (NCDNT)** under **Bhiku Ramji Idate (2015–2017)** flagged lack of reliable data as the central barrier to justice.
3. **Denial of documentation and public services:** Many DNT families face barriers in securing birth certificates, domicile proof, and ration cards due to mobility and local discrimination.
Eg: The **Idate Commission (2017)** noted that documentation gaps lead to exclusion from welfare schemes and citizenship-linked entitlements.
4. **Misclassification across SC/ST/OBC categories:** DNT identity often overlaps with SC/ST/OBC, but administrative rigidity creates errors, exclusion, and inter-group resentment.
Eg: The **Renke Commission (2008)** highlighted that DNTs remain scattered across categories, causing fragmented benefits and weak policy focus.
5. **Intergenerational poverty and low human development:** Criminalisation historically disrupted livelihoods and settlement rights, and the after-effects persist as poor education, health, and employment outcomes.
Eg: The **Renke Commission (2008)** documented structural deprivation among DNTs, especially in education access and livelihood stability.

How this legacy shapes state capacity and citizen trust

1. **Weak last-mile capacity for mobile populations:** Governance systems designed for sedentary citizens struggle to deliver services to nomadic groups, leading to persistent delivery failure.
Eg: **NFSA portability through One Nation One Ration Card (ONORC)** improves access, but DNT families still face barriers due to missing IDs and exclusion errors.
2. **Low trust in state institutions:** When communities experience repeated denial of recognition, the state is seen as coercive rather than protective, weakening legitimacy.
Eg: Civil society networks like the **DNT-Rights Action Group (DNT-RAG)** have repeatedly highlighted mistrust due to harassment and neglect in service delivery.
3. **Administrative overload and governance inefficiency:** Lack of reliable enumeration forces governments to rely on fragmented lists, making targeting inefficient and grievance-heavy.
Eg: The **NITI Aayog Strategy for New India @75 (2018)** emphasised that weak data quality undermines welfare efficiency, a problem visible sharply in DNT targeting.
4. **Rights deficit under Article 14 and Article 21:** Profiling and welfare exclusion violate the constitutional promise of equality and dignity, deepening the governance gap.
Eg: **K.S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India (2017)** linked dignity and privacy to constitutional liberty, making group-based suspicion incompatible with constitutional morality.

Measures for restorative governance

1. **Explicit enumeration in the 2027 Census:** Create a separate, clear enumeration tag for DNTs to end statistical invisibility and enable evidence-based policy.
Eg: The **Idate Commission (2017)** explicitly recommended a nationwide enumeration of **Denotified, Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Tribes**.
2. **Repeal or reform Habitual Offenders frameworks:** Replace suspicion-based policing with rights-based safeguards, accountability, and anti-profiling standards.

Eg: The **National Human Rights Commission (NHRC)** has repeatedly flagged that DNTs face discrimination and require rights safeguards against police excesses.

3. **Portable social protection for mobility:** Design entitlements around mobility—portable ration, health access, schooling support, and temporary shelters.

Eg: **Ayushman Bharat (PM-JAY)** can support DNT health access, but needs proactive inclusion through camps and enrolment drives in migratory routes.

4. **Simplified documentation and civil registration access:** Enable offline self-declaration with verification, reduce document burden, and expand doorstep civil registration.

Eg: The **Idate Commission (2017)** flagged that documentation barriers are central to exclusion and must be corrected through simplified processes.

5. **Dedicated institutional architecture:** Strengthen the **National Commission for Denotified, Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Tribes** and ensure convergence across ministries.

Eg: The **NCDNT (Idate Commission)** model itself shows the need for a permanent rights-and-welfare institution rather than temporary committees.

6. **Community-led governance and legal empowerment:** Partner with DNT collectives for enumeration, grievance redress, and legal aid to rebuild trust.

Eg: Best practices from **legal services authorities (NALSA ecosystem)** show that community-based legal awareness improves access to rights for vulnerable groups.

Conclusion

Restorative governance for **Denotified, Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Tribes (DNTs)** begins by replacing inherited suspicion with constitutional recognition. A credible census, rights-based policing reform, and portable welfare can convert a history of stigma into a future of equal citizenship.

Q. Evaluate how social media trends influence public policy priorities. Analyse the risks of governance by virality. Suggest reforms to preserve evidence-based policymaking. (15 M)

Introduction

In the attention economy, governance is increasingly judged not by outcomes, but by online visibility. When policy priorities begin to respond to trending outrage or viral campaigns, democratic accountability risks turning into algorithm-driven reactivity.

Body

How social media trends influence public policy priorities

1. **Agenda setting by virality:** Trends decide what becomes “urgent” in public discourse, often displacing chronic but less visible issues from the policy agenda.
Eg: Online outrage around episodic crimes can dominate priorities, while persistent concerns like malnutrition and learning losses flagged in **NFHS** and **ASER** struggle to sustain attention.
2. **Emotional amplification and simplification:** Platforms reward moral shock and short narratives, encouraging governments to prefer symbolic actions over complex reforms.
Eg: “Instant action” governance sometimes promotes punitive visibility measures, even when due process requirements under **Article 21** demand careful legal procedure.
3. **Visibility-driven welfare and credit politics:** Programs that produce instantly shareable visuals may gain preference over foundational reforms with delayed results.

Eg: Asset distribution events get higher visibility than strengthening primary healthcare, despite repeated emphasis on human capital in the **Economic Survey**.

4. **Administrative risk-aversion under online scrutiny:** Fear of backlash, trolling, or being misrepresented online can reduce objectivity and encourage “trend-safe” decisions.

Eg: Local authorities may delay lawful enforcement against misinformation or illegal gatherings to avoid online targeting, weakening rule-based governance.

5. **Narrative capture by organised digital networks:** Influencer ecosystems and coordinated campaigns can shape policy framing, sometimes bypassing broad-based consultation.

Eg: Public debates around platform regulation or privacy can become polarised online, even though the **B.N. Srikrishna Committee (2018)** stressed the need for principled data governance.

Risks of governance by virality

1. **Erosion of due process and constitutionalism:** Viral justice encourages shortcuts that conflict with rights-based governance and procedural fairness.

Eg: The Supreme Court in **K.S. Puttaswamy (2017)** affirmed privacy and dignity under **Article 21**, reinforcing that public pressure cannot justify rights dilution.

2. **Policy volatility and short-termism:** Trend-based governance shifts priorities rapidly, weakening long-term planning, continuity, and institutional memory.

Eg: Sudden reactive focus changes disrupt multi-year outcomes in education and health, where reforms need stable implementation cycles.

3. **Majoritarian pressure and vulnerability of minorities:** Online mobs can create incentives for discriminatory policy signalling, harming equal protection.

Eg: Hate-driven narratives influencing local policing or housing decisions can violate the equality principle under **Article 14**.

4. **Misinformation-led policy mistakes:** Virality can push governments into premature decisions before verification, increasing governance errors.

Eg: During public health crises, misinformation about vaccines and cures spreads faster than official advisories, which is why **MoHFW** and **WHO** stress trusted risk communication.

5. **Weakening of expert institutions and deliberation:** Committees, regulators, and evidence systems may be sidelined by instant public mood and “trend accountability”.

Eg: The Supreme Court in **Internet and Mobile Association of India v. RBI (2020)** emphasised proportional reasoning, reflecting the broader need for evidence-based state action.

Reforms to preserve evidence-based policymaking

1. **Institutionalise impact assessment and public reasoning:** Major policies should require published rationale, cost-benefit logic, and alternatives to reduce reactive policymaking.

Eg: Strengthening **Regulatory Impact Assessment** aligns with the 2nd ARC’s emphasis on transparency, accountability and reasoned governance.

2. **Strengthen consultative and deliberative processes:** Parliamentary committees, stakeholder consultation, and domain expertise must be prioritised over online noise.

Eg: Department-related Standing Committees are designed to deepen scrutiny beyond media cycles, reinforcing legislative oversight.

3. **Build robust state communication and fact-check capacity:** Governments must counter misinformation quickly through credible, non-partisan channels.

Eg: PIB Fact Check and official dashboards help reduce misinformation, especially during crises and disasters.

4. **Codify ethical digital conduct for public officials:** Clear rules should prevent policy signalling, partisan posting, and performative administration.

Eg: The **AIS (Conduct) Rules, 1968** already demand political neutrality, and can be supplemented with explicit digital-era guidelines.

5. **Invest in data systems and outcome-based evaluation:** Evidence-based governance requires strong data, independent evaluation, and feedback loops beyond online trends.

Eg: Using credible surveys and outcome tracking (health, learning, poverty) helps keep policy anchored to measurable public welfare.

Conclusion

A democracy cannot allow public policy to be driven by what trends fastest rather than what matters most. The solution is not silencing social media, but strengthening constitutionalism, institutional deliberation, and evidence systems so governance remains reasoned, not reactive.

Q. Discuss the core objectives of PM-POSHAN. Explain how it contributes to education outcomes beyond nutrition. (10 M)

A school meal is not just calories on a plate; it is a governance tool that converts classrooms into real opportunities for children. PM-POSHAN strengthens the State's obligation under **Article 21A** by enabling children to actually stay, learn and complete schooling.

Body

Core objectives of PM-POSHAN

1. **Nutrition security for school-age children:** Ensure one hot cooked meal to improve daily nutrient intake and reduce classroom hunger, especially for poor households.

Eg: PM-POSHAN (2021–22 to 2025–26) targets children up to **Class 8** in government and aided schools, strengthening food access for vulnerable groups.

2. **Improve enrolment, attendance and retention:** Use meals as an incentive to bring children to school and reduce dropouts.

Eg: The scheme supports the constitutional goal of universal education under **Article 21A**, especially for children from disadvantaged communities.

3. **Support equity and social inclusion:** Promote social mixing by making children eat together, reducing visible discrimination in daily school life.

Eg: The Supreme Court in PUCL vs Union of India (Right to Food case, 2001 onwards) treated school meals as part of state obligation to ensure food entitlements.

4. **Address learning readiness through better health:** Improve children's health status so that they are physically able to participate and learn in school.

Eg: Reduced hunger in school improves attention span, directly supporting learning outcomes, especially in early grades.

5. **Strengthen local economic linkages:** Encourage decentralised procurement and community participation, creating local ownership.

Eg: Use of local supply chains and community-based monitoring strengthens accountability and reduces leakages.

Contribution to education outcomes beyond nutrition

1. **Improves classroom concentration and cognitive engagement:** A child who is not hungry can participate better, improving classroom interaction and comprehension.
Eg: Midday meals reduce “short-term hunger”, which is strongly linked with poor attention and weak learning performance in primary classes.
2. **Reduces household education costs:** Meals reduce the burden of providing lunch, enabling poor families to keep children in school.
Eg: For low-income households, the meal works like an in-kind education support, improving retention, especially for girls.
3. **Strengthens gender outcomes and girls’ participation:** Families are more willing to send girls to school when basic needs are met through school provisioning.
Eg: The scheme complements the equality mandate of **Article 14** by reducing gendered barriers to schooling in poorer regions.
4. **Creates a predictable school routine and institutional trust:** Regular meals improve the credibility of public schooling, increasing parent confidence.
Eg: Where schools provide consistent meals, parents view government schools as dependable, supporting continued enrolment.
5. **Promotes socialisation and civic values:** Eating together normalises equality and dignity, shaping attitudes early in life.
Eg: Shared meals operationalise the constitutional vision of fraternity in the **Preamble**, building social cohesion within schools.

Conclusion

PM-POSHAN is a human-capital intervention, not merely a feeding programme. By linking nutrition with enrolment, equity and learning readiness, it strengthens the constitutional promise of meaningful education for every child.

Q. Describe the key features of the IT Rules (Amendment), 2026 relating to AI-generated content. Analyse how these provisions attempt to balance user safety, privacy and free speech. Suggest safeguards to prevent over-compliance and censorship. (15 M)

Introduction

In an era where **deepfakes** can weaponise trust within minutes, India’s digital governance challenge is no longer only about “illegal content”, but about **authenticity, speed, and rights**. The **IT Rules (Amendment), 2026** attempt to redesign intermediary obligations to curb synthetic harm while retaining constitutional freedoms.

Body

Key features of the IT Rules (Amendment), 2026 on AI-generated content

1. **Mandatory prominent labelling of synthetic content:** Platforms must ensure “**prominent**” labelling of **synthetically generated** images/videos so users can distinguish authentic from

inauthentic media.

Eg: AI-generated political deepfake clips circulated during election periods show how labelling can reduce **misinformation velocity** and prevent manipulation of voter perception.

2. **User declaration for AI-generated content:** Large intermediaries (over the notified threshold) must obtain a **user declaration** before publishing AI-generated content, strengthening traceability of responsibility.

Eg: A declaration requirement can deter creators of **impersonation deepfakes** targeting **women journalists** and public figures by raising perceived legal accountability.

3. **Technical verification before publishing permissible SGI:** Platforms must conduct **technical verification** to ensure compliance before AI-generated content is published, signalling a shift from passive hosting to proactive checks.

Eg: Large platforms already deploy **deepfake detection** for integrity operations; the amendment formalises this expectation for high-risk synthetic media.

4. **Reasonable technical measures against unlawful SGI:** Platforms are required to deploy **reasonable and appropriate technical measures** to prevent unlawful synthetic content, without mandating a single technology.

Eg: Platform-level detection for **non-consensual synthetic sexual content** is increasingly used globally as a harm-prevention standard, aligned with user safety duties.

5. **Provenance and identifier requirements:** The rules require compliance with **provenance/identifier** norms for permissible SGI, nudging the ecosystem toward metadata-based authenticity signals.

Eg: Standards like **C2PA** embed provenance markers to improve cross-platform verification, reducing reliance on subjective content moderation alone.

6. **Carve-outs to prevent overbreadth:** The definition of SGI is narrowed with exemptions such as **smartphone auto-retouching** and **film VFX**, reducing regulatory overreach into routine creativity.

Eg: Exempting **camera-app enhancements** avoids treating ordinary photographs as SGI, preventing unnecessary compliance burdens for citizens.

7. **Explicit prohibition of high-harm SGI categories:** The amendment prohibits certain SGI such as **CSAM, forged documents, explosive-making information, and deepfakes falsely representing a real person.**

Eg: **Forged Aadhaar/PAN-style documents** and **impersonation deepfakes** have been linked to fraud ecosystems, making categorical prohibition a harm-focused approach.

How the provisions attempt to balance user safety, privacy and free speech

1. **User safety through authenticity and rapid harm reduction:** Labelling + verification + technical measures aim to reduce the scale of harm from deepfakes, misinformation, and identity-based attacks.

Eg: Deepfakes used for **financial fraud** and **non-consensual sexual abuse** are time-sensitive harms where early intervention reduces irreversible damage.

2. **Privacy protection by discouraging impersonation and unlawful synthetic profiling:** Restrictions on impersonation deepfakes and unlawful SGI indirectly protect **informational privacy** and dignity.

Eg: The Supreme Court in **K.S. Puttaswamy (2017)** recognised **privacy** as a fundamental right; deepfakes are a direct violation of informational autonomy and dignity.

3. **Free speech accommodation via limited scope and exemptions:** Exemptions for routine edits and cinematic VFX show an attempt to protect legitimate expression, satire, and creativity from blanket regulation.
Eg: Exempting **film special effects** prevents chilling of artistic industries, aligning with free expression under **Article 19(1)(a)**.
4. **Balancing through “reasonableness” rather than single-tech mandates:** By requiring “reasonable” measures, the rules avoid locking platforms into one standard and leave space for proportionality.
Eg: Avoiding compulsory endorsement of one provenance system prevents monopoly-like control over authenticity infrastructure.

Safeguards to prevent over-compliance and censorship

1. **Embed proportionality and reasoned action in takedowns:** Platform action should follow **Article 19(2)** limits and the principle of proportionality, avoiding excessive removals driven by fear of liability.
Eg: In **Shreya Singhal (2015)**, the Supreme Court underscored protection of online speech and warned against vague restrictions that chill expression.
2. **Ensure procedural fairness through notice, appeal and transparency:** Takedowns should include **user notice, time-bound appeal**, and periodic transparency reporting to prevent silent censorship.
Eg: A structured appeal system aligns with natural justice and reduces wrongful removal of **satire or political criticism** misclassified as synthetic harm.
3. **Independent oversight for high-impact content moderation:** Establish independent review for disputed takedowns involving public interest speech, rather than leaving final power to private intermediaries.
Eg: Parliamentary committees have repeatedly stressed stronger accountability in platform governance; an oversight layer can prevent arbitrary content suppression.
4. **Define clear thresholds for “prominent labelling” and verification:** Operational clarity is essential so compliance does not become arbitrary, inconsistent, or discriminatory across users.
Eg: Without clarity, small creators may face stricter enforcement than influential accounts, undermining equality principles under **Article 14**.
5. **Protect privacy and prevent surveillance-by-design:** User declarations and verification must not become a backdoor for mass profiling; data minimisation and purpose limitation should be mandatory.
Eg: The Supreme Court in **Puttaswamy (2017)** requires legality, necessity, and proportionality in state-linked intrusions into privacy.
6. **Risk-tiered compliance for platforms and content types:** High-risk synthetic media (impersonation, sexual abuse, election manipulation) should face stricter scrutiny than low-risk creative edits.
Eg: A tiered model reduces chilling effects on harmless AI creativity while focusing enforcement on **deepfake impersonation** and **non-consensual content**.

Conclusion

India’s 2026 amendments signal a shift from “content removal” to **authenticity governance**, which is necessary in the deepfake era. The long-term legitimacy of this framework will depend on **due process, transparency, proportionality, and privacy-by-design**, not only speed of takedowns.

Q. In India, welfare politics has expanded faster than welfare governance. Examine this statement. Discuss its implications for democratic accountability and public service delivery. Suggest reforms to make welfare outcome-oriented. (15 M)

Introduction

India's welfare architecture has expanded rapidly in recent years, especially through cash and benefit schemes. However, governance systems to ensure targeting, outcomes, and fiscal accountability have not expanded at the same pace.

Body

How welfare politics has expanded faster than welfare governance

1. **Announcement-first approach:** Welfare is often launched as a political commitment before building delivery capacity.
Eg: Election-period frontloading of transfers and special assistance packages has become a recurring pattern across States.
2. **Weak outcome design:** Many schemes focus on input delivery rather than measurable improvements in capabilities.
Eg: NITI Aayog's MPI discussion paper (2024) stresses multidimensional outcomes beyond income support.
3. **Inadequate transparency in scheme costing:** Citizens rarely see credible medium-term fiscal projections for welfare.
Eg: RBI's State Finances reports repeatedly flag rising committed expenditure and fiscal risks in States.
4. **Fragmented and overlapping welfare schemes:** Convergence is weak, reducing efficiency and accountability.
Eg: Parliamentary Standing Committee observations on social sector programmes often highlight duplication and poor coordination.
5. **Limited frontline governance capacity:** Local institutions are burdened without adequate devolution of resources.
Eg: 15th Finance Commission (2021) emphasised empowering local bodies for service delivery, but implementation remains uneven.

Implications for democratic accountability

1. **Distortion of voter choice:** Elections shift towards benefit competition rather than policy evaluation.
Eg: S. Subramaniam Balaji v. State of Tamil Nadu (2013) highlighted the challenge of freebies within electoral democracy.
2. **Weak legislative scrutiny:** Welfare expansion is not matched by strong legislative debate on outcomes.
Eg: PAC mechanisms in many States remain under-utilised, reducing financial accountability.
3. **Erosion of welfare legitimacy:** Welfare begins to appear as party-linked favour rather than State obligation.
Eg: Directive Principles (Part IV) place welfare within the State's duty to promote social justice.
4. **Administrative neutrality pressure:** Bureaucracy is pushed to prioritise visible disbursements over structural reforms.

Eg: Election seasons often witness prioritisation of **direct benefit schemes** over improving **schools and PHCs**.

5. **Accountability shifts to optics:** Success is measured by “beneficiaries covered” rather than outcomes achieved.

Eg: Large disbursement figures may not translate into better **learning outcomes** or **health indicators**.

Implications for public service delivery

1. **Crowding out of developmental spending:** High recurring transfers can reduce fiscal space for long-term investments.
Eg: **RBI State Finances** notes the risk of rising revenue expenditure reducing capacity for capex.
2. **Service delivery stagnation:** Cash transfers become easier than fixing frontline public institutions.
Eg: Improving **teacher availability, PHC staffing, and urban services** requires governance reforms, not only funding.
3. **Rigid expenditure structure:** Welfare commitments create inflexible budgets and reduce policy adaptability.
Eg: **FRBM frameworks** caution against unsustainable growth of committed expenditure.
4. **Leakage and exclusion risks remain:** Weak verification and grievance systems reduce welfare effectiveness.
Eg: Targeting challenges linked to outdated databases like **SECC** have been widely discussed in welfare policy debates.
5. **Short-termism in governance:** Long-gestation reforms receive less attention compared to instant transfers.
Eg: Public goods like **water supply, sanitation systems, and preventive healthcare** often remain under-prioritised.

Reforms to make welfare outcome-oriented

1. **Outcome-based budgeting:** Link welfare spending to measurable indicators and publish performance dashboards.
Eg: Strengthening **Outcome Budgeting** frameworks can improve transparency and evaluation.
2. **Independent evaluation and social audits:** Make periodic third-party assessment mandatory for major schemes.
Eg: **MGNREGA social audits** demonstrate how institutionalised transparency can improve accountability.
3. **Mandatory fiscal disclosure for welfare promises:** Require pre-announcement costing and medium-term funding plans.
Eg: **RBI’s fiscal sustainability recommendations** support credible multi-year projections for States.
4. **Strengthen legislative and audit follow-up:** Time-bound action on CAG findings and PAC recommendations.
Eg: **CAG performance audits** should be linked with compliance reporting in legislatures.
5. **Balance transfers with service guarantees:** Combine cash support with improvements in education, health and skilling.

Eg: Right to Education Act, 2009 shows how enforceable service standards can complement welfare measures.

6. **Convergence and sunset clauses:** Merge overlapping schemes and introduce periodic review mechanisms.

Eg: 15th Finance Commission stressed efficiency and improved outcomes in social spending through reforms.

Conclusion

India needs a shift from welfare as electoral messaging to welfare as outcome-based governance.

Transparent fiscal rules, strong oversight, and capability-focused delivery can protect social justice while strengthening democratic accountability.

Q. “The governance crisis of marginalised communities is often rooted more in administrative invisibility than legal absence”. Discuss how enumeration and classification shape social justice outcomes. Propose reforms to make welfare delivery rights-based. (15 M)

Introduction

A welfare state can fail even with strong laws when vulnerable groups remain statistically invisible and administratively unrecognised. In such cases, exclusion is produced less by absence of rights and more by absence of identity in governance systems.

Body

Governance crisis of marginalised communities is often rooted more in administrative invisibility than legal absence

1. **Invisible in records, absent in delivery:** Many marginalised groups are not missing from constitutional promises, but they are missing from official datasets, beneficiary lists and local registries, which blocks real access.
Eg: Denotified, nomadic and semi-nomadic tribes (DNTs) are largely not enumerated as a distinct group post-1931, making targeted policy design and budgeting weak.
2. **Implementation gap despite constitutional guarantees:** Constitutional rights exist, but administrative systems often do not recognise the citizen in a usable manner for service delivery.
Eg: Despite **Article 14** and **Article 21**, people without stable documentation (migrants, homeless) struggle to access entitlements like ration, health and housing.
3. **Stigma survives through state practices:** Even after legal reform, bureaucratic and policing practices can continue exclusion through profiling and discretionary control.
Eg: The persistence of **Habitual Offenders laws** in several States after repeal of the **Criminal Tribes Act, 1871** shows how administrative labels can outlive legal change.

How enumeration and classification shape social justice outcomes

1. **Enumeration enables visibility, planning and budgeting:** Census and surveys create the evidence base for targeted welfare, fiscal allocation and monitoring of outcomes.
Eg: Socio-Economic and Caste Census (SECC) 2011 became a major basis for identifying deprivation-linked households for welfare targeting.

2. **Classification decides eligibility and access:** Welfare delivery depends on category-based inclusion (SC/ST/OBC/others), and those not clearly classified face systemic exclusion.
Eg: Many DNT communities are scattered across **SC/ST/OBC** lists or remain unclassified, leading to inconsistent access to benefits across States.
3. **Misclassification produces exclusion and leakage:** Incorrect categories can deny benefits to genuine claimants while allowing better-off groups to corner welfare.
Eg: The debate on **sub-categorisation within OBCs** reflects how broad categories can mask internal inequalities and distort benefit distribution.
4. **Certification is the bridge between identity and entitlements:** Even when a scheme exists, lack of uniform certification processes can make eligibility meaningless.
Eg: The **SEED scheme (Social Justice Ministry)** for DNTs faced poor uptake partly because many districts do not issue **DNT certificates**, blocking access.
5. **Classification shapes political voice and policy priority:** Counted communities gain visibility in democratic bargaining, while uncounted groups remain low priority.
Eg: The long-standing demand for **separate enumeration of DNTs in Census 2027** shows how communities link counting with recognition and representation.

Reforms to make welfare delivery rights-based

1. **Rights-based entitlements anchored in dignity:** Welfare should be treated as enforceable social rights linked to **Article 21**, not as discretionary charity.
Eg: In **PUCL vs Union of India (Right to Food case, 2001)**, the Supreme Court used continuing mandamus to strengthen food entitlements as rights.
2. **Uniform, portable and simplified identity architecture:** Create portability across States and reduce documentary burdens to prevent exclusion of migrants and mobile groups.
Eg: **One Nation One Ration Card (DFPD)** improves portability for migrants, showing how design reforms can reduce administrative exclusion.
3. **Standardised certification with time-bound service delivery:** Certification must be rule-based, digitised, and enforceable with accountability for delays and denials.
Eg: **Sevottam model (DARPG)** and citizen charters can be applied to caste/DNT certification to reduce discretion and ensure service guarantees.
4. **Institutionalise enumeration for marginalised groups:** Create periodic official counting mechanisms beyond Census, using surveys and administrative registers.
Eg: **NITI Aayog's MPI framework** demonstrates how multi-dimensional datasets can guide targeting beyond income poverty.
5. **Independent grievance redress and social audits:** Rights-based delivery requires complaint mechanisms, transparency and community monitoring.
Eg: **MGNREGA social audits** provide a governance best practice that can be adapted to urban and social justice schemes.
6. **Dedicated institutional mechanism for hard-to-reach groups:** Strengthen coordination through a permanent body for communities facing historical stigma and mobility barriers.
Eg: The **Idate Commission (2017)** recommended stronger institutional mechanisms for DNT welfare, reflecting the need for sustained governance focus.

Conclusion

A rights-based welfare state begins with visibility: what is not counted cannot be governed justly. India's

social justice agenda must therefore shift from scheme-driven delivery to **enumeration-backed, portable, accountable and dignity-centred entitlements**.

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

Q. Discuss the importance of preventive and promotive approaches in mental health policy. Examine how they address inequities in access to mental healthcare in India. (10 M)

Introduction

India's mental health challenge is no longer confined to treatment gaps but reflects deeper inequities shaped by poverty, geography, gender, and social stigma. A preventive and promotive policy approach is therefore essential to realise mental health as an integral component of the right to life and dignity.

Body

Importance of preventive and promotive approaches in mental health policy

1. **Early risk reduction:** Preventive strategies reduce the onset and severity of mental disorders by addressing risk factors before clinical manifestation.
Eg: National Mental Health Programme (NMHP) emphasises **early identification and community awareness**, shifting focus from hospital-centric care.
2. **Cost-effective public health strategy:** Prevention lowers long-term healthcare expenditure and productivity losses caused by untreated mental illness.
Eg: WHO Mental Health Action Plan 2013–2030 recognises prevention as essential for reducing the economic burden on health systems.
3. **Normalisation of help-seeking behaviour:** Promotive interventions reduce stigma by integrating mental wellbeing into everyday settings like schools and workplaces.
Eg: Mental Healthcare Act, 2017 mandates promotion of mental health and awareness as a statutory obligation of the State.
4. **Strengthening community resilience:** Promotive approaches build psychosocial resilience and coping capacities at the community level.
Eg: District Mental Health Programme (DMHP) focuses on community-based outreach rather than institutional isolation.
5. **Alignment with constitutional morality:** Preventive mental healthcare operationalises dignity, autonomy, and humane treatment.
Eg: Supreme Court in Common Cause v. Union of India (2018) linked mental health, dignity, and **Article 21**.

Addressing inequities in access to mental healthcare

1. **Reducing rural–urban disparities:** Preventive services expand access beyond psychiatrists concentrated in urban centres.
Eg: Tele-MANAS (2022) provides nationwide mental health support through tele-counselling, reaching remote populations.
2. **Improving access for economically weaker sections:** Preventive care lowers dependence on expensive tertiary facilities.

Eg: Ayushman Bharat – Health and Wellness Centres integrate mental health services at the primary care level.

3. **Addressing gender-based inequities:** Promotive mental health policies recognise women’s disproportionate caregiving and psychosocial burdens.

Eg: National Mental Health Policy, 2014 highlights gender-sensitive mental healthcare delivery.

4. **Reaching children and adolescents:** Preventive interventions ensure early support for age-specific vulnerabilities.

Eg: School Health Programme under Ayushman Bharat includes mental wellbeing as a core component.

5. **Reducing stigma-based exclusion:** Community-level promotion counters social discrimination against persons with mental illness.

Eg: Justice K.S. Puttaswamy (2017) affirmed dignity and autonomy as intrinsic to **Article 21**, reinforcing anti-stigma approaches.

Conclusion

Preventive and promotive mental health policies are central to equitable healthcare delivery in a diverse society like India. Strengthening these approaches is essential to transform mental health from a privilege of access into a universal public good.

Q. “Higher education is not merely a sector to regulate, but a national capability to build.” Examine India’s approach to private universities in this light. Analyse the reforms needed in funding, regulation and accountability. (15 M)

Introduction

A modern state’s real strength lies not only in infrastructure and defence, but in the quality of its universities that produce knowledge, innovation and leadership. In India’s case, private universities are no longer peripheral actors but critical partners in building national capability for **Viksit Bharat 2047**.

Body

Higher education is not merely a sector to regulate, but a national capability to build

1. **Human capital and productivity base:** Higher education builds advanced skills, professional competence and managerial capacity, which directly shape national competitiveness.
Eg: The **Economic Survey 2023-24** highlighted the importance of human capital and skilling for sustaining India’s growth trajectory in a technology-driven economy.
2. **Research and innovation ecosystem:** Universities are not only teaching centres but engines of **R&D, patents, and frontier innovation**, which are strategic assets for the state.
Eg: India’s **Gross Expenditure on R&D remains around 0.6–0.7% of GDP** (as repeatedly noted in **Economic Survey** and **DST** discussions), limiting research intensity compared to advanced economies.
3. **Strategic autonomy and national missions:** Higher education supports self-reliance in sectors like semiconductors, AI, defence-tech, health and climate solutions.
Eg: The **IndiaAI Mission (2024)** and growth of deep-tech priorities show that research universities are necessary for talent pipelines beyond short-term employability.

India's approach to private universities

1. **Expansion-first but weak differentiation:** India has enabled private universities to grow, but the system often treats them as a broadly similar category despite wide variation in mission and capability.
Eg: The NAAC grading ecosystem has expanded, yet quality signalling remains uneven, leading to information asymmetry for students.
2. **Compliance-heavy regulation over capability-building:** Regulatory focus often emphasises procedural compliance rather than nurturing research ecosystems, faculty depth and long-term academic investment.
Eg: UGC Regulations, 2018 on graded autonomy attempted differentiation, but most high autonomy benefits remain concentrated among established public institutions.
3. **Research capacity concentrated in public institutions:** National research funding and doctoral pipelines remain disproportionately concentrated in older public institutions and central universities.
Eg: Major research ecosystems continue to cluster around IITs, IISc, central universities, while many private universities remain primarily teaching-focused

Reforms needed in funding, regulation and accountability

Funding reforms

1. **Capability-based public research funding:** Research grants should be allocated through competitive peer review based on demonstrated capability, irrespective of ownership.
Eg: The National Research Foundation (NRF) under the Anusandhan National Research Foundation Act, 2023 aims to strengthen India's research culture through competitive funding.
2. **Opening national talent schemes to quality institutions:** National research fellowships and chairs should be opened to all institutions that meet transparent capability benchmarks.
Eg: Expanding PMRF access based on research output and doctoral ecosystem can reduce concentration and build broader national capacity.

Regulation reforms

1. **Mission-based institutional classification:** Regulation should explicitly differentiate between teaching universities, multidisciplinary universities, and research universities with separate norms for each.
Eg: NEP 2020 recommended a transition to multidisciplinary institutions and a restructured regulatory architecture aligned to quality and institutional maturity.
2. **Light but tight regulation with outcome focus:** Reduce micromanagement of inputs while strengthening evaluation of learning outcomes, research integrity and governance quality.
Eg: NEP 2020's principle of "light but tight" regulation supports autonomy, but requires strong outcome-linked accreditation.

Accountability reforms

1. **Stronger governance and conflict-of-interest safeguards:** Private universities must meet stricter standards of transparency in governing bodies, finances and academic decision-making.

Eg: 2nd ARC (2007) emphasised that ethical governance requires transparency, citizen-centric accountability and institutional checks against arbitrary power.

2. **Student protection and information disclosure regime:** Mandatory public disclosure of placement data, faculty strength, research output, fee structures and grievance redressal outcomes is essential.

Eg: A disclosure framework aligned with UGC's **student grievance redressal regulations** can reduce market opacity and protect learners from low-quality institutions.

3. **Academic integrity and research ethics enforcement:** Expansion of research funding must be paired with strict safeguards on plagiarism, publication ethics and financial integrity.

Eg: UGC (Promotion of Academic Integrity and Prevention of Plagiarism) Regulations, 2018 provide a baseline for enforcing integrity in research output.

Conclusion

India must treat private universities not as entities to merely police, but as institutions to strategically enable, differentiate and discipline. A capability-driven model combining **competitive funding, mission-based regulation and rigorous accountability** is essential if higher education is to power India's transformation into a knowledge economy by 2047.

Q. "India's ITI ecosystem suffers from a severe employability crisis despite sustained public spending". Bring out the key reasons for weak placement outcomes. Examine how PM-SETU's design attempts to correct these failures. (10 M)

Introduction

Skilling is the missing bridge between **demographic potential** and **productive employment**. Yet India's ITI ecosystem shows a sharp gap between **public expenditure** and **job outcomes**, raising a governance question of efficiency, accountability and design.

Body

Reasons for weak placement outcomes despite public spending

1. **Low instructor capacity and outdated pedagogy:** ITIs face chronic vacancies and inadequate trainer upskilling, weakening hands-on learning and job readiness even when infrastructure exists.
Eg: NITI Aayog (2023) highlighted that only around **36% of sanctioned instructor positions** were filled, increasing reliance on contractual/guest faculty.
2. **Weak industry linkages and poor on-the-job exposure:** Training often remains classroom-centred with limited apprenticeships, resulting in a mismatch between skills taught and shop-floor requirements.
Eg: NITI Aayog (2023) noted persistent employability gaps despite high public expenditure, even as industries report shortage of skilled technicians.
3. **Placement systems not institutionalised:** Many ITIs lack functional placement cells, employer networks, and structured tracking of alumni outcomes, leading to weak labour-market transitions.
Eg: NITI Aayog (2023) reported extremely poor placements — **405 placed out of 4,14,247 trained (0.09%)** based on available data.
4. **Misalignment with local labour markets:** Trades are often not updated to local value chains and district-level demand, causing trained youth to remain unemployed or underemployed.

Eg: PM-SETU itself mandates **local labour-market studies** in Strategic Investment Plans, implying this has been a systemic gap.

5. **Gender exclusion reducing system efficiency:** Very low participation of women reduces the effective talent pool and reinforces occupational segregation in technical trades.

Eg: NITI Aayog (2023) flagged that women were only **6.6% of enrolled trainees** and **15.83% of instructors**.

How PM-SETU attempts to correct these failures

1. **Industry-led reform through Anchor Industry Partners:** PM-SETU assigns industry partners a central role in planning, execution and performance, aiming to make training demand-linked.
Eg: Under PM-SETU, clusters are designed through **Strategic Investment Plans (SIPs)** prepared by the **industry partner**, approved by the State and Centre.
2. **Hub-and-spoke model to improve standardisation:** Upgrading **200 Hub ITIs** linked to **800 Spoke ITIs** aims to reduce uneven quality and create scalable training ecosystems.
Eg: PM-SETU guidelines specify a hub connected to **around four spokes**, enabling shared resources and common standards.
3. **Trainer development via NSTI centres of excellence:** PM-SETU upgrades **five NSTIs** as premier institutions to address the trainer-quality bottleneck, not only equipment gaps.
Eg: The scheme targets NSTIs in **Bhubaneswar, Chennai, Hyderabad, Kanpur and Ludhiana** for capacity augmentation and trainer development.
4. **Co-funding to increase seriousness and reduce tokenism:** Mandatory industry contribution aims to ensure private partners have real skin in the game rather than symbolic association.
Eg: PM-SETU mandates **17% industry contribution** for ITI clusters and **₹40 crore committed investment** per NSTI over five years.
5. **KPI-based monitoring and phased rollout:** Performance-linked assessment and phased implementation aim to reduce leakage, improve accountability and allow course correction.
Eg: PM-SETU uses indicative **Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)** through SIPs and AOPs, monitored via State-level agencies and the **National Steering Committee**.

Conclusion

PM-SETU recognises that employability is a function of **institutions, trainers and market linkages**, not merely infrastructure. Its success will depend on whether the scheme builds credible **trainer pipelines and local job networks**, rather than becoming another upgrade programme measured only by spending and equipment.

Q. Underutilisation of education funds reflects governance deficits more than fiscal constraints. Evaluate the reasons behind persistent under-spending. Suggest reforms in Centre–State education financing. (10 M)

Introduction

Education spending is not constrained only by fiscal space, but by the State's ability to plan, execute and coordinate across levels of government. Persistent underutilisation of education funds indicates a deeper governance deficit, weakening India's human capital foundation despite repeated policy commitments.

Body

Underutilisation reflects governance deficits more than fiscal constraints

1. **Weak planning and delayed approvals:** Funds remain unspent when states and institutions fail to submit timely annual plans, DPRs and utilisation certificates.
Eg: PM-USHA has repeatedly seen slow proposal finalisation and delayed administrative approvals by state higher education departments.
2. **Low absorptive capacity of institutions:** Many government schools, ITIs and state universities lack procurement, engineering and project management capacity to execute grants.
Eg: CAG reports on social sector spending have flagged unspent balances due to delayed tendering and weak execution capacity.
3. **Fragmented scheme architecture:** Too many schemes, components and overlapping missions create compliance overload and diffused accountability.
Eg: Despite NEP 2020 pushing convergence, multiple parallel skilling and higher education initiatives continue with separate reporting lines.
4. **Centre–State trust deficit and conditionalities:** Rigid guidelines, procedural bottlenecks and matching share requirements cause delays and discourage timely spending.
Eg: Many centrally sponsored schemes face delayed releases when states struggle with co-financing or documentation conditions.
5. **Vacancies and weak administrative manpower:** Understaffed education departments and lack of financial specialists reduce implementation quality.
Eg: 2nd ARC highlighted that weak administrative capacity is a major reason for poor delivery in social sector programmes.

Reasons behind persistent under-spending

1. **Late releases and short spending windows:** Funds often arrive late in the financial year, leaving little time for quality spending and leading to surrender.
Eg: 15th Finance Commission emphasised predictable transfers for improving spending efficiency in key social sectors.
2. **Input-driven budgeting and weak outcome monitoring:** When monitoring focuses on expenditure rather than learning outcomes, utilisation becomes inefficient and delayed.
Eg: NITI Aayog SDG India Index shows uneven education outcomes across states, reflecting weak accountability systems.
3. **Procurement delays and tendering failures:** Education infrastructure and digital projects face repeated tender cancellations, vendor disputes and cost escalation.
Eg: School infrastructure and ICT procurement often face delays due to multi-layer approvals and audit fears.
4. **Over-centralised design ignoring local needs:** Uniform scheme norms reduce relevance for diverse state contexts, lowering ownership and execution.
Eg: The Concurrent List (Article 246) structure demands co-design, yet many schemes remain top-down in operational design.
5. **Weak financial discipline at implementing levels:** Funds get parked in implementing agency accounts, creating artificial utilisation while real work lags.
Eg: CAG has repeatedly flagged “parking of funds” and accumulation of unspent balances in implementing bodies.

Reforms in Centre–State education financing

1. **Institutionalise cooperative federalism in education:** Make funding rules consultative, transparent and stable to improve trust and timely execution.
Eg: Education being in the **Concurrent List** requires structured Centre–State coordination for NEP implementation.
2. **Move to formula-based and multi-year grants:** Replace annual scheme-driven releases with predictable medium-term transfers based on equity, need and outcomes.
Eg: **15th Finance Commission** supported predictable transfers and performance-linked incentives for better service delivery.
3. **Strengthen state and institutional capacity:** Create dedicated project management units, procurement support cells and financial training for education administrators.
Eg: **Aspirational Districts Programme** shows that capacity + monitoring can improve outcomes in lagging regions.
4. **Simplify schemes through convergence and single-window reporting:** Merge overlapping schemes and standardise reporting to reduce compliance burden.
Eg: **NEP 2020** emphasises integrated governance, which requires rationalisation of scheme architecture.
5. **Link funding to outcomes without penalising poorer states:** Introduce graded outcome-linked financing that rewards improvement rather than absolute performance.
Eg: **NITI Aayog’s outcome dashboards** can be used to track progress while protecting equity in allocations.

Conclusion

Underutilisation of education funds is fundamentally a governance and federal coordination failure, not merely a shortage of money. Predictable transfers, stronger implementation capacity and simplified scheme architecture can convert allocations into measurable learning outcomes and reduce regional disparities.

Q. Examine the implications of India’s stagnating R&D expenditure as a percentage of GDP. Discuss why private sector participation remains limited despite policy intent. Suggest policy and governance measures to crowd-in private R&D. (15 M)

Introduction

India’s innovation ambition is rising, but its **R&D intensity remains stuck at a low base**, creating a mismatch between global-tech aspirations and domestic scientific capability. In a world where strategic autonomy is increasingly technology-defined, **stagnant R&D spending becomes a governance and competitiveness constraint**.

Body

Implications of India’s stagnating R&D expenditure as % of GDP

1. **Strategic autonomy deficit:** Low R&D intensity weakens India’s ability to develop indigenous technologies in critical sectors.
Eg: Dependence on imported **semiconductor equipment**, advanced materials, and defence-grade electronics persists despite missions like **Semicon India**, showing capability gaps.

2. **Weak innovation-to-industry pipeline:** Limited research funding reduces the conversion of ideas into patents, prototypes and scalable products.
Eg: Public institutions like **CSIR** have improved tech-transfer, but many universities still lack strong **TTOs (Technology Transfer Offices)**.
3. **Brain drain and talent underutilisation:** Low funding and uncertain grants reduce research careers' attractiveness and weaken retention.
Eg: Delays in grant cycles during transitions like **SERB to ANRF** created uncertainty for early-career researchers in **2024–25**.
4. **Regional and social inequality in innovation:** Underfunding concentrates research in a few elite institutions, weakening inclusive innovation.
Eg: Most State universities remain teaching-heavy due to weak research funding, limiting regional innovation despite NEP 2020's vision.
5. **Low resilience against national challenges:** Weak R&D capacity limits preparedness for public health, climate adaptation and disaster risk.
Eg: India's response capacity improves when R&D is strong, as seen in **vaccine ecosystem scaling** during COVID-19 through DBT-BIRAC support.

Why private sector participation remains limited despite policy intent

1. **High risk and long gestation of R&D:** Indian firms often prefer importing mature technology rather than funding uncertain discovery.
Eg: Many industries rely on foreign IP for advanced manufacturing, as in high-end electronics and precision equipment.
2. **Weak demand for frontier innovation in domestic markets:** Cost-sensitive markets reward low-cost adaptation more than original R&D.
Eg: MSMEs often focus on process tweaks rather than new IP due to survival pressures and thin margins.
3. **Poor university-industry linkages:** Collaboration mechanisms remain weak, reducing trust and joint problem-solving.
Eg: Compared to global models, India has limited scale of long-term university-industry chairs and joint labs outside a few IITs.
4. **Regulatory uncertainty and compliance burden:** Firms face unpredictability in approvals, procurement and standards, discouraging R&D investment.
Eg: Start-ups in health-tech and biotech often face long approval timelines, raising the cost of innovation.
5. **Limited venture depth for deep-tech:** India's capital ecosystem favours short-cycle digital models over lab-to-market innovation.
Eg: Deep-tech start-ups struggle for patient capital compared to fintech/consumer tech, despite RDI-type announcements.

Policy and governance measures to crowd-in private R&D

1. **Stable, predictable public funding as a catalyst:** Public R&D must anchor risk-taking and reduce uncertainty for private co-investment.
Eg: **ANRF** was envisaged with **₹50,000 crore over five years**, but low and uneven funding weakens credibility for crowding-in.
2. **Mission-linked co-funding with clear outcomes:** Structure missions where private R&D receives support only with measurable innovation deliverables.
Eg: Models like **DBT-BIRAC's National Biopharma Mission** show how shared infrastructure and milestone funding can de-risk innovation.
3. **Tax and procurement incentives for indigenous IP:** Use public procurement and standards to create demand for Indian technology.

Eg: GeM and Make in India procurement can be tied to domestic IP benchmarks, especially in health devices and clean-tech.

4. **Strengthen university-industry platforms:** Build thematic clusters, shared labs and technology transfer capacity in universities.

Eg: The Budget's **University Townships** idea can be designed as State-led innovation ecosystems with anchor universities.

5. **Ease of doing research reforms:** Reduce bureaucratic micromanagement while maintaining audit accountability through digital compliance.

Eg: The **Economic Survey** has repeatedly highlighted the need for improving India's innovation ecosystem through governance simplification.

Conclusion

India cannot reach Viksit Bharat goals with **low R&D intensity and weak private participation**. A credible ANRF, mission-linked co-funding, innovation procurement, and university-industry clusters can shift India from **technology adoption to technology creation**.

Q. The failure of skilling schemes is often a failure of governance, not of training. Analyse the structural reasons behind low placements under PM-DAKSH. Evaluate how institutional design can align training with labour demand. Suggest reforms for outcome accountability.

(15 M)

Introduction

A skilling scheme succeeds not when certificates are issued, but when **capabilities convert into dignified livelihoods**. The PM-DAKSH placement shortfall shows that weak governance can break the training-to-job pipeline even when training is delivered.

Body

Structural reasons behind low placements under PM-DAKSH

1. **Weak demand mapping and course mismatch:** Training often remains supply-driven, ignoring district-level labour demand, local industry clusters and seasonal job patterns.
Eg: The **Lok Sabha reply** showed only **44% placements** (2021–2024) despite a **70% placement mandate**, indicating weak alignment between training and actual job availability.
2. **Fragmented institutional architecture:** Multiple corporations (**NSFDC, NBCFDC, NSKFDC**) operate with uneven capacity, causing inconsistent implementation and weak standardisation of placement processes.
Eg: Data show **NSFDC 49.8%, NBCFDC 48.9%, and NSKFDC 23%** placements, reflecting structural divergence across implementing arms.
3. **State-level implementation disparities:** Skilling outcomes vary sharply due to uneven local governance, industry ecosystem, and monitoring quality across States.
Eg: States like **Rajasthan, Tripura and Jharkhand** recorded **less than 40% placement**, highlighting a federal delivery gap.
4. **Vulnerability-linked barriers ignored:** Target groups face discrimination, mobility constraints, poor networks and informality, which training alone cannot resolve.
Eg: **NSKFDC** groups including **Safai Karamcharis and waste pickers** recorded only **23% placements**, showing that stigma and labour market exclusion reduce employability conversion.
5. **Placement verification weaknesses:** Institutes may report short-term, low-quality or informal work as “placement”, while independent verification remains limited.
Eg: The scheme design itself shows the risk: **30% of training cost is forfeited** if placement targets fail, which can incentivise inflated reporting without third-party audits.

How institutional design can align training with labour demand

1. **District skill ecosystem approach:** Training must be linked with district industrial profiles, MSME clusters, and local services economy rather than generic courses.
Eg: The **15th Finance Commission** emphasised strengthening **local governance capacity**, which is crucial for district-level convergence of skilling with local economic opportunities.
2. **Apprenticeship-first model:** Institutional design should prioritise apprenticeships and on-the-job training, because employability improves most through workplace exposure.
Eg: The **National Education Policy 2020** stresses vocational exposure and practical learning, which can be adapted to PM-DAKSH through apprenticeship-linked training.
3. **Credit and enterprise linkage for self-employment:** For vulnerable groups, wage employment may be limited, so design must integrate credit, mentoring and market access.
Eg: NSFDC and NBCFDC already provide **loan support**, but the low placement rates show the need for tighter coupling of training with enterprise incubation.
4. **Anti-discrimination and mobility support embedded in scheme design:** Placement requires addressing social barriers through counselling, relocation support and employer sensitisation.
Eg: **Article 46** directs the State to promote educational and economic interests of **SCs and weaker sections**, implying skilling must ensure real economic mobility, not token training.

Reforms for outcome accountability

1. **Outcome definition reform:** Placement should be defined as sustained employment, not immediate short-term joining, with tracking at 3/6/12 months.
Eg: The **2nd ARC** emphasised **outcome-based governance**, supporting a shift from “trained numbers” to sustained livelihood metrics.
2. **Independent verification and social audit:** Third-party verification, local body involvement and beneficiary feedback loops must validate placement claims.
Eg: **Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG)** audits of skilling schemes like **PMKVY** have repeatedly flagged governance gaps, justifying stronger verification for PM-DAKSH.
3. **Performance-linked incentives for quality, not just quantity:** Training partners should be rewarded for retention, wage levels and skill progression rather than raw placements.
Eg: The scheme currently uses a **forfeiture clause** for non-placement; redesigning it into graded incentives can reduce gaming and improve quality.
4. **Parliamentary and public disclosure accountability:** Dashboards should publish district-wise placements, wage bands, and employer details to enable legislative oversight.
Eg: The PM-DAKSH placement data entered public domain only through a **Lok Sabha reply**, showing the need for routine transparency by design.

Conclusion

PM-DAKSH's outcomes underline that skilling is ultimately a governance challenge of **matching, mentoring and monitoring**, not merely training delivery. A demand-linked, apprenticeship-heavy and transparently audited model can turn constitutional social justice from **paper entitlements into real economic mobility**.

Q. India is exporting students at scale, but failing to build itself as a credible global study destination. Examine this paradox. Outline key priority policy measures to correct it. (10 M)

Introduction

India is among the world's largest sources of internationally mobile students, yet it attracts only a small

fraction of global learners. This paradox shows that India's higher education is still seen more as a **talent supplier** than a **global knowledge destination**.

Body

Examining the paradox

1. **Global credibility gap despite scale and English advantage:** India has mass enrolment and English instruction, but lacks globally trusted institutional ecosystems.
Eg: NITI Aayog (student mobility analysis) highlighted that in **2021**, for every international student coming to India, around **25 Indians studied abroad** (Source: **NITI Aayog**).
2. **Weak research and ranking visibility:** Limited globally ranked universities and uneven research output reduces international student confidence.
Eg: India's global university presence remains concentrated in a small elite set like **IITs and IISc**, while most institutions lack global branding (Source: **QS/THE ranking trends**).
3. **Regulatory and academic pathway uncertainty:** Multiple regulators, slow approvals and rigid rules reduce ease of entry and credit mobility.
Eg: International students face inconsistent processes across institutions for **credit transfer, equivalence and admissions**, unlike standardised systems in major destinations.
4. **Student experience deficit as a structural barrier:** Poor housing, integration, counselling and campus support lowers destination attractiveness.
Eg: Many Indian universities lack structured **international student offices**, making onboarding and settlement uneven.

Key priority policy measures to correct it

1. **Single-window internationalisation framework:** Create predictable visa, admission, equivalence and compliance rules under a unified mechanism.
Eg: NEP 2020 pushes internationalisation, but requires coordinated execution through bodies like **HECI**-type regulatory simplification (Source: **NEP 2020**).
2. **Globally compatible academic architecture:** Expand flexible curricula, interdisciplinary degrees and globally aligned credit frameworks.
Eg: Academic Bank of Credits (ABC) and the **National Credit Framework** can be adapted for smoother international credit mobility (Source: **NEP reforms**).
3. **Research-driven university ecosystem:** Fund research clusters, improve doctoral pipelines and strengthen global collaborations.
Eg: The National Research Foundation (NRF) framework aims to strengthen research culture across universities (Source: **NEP 2020**).
4. **International student services as a core mandate:** Make housing, safety, career support and integration measurable institutional outcomes.
Eg: Leading destinations treat international student support as a service standard through dedicated offices and compliance audits.
5. **Education diplomacy and branding strategy:** Position India as a regional education hub through targeted scholarships and partnerships.
Eg: Study in India programme can be scaled with focus on **South Asia, Africa and ASEAN** through structured scholarship diplomacy (Source: **MoE initiatives**).

6. **Rights-based and inclusive governance framework:** Ensure non-discrimination, safety and grievance redressal for international students.
Eg: Article 14 ensures equality before law for all persons, forming a constitutional basis for fair treatment of international students in India.

Conclusion

To shift from being a student exporter to a study hub, India must treat higher education as a strategic service sector backed by **regulatory clarity, research strength and student-centric governance**. A globally credible “Study in India” ecosystem can convert India’s demographic advantage into durable soft power.

Issues relating to poverty and hunger.

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

Q. Describe the structural challenges in implementing comprehensive police reforms in India. Discuss the role of judicial interventions in this domain. (10 M)

Introduction

Democratic policing is the backbone of rule of law under **Article 21** and **Article 14** of the Constitution. Despite repeated reform prescriptions since **Independence**, implementation remains uneven due to deep structural constraints.

Body

Structural challenges in implementing comprehensive police reforms

1. **Political control and lack of functional autonomy:** Frequent transfers and executive interference undermine operational independence and professionalism.
Eg: In Prakash Singh v. Union of India (2006), the Supreme Court noted arbitrary transfers and directed creation of **State Security Commissions** to insulate police from political pressure; however, several states diluted these provisions in subsequent Police Acts (**CHRI**).
2. **Weak accountability architecture:** Absence of independent oversight weakens external accountability and public confidence.
Eg: The Court in Prakash Singh (2006) mandated **Police Complaints Authorities (PCAs)** at state and district levels, but many states either delayed constitution or gave them recommendatory powers only, limiting effectiveness.
3. **Colonial legal framework:** Continued reliance on the **Police Act, 1861** perpetuates a force-centric rather than service-oriented model.
Eg: The National Police Commission (1977–81) recommended replacing the 1861 Act; yet, while some states enacted new laws, concerns remain that core structural changes suggested by the Commission were not fully adopted.

4. **Resource and capacity deficits:** Manpower shortages and inadequate training hamper professionalisation.
Eg: According to **Bureau of Police Research and Development (BPR&D) Data on Police Organisations (latest edition)**, there is a significant gap between sanctioned and actual strength in many states, affecting investigation quality and community engagement.
5. **Fragmented reform implementation:** Reform directions often lack uniform adoption across states due to policing being a **State subject under Entry 2, State List, Seventh Schedule**.
Eg: Variation in compliance with **Supreme Court directives (2006)** across states demonstrates uneven institutional commitment, reflecting federal and political complexities.

Role of judicial interventions in police reforms

1. **Catalysing structural reform through constitutional interpretation:** The judiciary has linked police reform to protection of **fundamental rights** under **Articles 14 and 21**.
Eg: In **Prakash Singh (2006)**, the Supreme Court issued seven binding directives including fixed tenure for DGPs and separation of investigation from law and order to ensure fairness and professionalism.
2. **Ensuring tenure security and merit-based appointments:** Judicial oversight sought to reduce arbitrariness in leadership selection.
Eg: The Court mandated UPSC-based empanelment for **Director General of Police (DGP)** appointments, later clarified in subsequent orders (2018) to strengthen merit and tenure stability.
3. **Promoting accountability through mandated institutions:** Judicial intervention attempted to institutionalise grievance redress mechanisms.
Eg: Directions for establishment of **Police Complaints Authorities** aimed at independent inquiry into misconduct, reinforcing citizen-centric policing.
4. **Limitations of judicial approach:** Courts lack enforcement machinery and depend on executive compliance.
Eg: Despite binding nature under **Article 141**, implementation gaps persist, highlighting the need for legislative and executive ownership beyond judicial mandates.

Conclusion

Sustainable police reform requires moving beyond court-driven compliance toward political consensus and institutional redesign. A rights-based, accountable and autonomous policing framework is essential to deepen constitutional democracy in India.

Role of civil services in a democracy.

India and its neighborhood- relations.

Q. Trade diplomacy works best when it converts market access into strategic trust. Assess how the India–U.S. trade deal can strengthen broader bilateral ties. (10 M)

Introduction

Trade diplomacy today is a tool for building **predictability, credibility and long-term strategic alignment**, not merely reducing tariffs. The India–U.S. trade deal can therefore strengthen bilateral ties by converting market access into deeper strategic trust.

Body

Trade diplomacy works best when it converts market access into strategic trust

1. **Trust through predictability:** Stable market access reduces uncertainty and signals that both sides prefer rules-based cooperation over abrupt coercive tariffs.
Eg: The deal lowers tariffs to a predictable level and supports confidence-building under the ongoing **India–U.S. BTA** track.
2. **Trust through reduced friction:** When trade disputes decline, diplomatic bandwidth opens up for collaboration in strategic domains like defence, technology and Indo-Pacific security.
Eg: Tariff moderation eases immediate trade frictions that otherwise dominate bilateral engagement.
3. **Trust through interdependence:** Higher trade dependence raises the cost of confrontation and encourages long-term strategic restraint and continuity.
Eg: The U.S. is India's **largest export destination**, making economic ties strategically consequential.
4. **Trust through institutionalisation:** Trade deals create structured negotiation channels, making dispute resolution more credible than ad-hoc political bargaining.
Eg: Progress under the **Bilateral Trade Agreement** provides a formal pathway to handle regulatory and market access issues.
5. **Trust through credibility of commitments:** Delivering on trade commitments signals seriousness and reliability, which carries over into security and technology cooperation.
Eg: Successful conclusion after prolonged negotiations improves the credibility of both sides as stable partners.

How the India–U.S. trade deal can strengthen broader bilateral ties

1. **Supply chain resilience alignment:** The deal improves India's competitiveness and strengthens India's role in trusted supply chains in the Indo-Pacific.
Eg: It supports India's positioning within **China+1 diversification** strategies pursued by global firms.
2. **Technology and innovation cooperation:** Trade stability encourages joint ventures and investment in high-value sectors, reinforcing strategic-tech partnership.
Eg: The deal can complement momentum under **iCET (Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology)**.
3. **Defence-industrial deepening:** Stronger economic relations support defence co-production, interoperability and long-term strategic convergence.
Eg: Defence cooperation has been institutionalised through **LEMOA (2016)** and growing defence trade.
4. **People-to-people and business ecosystem expansion:** Improved trade conditions strengthen diaspora-led business networks, investment flows and institutional partnerships.
Eg: Higher export and manufacturing activity strengthens India–U.S. corporate linkages in employment-intensive sectors.
5. **Multilateral and Indo-Pacific cooperation:** Economic trust strengthens coordination in forums where resilient trade and trusted partners are strategic priorities.
Eg: The **Quad** increasingly focuses on supply chains, standards, and economic security alongside defence cooperation.

Conclusion

Market access becomes strategic trust when it creates **predictability, institutionalised dialogue and credible commitments**. If sustained, the India–U.S. trade deal can deepen cooperation across **supply chains, technology and security**, making the partnership more durable than a tariff reset.

Q. “India’s neighbourhood diplomacy must be based on enduring interests, not changing governments”. Assess this with reference to Bangladesh. Outline ways to institutionalise bilateral cooperation. (10 M)

Introduction

India’s neighbourhood diplomacy cannot be hostage to political churn in neighbouring capitals. With Bangladesh, India’s interests are structural—rooted in geography, connectivity and regional integration.

Body

India’s neighbourhood diplomacy must be based on enduring interests, not changing governments

1. **Geography as an enduring interest:** Bangladesh remains India’s critical link for Northeast access and Act East connectivity.
Eg: Transit routes, rail revival and coastal shipping through Bangladesh directly support India’s **Northeast integration** and regional outreach.
2. **Economic interdependence as a stabiliser:** Trade and energy cooperation create continuity even when political relations fluctuate.
Eg: India–Bangladesh cooperation in cross-border power trade has continued as a functional pillar of ties.
3. **Sub-regional platforms reduce bilateral volatility:** Regional groupings help keep cooperation insulated from political shifts.
Eg: BIMSTEC and BBIN provide institutional pathways for connectivity and economic coordination beyond bilateral politics.
4. **People-to-people ties outlast governments:** Social, cultural and educational linkages sustain goodwill across regimes.
Eg: Education, medical travel and cultural exchanges remain resilient channels even during diplomatic downturns.

Ways to institutionalise bilateral cooperation

1. **Rule-based agreements with review mechanisms:** Strong implementation structures make commitments less personality-driven.
Eg: The 2015 Land Boundary Agreement shows how formal treaties can deliver durable outcomes when backed by monitoring.
2. **Permanent joint bodies for trade and connectivity:** Institutional coordination reduces ad-hoc negotiations and delays.
Eg: A standing mechanism for customs harmonisation and logistics coordination can improve predictability in bilateral trade.
3. **Sub-national diplomacy through border states:** Involving Indian states builds ownership and improves delivery.

Eg: Structured coordination with **Tripura, Assam, Meghalaya and West Bengal** can strengthen cross-border commerce and connectivity.

4. **Issue-based cooperation on climate and disasters:** Shared public goods create trust and reduce political friction.

Eg: Cooperation on **flood forecasting and cyclone resilience** strengthens humanitarian credibility and long-term partnership.

5. **Institutional dialogue channels beyond the executive:** Wider engagement prevents sudden narrative shocks.

Eg: Regular dialogue via **parliamentary exchanges** and **ICWA-style Track-2 forums** can sustain continuity during transitions.

Conclusion

India's Bangladesh policy must be anchored in **institutions, treaties and functional cooperation** rather than shifting political alignments. Durable engagement will come from making cooperation predictable, multi-layered and outcome-driven.

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

Q. Examine the key provisions of New START relevant to nuclear stability. Analyse why its expiry is a turning point in strategic arms control. (10 M)

Introduction

Strategic arms control works less by eliminating weapons and more by **making nuclear rivalry predictable and verifiable**. The expiry of **New START (5 February 2026)** has removed the last legally binding restraint on the world's two largest nuclear arsenals.

Body

Key provisions of New START relevant to nuclear stability

1. **Ceiling on deployed strategic warheads: It capped deployed strategic nuclear warheads at 1,550, limiting worst-case escalation.**
Eg: By **5 February 2018**, both sides were required to meet these limits, preventing rapid "uploading" of stored warheads onto deployed missiles.
2. **Limits on delivery systems: It constrained ICBMs, SLBMs and heavy bombers, preventing destabilising force expansions.**
Eg: The treaty limited deployed and non-deployed launchers, ensuring the competition did not shift only to delivery platforms with higher first-strike potential.
3. **Robust verification regime: On-site inspections and data exchanges reduced misperception and intelligence gaps.**
Eg: It permitted **18 on-site inspections annually**, enabling each side to confirm the other's declared forces rather than relying solely on unilateral estimates.
4. **Protection of national technical means: It prohibited interference with satellites and other monitoring tools, supporting transparency.**
Eg: By protecting **National Technical Means (NTM)**, the treaty strengthened credibility of verification even when diplomatic trust weakened.

5. **Institutionalised dispute resolution: A bilateral commission enabled continuous compliance management and crisis de-escalation.**

Eg: The **Bilateral Consultative Commission (BCC)** provided a formal channel to resolve counting disputes and interpret technical definitions.

Why its expiry is a turning point in strategic arms control

1. **End of legally binding restraint: For the first time since 1972, there are no binding U.S.–Russia strategic limits.**

Eg: With the cap gone, both sides can technically “upload” **thousands of stored warheads** onto existing missiles, changing force postures rapidly.

2. **Collapse of verification and predictability: Arms control shifts from shared monitoring to unilateral suspicion.**

Eg: After Russia’s suspension in **February 2023**, inspections and data sharing broke down; post-expiry, both sides rely mainly on **satellite imagery and inference**.

3. **Treaty design crisis due to new technologies: Emerging systems fall outside traditional counting rules and destabilise negotiations.**

Eg: Systems like **Poseidon** and **Burevestnik** were outside New START’s technical definitions, showing how innovation can outpace treaty frameworks.

4. **Harder path to multilateral arms control: Without U.S.–Russia restraint, China and others have weaker incentives to accept transparency.**

Eg: China argues its arsenal is not comparable, and without a functioning bilateral treaty, it can resist intrusive verification as “unfair”.

5. **Greater risk of miscalculation in entangled warfare: Cyber, space and precision conventional strikes complicate escalation control.**

Eg: A cyberattack or conventional strike perceived as threatening **nuclear command-and-control** could trigger escalation even below the nuclear threshold.

Conclusion

New START’s expiry is not just the end of a treaty but the erosion of **predictability, verification and strategic reassurance**. Restoring minimum transparency and crisis-management mechanisms is essential to prevent nuclear rivalry from sliding into uncontrolled brinkmanship.

Q. “Parallel peace mechanisms without legal accountability weaken multilateralism rather than reform it”. Discuss in the context of emerging conflict-resolution forums. Suggest India’s principled response. (10 M)

Introduction

Peace without law is only a pause in violence, not a settlement. When conflict-resolution forums bypass **international humanitarian law** and **multilateral consent**, they risk replacing rules with power, and diplomacy with optics.

Body

How parallel peace mechanisms weaken multilateralism instead of reforming it

1. **Erodes UN Charter-based legitimacy:** Parallel forums dilute the authority of the **UN Charter system**, weakening collective security and the primacy of multilateral consent.
Eg: The **UN Charter (1945)** places primary responsibility for peace and security on the **UN Security Council**, and parallel boards weaken this foundational legitimacy.
2. **Shifts conflict management from rules to discretion:** When decisions depend on the will of a chair or select states, peace-making becomes personalised and arbitrary.
Eg: The **UNGA “Uniting for Peace” Resolution (1950)** emerged precisely because unilateral veto-driven approaches can paralyse legitimate multilateral action.
3. **Weakens international humanitarian law enforcement:** Without legal accountability, reconstruction and ceasefire frameworks risk ignoring civilian protection, war crimes scrutiny and proportionality.
Eg: **Geneva Conventions (1949)** obligate parties to protect civilians, but informal peace boards often lack mechanisms for legal compliance or accountability.
4. **Creates legitimacy laundering through selective membership:** Democracies can be used as symbolic participants to legitimise outcomes already decided by power blocs.
Eg: The **UN reform debate** repeatedly flags how “coalitions of the willing” create **optics of multilateralism** without genuine representativeness.
5. **Encourages forum-shopping and fragmentation:** Competing peace platforms create overlapping mandates, confusion, and weakened coordination in humanitarian crises.
Eg: The proliferation of “contact groups” and ad-hoc coalitions in recent conflicts has often produced **parallel diplomacy** with inconsistent outcomes (UN reports on mediation).

India’s principled response

1. **Anchor engagement in UN and international law:** India should support Gaza peace and reconstruction only through mechanisms consistent with **UN mandate** and humanitarian law.
Eg: India has consistently supported a **two-state solution** and humanitarian assistance within a UN-centred framework, including aid routed through recognised channels.
2. **Strengthen coalition-based multilateralism among middle powers:** India should work with like-minded states to resist hegemon-driven parallelism and restore collective bargaining power.
Eg: Platforms like **G20, BRICS, and IBSA** allow India to mobilise coalitions without surrendering legitimacy to veto-centric personalised forums.
3. **Push UN reform instead of UN bypass:** India must treat parallel boards as symptoms of UN dysfunction, and intensify diplomacy for credible reform of global governance.
Eg: India’s long-standing demand for **UNSC reforms** is rooted in expanding legitimacy, not creating alternative bodies outside the UN system.
4. **Protect strategic autonomy through conditional participation:** If engagement is unavoidable, India should insist on legal safeguards—clear mandate, accountability clauses, and multilateral consent.
Eg: India’s doctrine of **strategic autonomy** historically emphasises independent judgement, visible in India’s issue-based alignments in recent geopolitics.

Conclusion

India should not trade legitimacy for optics in a world drifting towards unilateralism. Its best leadership lies in defending **rule-based multilateralism**, while building coalitions that make international law enforceable rather than optional.

Q. Analyse the strategic rationale of India–France relations in the post-Cold War era. Discuss how strategic autonomy shapes their foreign policy convergence. Suggest measures to upgrade the partnership for a multipolar Indo-Pacific. (15 M)

Introduction

In a world returning to power politics, India and France have built one of India's most dependable strategic partnerships without the constraints of alliance politics. Their relationship has matured into a template of trust-based cooperation rooted in sovereignty, technology and a shared Indo-Pacific vision.

Body

Strategic rationale of India–France relations in the post-Cold War era

1. **Reliable strategic partner without alliance pressure:** France supports India's rise while respecting its independent foreign policy choices, unlike many bloc-driven partners.
Eg: After India's **1998 nuclear tests**, France avoided hostile diplomatic isolation and later supported India's mainstreaming in global nuclear order.
2. **Defence modernisation and high-end capability access:** France has been a consistent supplier of advanced platforms with relatively fewer political conditionalities.
Eg: India inducted **Rafale fighters** and **Scorpène-class submarines**, strengthening deterrence and maritime capacity.
3. **Convergence in Indo-Pacific and Indian Ocean security:** France is a resident Indo-Pacific power due to its overseas territories, aligning with India's maritime priorities.
Eg: The **2018 logistics support agreement** enabled operational cooperation, including access linked to **La Réunion** in the Indian Ocean.
4. **Support for India's global governance aspirations:** France has been among the strongest P5 supporters of India's claim for permanent membership in the UNSC.
Eg: France has repeatedly endorsed India's **UNSC permanent seat** in bilateral statements and multilateral diplomacy.
5. **Expanding cooperation beyond defence into strategic domains:** The partnership now spans space, cyber, climate, critical minerals and emerging technologies.
Eg: The **India–France Year of Innovation 2026** reflects the widening agenda into technology, start-ups and innovation ecosystems.

How strategic autonomy shapes foreign policy convergence

1. **Shared preference for multi-alignment over bloc politics:** Both avoid rigid Cold War-style alliances and keep space for issue-based partnerships.
Eg: India's approach of **multi-alignment** and France's idea of **puissance d'équilibre** converge in balancing without bandwagoning.
2. **Commitment to a rules-based order without surrendering sovereignty:** Both support international law and multilateralism while guarding strategic decision-making.

Eg: Their Indo-Pacific cooperation emphasises **freedom of navigation** and **sovereignty**, without formal military alliance structures.

3. **Technology and defence cooperation as sovereignty tools:** Strategic autonomy is operationalised through co-development and reduced supply-chain dependence.

Eg: The announcement of a **Joint Advanced Technology Development Group** signals intent to co-develop niche critical technologies.

4. **Independent positioning on major power rivalries:** Both seek room to manoeuvre vis-à-vis the US–China competition without becoming proxies.

Eg: France is not part of the **Quad**, yet works closely with India in the Indo-Pacific, reflecting autonomy-based convergence.

5. **Counter-terrorism cooperation rooted in shared threat perception:** Strategic autonomy also means resisting political selectivity on terrorism.

Eg: India and France have consistently emphasised **zero tolerance to terrorism** in joint statements and multilateral forums.

Measures to upgrade the partnership for a multipolar Indo-Pacific

1. **Move from buyer–seller to co-development and co-production:** Institutionalise joint design, IP-sharing and production chains for strategic platforms.

Eg: Expand Make-in-India defence outcomes from Rafale offsets to genuine joint development under the **India–France strategic technology track**.

2. **Operationalise Indo-Pacific roadmaps into outcomes:** Convert frameworks into regular joint patrols, HADR coordination and maritime domain awareness.

Eg: Use the **Indo-Pacific Roadmap (2023)** to expand joint surveillance missions with assets like India's **P-8I**.

3. **Build resilient supply chains for critical minerals and advanced materials:** Link strategic minerals cooperation with India's manufacturing and energy transition.

Eg: Collaboration on **critical minerals** can support India's EV, battery and aerospace supply security amid global disruptions.

4. **Deepen cooperation in cyber, AI and space governance:** Create trusted mechanisms for secure innovation, standards and threat intelligence sharing.

Eg: Joint work on **cyberspace and AI** can complement India's Digital Public Infrastructure model and France's regulatory expertise.

5. **Strengthen unilateral and regional capacity building:** Cooperate in IORA/IONS and island states for maritime security, climate resilience and infrastructure.

Eg: Joint initiatives through **IORA** can enhance capacity in the western Indian Ocean without provoking bloc confrontation.

Conclusion

India–France ties are strategically valuable because they convert shared autonomy into practical cooperation in defence, technology and the Indo-Pacific. Upgrading the partnership now requires shifting from frameworks to deliverables that strengthen deterrence, resilience and regional stability in a multipolar order.

Q. “In Asia’s evolving balance of power, middle powers will shape outcomes as much as great powers”. Comment. (10 M)

Introduction

Asia's power balance is no longer shaped only by US–China rivalry; it is increasingly influenced by capable “middle powers” that can build coalitions, shape rules, and provide strategic public goods. In an era of contested multipolarity, their choices often determine whether competition escalates into conflict or stabilises into cooperation.

Body

In Asia's evolving balance of power, middle powers will shape outcomes as much as great powers

1. **Coalition-building and minilateralism:** Middle powers are creating flexible groupings that shape regional outcomes without waiting for great power consensus.
Eg: Quad (India, Japan, Australia, US) has advanced **maritime domain awareness, HADR, and critical technologies**, shaping Indo-Pacific norms beyond bilateral great power frameworks.
2. **Rule-setting through institutions:** Middle powers influence the regional order by strengthening norms like sovereignty, UNCLOS compliance, and freedom of navigation.
Eg: ASEAN-led forums like **EAS and ARF** keep major powers engaged under a rules-based umbrella, preventing Asia from becoming purely bloc-driven.
3. **Strategic balancing and hedging:** Middle powers constrain great power unilateralism by diversifying partnerships and avoiding dependency.
Eg: Vietnam's multi-alignment through defence ties with India, Japan, and the US while managing China reflects how middle powers shape deterrence without formal alliances.
4. **Economic statecraft and supply chain resilience:** Middle powers can reduce coercion by building alternative economic networks and resilient corridors.
Eg: India–Japan supply chain initiatives and Japan's push for **trusted manufacturing ecosystems** show how economic policy becomes a strategic lever in Asia.
5. **Security provision beyond alliances:** Middle powers contribute to regional security through capacity-building, patrols, and defence exports.
Eg: India's maritime capacity-building in the Indian Ocean (training, patrol vessels, radar cooperation) strengthens smaller states' autonomy against coercion.

Challenges to middle powers shaping outcomes

1. **Limited hard power compared to great powers:** Middle powers may lack scale for sustained military deterrence and expeditionary capacity.
Eg: Even strong regional players remain dependent on US security guarantees in high-end contingencies like a **Taiwan Strait crisis**, limiting independent influence.
2. **Economic interdependence with China:** Trade dependence can constrain strategic choices and dilute collective responses to coercion.
Eg: Several Asian middle powers face vulnerability to **trade restrictions and supply disruptions**, which weakens unified responses during geopolitical tensions.
3. **Internal political and demographic constraints:** Domestic instability, fiscal stress, and ageing populations reduce strategic bandwidth.
Eg: Japan's strategic ambitions must operate alongside **demographic decline and fiscal pressures**, limiting long-term force expansion despite policy intent.
4. **Fragmented regional consensus:** Competing threat perceptions prevent middle powers from acting as a coherent bloc.
Eg: Within ASEAN, varying positions on the **South China Sea** often prevent strong collective action, reducing the effectiveness of middle-power diplomacy.
5. **Risk of escalation and entrapment:** Aligning too closely with one side may invite retaliation or pull middle powers into unwanted conflicts.
Eg: Strategic partnerships in the Indo-Pacific often require careful calibration to avoid **security dilemmas** and retaliatory pressure from major powers.

Conclusion

Middle powers increasingly shape Asia by building coalitions, strengthening norms, and providing economic-security alternatives, even if they cannot match great powers in raw capability. India's task is to convert its middle-power advantage into consistent leadership through capacity, credibility, and sustained regional delivery.

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

Q. Account for India's critical minerals strategy in the context of geopolitical competition. Explain the role played by plurilateral arrangements. Also identify the principal challenges ahead. (15 M)

Introduction

Critical minerals have emerged as a central axis of geopolitical competition, driven by energy transition, defence technologies and strategic supply-chain security. India's strategy reflects a shift from passive import dependence to proactive external engagement amid intensifying great-power rivalry.

Body

India's critical minerals strategy in the context of geopolitical competition

- 1. Supply-chain de-risking from China-centric dominance:** India's strategy is shaped by the need to reduce over-dependence on China, which controls a dominant share of rare-earth processing and refining.
Eg: China's repeated use of **export controls on gallium, germanium and rare earths** has highlighted strategic vulnerabilities for India and its partners.
- 2. Strategic alignment with like-minded partners:** India has aligned its mineral diplomacy with trusted partners to secure access while avoiding geopolitical coercion.
Eg: India's participation in the **Mineral Security Partnership (MSP)** and the **Quad critical minerals agenda** reflects this alignment.
- 3. Leveraging market size and resource endowment:** India seeks to use its large domestic market and significant **monazite and rare-earth reserves** as bargaining leverage in global partnerships.
Eg: India possesses one of the world's largest **monazite reserves**, yet remains under-integrated into global value chains.
- 4. Value-chain oriented external strategy:** The focus has shifted from mere extraction to processing, refining and downstream manufacturing.
Eg: India's emphasis on **processing partnerships** under MSP rather than only raw material access.
- 5. Strategic autonomy through diversification, not isolation:** India's approach avoids autarky and instead seeks resilience through diversified external engagements.
Eg: Bilateral mineral MoUs with **Australia, Argentina and African partners** complement plurilateral efforts.

Role of plurilateral arrangements in advancing the strategy

- 1. Collective counter-balancing of China's market power:** Plurilateral platforms help neutralise China's subsidy-driven price suppression.
Eg: MSP discussions on **coordinated offtake guarantees and price-risk mitigation**.

2. **Pooling capital and technical expertise:** Such platforms provide Indian firms access to deeper capital pools and advanced technology.
Eg: MSP-supported **lithium refining investment involving Indian participation in Brazil.**
3. **Supply-chain coordination across trusted partners:** Plurilateral mechanisms enable coordinated mining, processing and logistics planning.
Eg: Quad cooperation across **critical minerals mapping, processing and workforce skills.**
4. **Facilitating technology and R&D collaboration:** These arrangements support substitution technologies and efficiency-enhancing innovation.
Eg: MSP and **TRUST Initiative (earlier iCET)** focus on R&D for rare-earth substitutes and magnet efficiency.
5. **Reducing political and regulatory risks:** Joint frameworks lower due-diligence and geopolitical risk for overseas investments.
Eg: MSP's role in **risk-screening and project identification** for member countries.

Principal challenges ahead

1. **Weak domestic processing and refining capacity:** India remains strong in extraction potential but weak in downstream capabilities.
Eg: Continued export of **manganese ore in raw form** instead of value-added alloys.
2. **Limited financial and technological capacity of Indian firms:** Indian companies struggle to compete with state-backed global players.
Eg: High capital intensity and long gestation periods deter private investment abroad.
3. **Political instability in resource-rich regions:** Overseas mineral assets are often located in geopolitically fragile states.
Eg: Elevated investment risks in parts of **Africa and Latin America.**
4. **Price volatility and Chinese market distortion:** Artificially low Chinese prices disincentivise alternative supply chains.
Eg: **Lithium price crashes** have undermined recycling and non-Chinese producers.
5. **Underdeveloped recycling and circular economy ecosystem:** Recycling remains marginal despite strategic potential.
Eg: Less than **3% of global lithium demand** is currently met through recycling.

Conclusion

India's critical minerals strategy reflects a pragmatic blend of strategic autonomy and multilateral cooperation. Its success will depend on translating plurilateral intent into **processing capacity, financial resilience and technological depth**, ensuring long-term supply security in an era of mineral geopolitics.

Q. In the era of sanctions and tariffs, energy policy has become a tool of economic coercion. Analyse how this changes India's energy diplomacy. Outline safeguards to protect India's strategic autonomy. (10 M)

Introduction

Energy is no longer traded only through markets; it is increasingly shaped by sanctions, tariffs and strategic signalling. For India, this has turned oil, gas and critical minerals into instruments of diplomacy, coercion and national security.

Body

How energy coercion is changing India's energy diplomacy

1. **Energy as geopolitical leverage:** India must treat energy contracts as strategic commitments, not merely commercial deals, because suppliers and consumers now weaponise interdependence.
Eg: EU's energy shock after the Russia–Ukraine war (2022 onwards) showed how supply disruptions can reshape foreign policy and domestic stability.
2. **Shift from price-first to risk-first sourcing:** India's diplomacy now prioritises reliability, sanctions exposure and shipping insurance risks, along with price.
Eg: India's crude import diversification strategy has increasingly emphasised **West Asia, the US, and Africa**, as reflected in **PPAC** import source data.
3. **Energy diplomacy merges with trade diplomacy:** Tariffs and market access are increasingly linked with energy alignment, reducing separation between commerce and strategic policy.
Eg: The US has used **sanctions and trade restrictions** as tools of statecraft, influencing energy choices of multiple partners through secondary pressure.
4. **Greater role of strategic partnerships:** India must build long-term energy partnerships tied to investment, technology and downstream integration, not spot purchases.
Eg: India's energy engagement with the **UAE** increasingly includes long-term supply, storage, and refinery linkages through Indian and Gulf national oil companies.
5. **Expansion beyond crude into minerals and nuclear fuel:** Energy diplomacy now includes **uranium, LNG, critical minerals and green supply chains**, widening India's diplomatic agenda.
Eg: India has civil nuclear fuel cooperation with **Canada and Australia**, anchored in long-term uranium supply frameworks.
6. **Need for multi-alignment balancing:** India must maintain strategic autonomy by engaging competing blocs without being locked into any one camp's energy agenda.
Eg: India's consistent articulation of **strategic autonomy** in forums like **G20** reflects this balancing approach.

Safeguards to protect India's strategic autonomy

1. **Import diversification and redundancy:** India must prevent overdependence on any single supplier by ensuring diversified sources and flexible procurement.
Eg: IEA repeatedly recommends diversification and supply redundancy as key energy security principles for import-dependent economies.
2. **Strategic petroleum reserves expansion:** Larger reserves provide insurance against coercive supply shocks and price spikes.
Eg: India's **Strategic Petroleum Reserves Limited (ISPRL)** has operational SPR sites such as **Visakhapatnam, Mangaluru and Padur**, aimed at buffering disruptions.
3. **Strengthening domestic production and alternatives:** Increasing domestic exploration, ethanol blending, gas-based economy and renewable capacity reduces external vulnerability.
Eg: India's push for **20 percent ethanol blending target by 2025–26** (Government of India policy direction) reduces crude dependence in transport fuels.
4. **Rupee settlement and payment resilience:** Building diversified payment mechanisms reduces exposure to sanctions-driven financial chokepoints.
Eg: The **RBI's 2022 framework for international trade settlement in INR** supports resilience against currency and payment disruptions.
5. **Energy transition as strategic autonomy:** Accelerating renewables, storage and green hydrogen reduces geopolitical vulnerability tied to oil chokepoints.
Eg: The **National Green Hydrogen Mission (2023)** aims to reduce import dependence and build strategic industrial capacity.
6. **Institutional coordination for geoeconomic risk:** India needs structured coordination between MEA, MoPNG, Commerce and Finance for sanctions risk and trade retaliation.
Eg: The **National Security Council Secretariat** model highlights how cross-ministry coordination strengthens strategic decision-making in security-linked domains.

Conclusion

In a sanctions-and-tariffs world, India's energy diplomacy must be built on diversification, reserves and resilient payments, not on short-term bargains. The strongest safeguard for strategic autonomy is accelerating a credible transition towards cleaner domestic energy and secure supply chains.

Q4. "Strategic autonomy today is secured not through isolation but through selective technological alliances." Discuss in the context of India's participation in Pax Silica. Evaluate the challenges this poses for India's multi-alignment doctrine. (10 M)

Introduction

The grammar of global power has shifted from territorial control to control over technology stacks. In this environment, **strategic autonomy** increasingly depends on calibrated integration with trusted partners rather than isolation.

Body

Selective technological alliances as instruments of strategic autonomy

- 1. Economic security as national security:** In the age of dual-use technologies, access to semiconductors, AI and critical minerals is integral to sovereignty. Selective alliances help India secure supply chains while avoiding overdependence on adversarial ecosystems.
Eg: Pax Silica declaration (2026) aligns India with trusted partners on **AI, advanced manufacturing and critical minerals**, reflecting the broader securitisation of supply chains discussed in the **Economic Survey 2024–25 (chapter on global fragmentation and supply chains)**.
- 2. Leveraging human capital and design strength:** India's comparative advantage in semiconductor design and digital talent strengthens its bargaining power within such coalitions. Alliances convert this capability into access to capital and frontier IP.
Eg: The India Semiconductor Mission (2021, under MeitY) and collaboration under the **US-India Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology (iCET, 2023)** combine domestic capacity with external partnerships to enhance technology resilience.
- 3. Strategic geography as a continental anchor:** India's location outside the volatile **South China Sea-first island chain axis** provides diversification for global supply chains. This enhances India's strategic relevance without formal bloc alignment.
Eg: Discussions under Quad supply chain resilience initiatives (since 2021) emphasise diversification of critical technologies, where India is positioned as an alternative manufacturing and design hub.
- 4. Constitutional mandate for global cooperation:** India's foreign policy is guided by **Article 51(c)** of the Constitution, which directs the State to foster respect for international law and treaty obligations, legitimising calibrated coalition-building.
Eg: India's participation in plurilateral frameworks such as the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (2022) reflects engagement without compromising sovereign decision-making.
- 5. From autarky to calibrated interdependence:** Complete self-reliance in frontier technologies is impractical; strategic autonomy today implies control over critical nodes within global networks rather than isolation.

Eg: The **National strategy for artificial intelligence (NITI Aayog, 2018)** emphasised “**AI for all**” through partnerships and ecosystem development, signalling openness to international collaboration.

Challenges posed to India’s multi-alignment doctrine

1. **Risk of perceived bloc alignment:** Deep integration with US-led tech coalitions may generate perceptions of alignment, complicating relations with other major powers such as Russia and China.
Eg: India continues defence cooperation with **Russia** while expanding tech ties with the **US**, illustrating the delicate balance inherent in its **multi-alignment strategy**.
2. **Technology export controls and regulatory conditionalities:** Participation in securitised coalitions may subject India to restrictive export regimes or compliance standards shaped by dominant partners.
Eg: The global tightening of **semiconductor export controls (post-2022 US measures)** demonstrates how technology access can become a tool of geopolitical leverage.
3. **Policy autonomy in digital governance:** Alignment on AI governance and supply-chain security could limit India’s flexibility in domestic digital regulation.
Eg: India’s approach under the **Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023** reflects sovereign regulatory priorities which must remain compatible yet independent of coalition norms.
4. **Vulnerability to geopolitical shocks:** Tech blocs are susceptible to strategic rivalry, which may disrupt supply chains despite coalition membership.
Eg: The **Russia-Ukraine conflict (2022 onwards)** exposed the fragility of interdependent supply chains, underscoring the risks of concentrated alliances.
5. **Balancing atmanirbharta with openness:** Excessive reliance on external ecosystems may dilute long-term self-reliance objectives under national industrial policy.
Eg: The **Production Linked Incentive schemes (since 2020)** aim to deepen domestic manufacturing; their success depends on technology transfer rather than mere assembly integration.

Conclusion

Strategic autonomy in the digital age is no longer about standing apart but about choosing partnerships wisely. India’s task is to embed itself in trusted coalitions while preserving sovereign decision-making through diversified and overlapping engagements.

Q. “India’s engagement with Israel today is driven as much by technology and intelligence cooperation as by geopolitics”. Comment. (10 M)

Introduction

India–Israel relations have transformed from discreet defence contacts in the early 1990s to an openly acknowledged **Strategic Partnership since 2017**. In the contemporary security environment marked by technological warfare and regional flux in West Asia, the partnership reflects a fusion of advanced technology cooperation, intelligence coordination and calibrated geopolitics.

Body

Engagement driven by technology and intelligence cooperation as much as geopolitics

1. **Advanced defence technology partnership:** Israel is a key source of high-end military platforms and niche technologies critical for India's operational readiness.
Eg: According to the **SIPRI Arms Transfers Database 2023**, **India accounted for a significant share of Israel's defence exports between 2013–2022**, including **UAVs, air defence systems and precision-guided munitions**, strengthening India's combat capabilities.
2. **Joint development and technology transfer:** The relationship increasingly focuses on co-development rather than mere procurement, aligning with India's indigenisation goals.
Eg: The **Barak-8 Long Range Surface-to-Air Missile (LRSAM)** system is a joint project between **DRDO and Israel Aerospace Industries**, reflecting movement towards collaborative production under India's defence modernisation efforts.
3. **Counter-terrorism and intelligence sharing:** Shared threat perceptions regarding terrorism have institutionalised intelligence exchanges and homeland security cooperation.
Eg: After the **26/11 Mumbai attacks (2008)**, India and Israel intensified cooperation in **urban counter-terror response systems and surveillance technologies**, as acknowledged in official bilateral statements.
4. **Cyber and emerging technology cooperation:** Engagement now extends into cybersecurity, AI and critical infrastructure protection.
Eg: Under the **India–Israel Industrial R&D and Technological Innovation Fund (I4F)**, launched in 2017, joint projects have supported innovation in **AI, robotics and digital health**, according to official government releases.
5. **Agricultural and water technology collaboration:** Israeli expertise contributes to India's climate resilience and food security strategies.
Eg: More than **30 Centres of Excellence** established across Indian states focus on **micro-irrigation and precision agriculture**, as reported by the **Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare**, enhancing productivity in water-scarce regions.
6. **Defence industrial ecosystem integration:** Cooperation supports India's push under **Atmanirbhar Bharat** to strengthen domestic manufacturing capacities.
Eg: The **Defence Acquisition Procedure 2020** encourages technology transfer and local production, enabling partnerships with Israeli firms for manufacturing in India.

Geopolitical drivers of engagement

1. **Strategic positioning in West Asia:** Engagement with Israel strengthens India's diplomatic leverage amid shifting regional alignments.
Eg: During PM Modi's **2017 visit to Israel**, bilateral ties were elevated to a **Strategic Partnership**, marking a visible departure from earlier diplomatic restraint.
2. **Connectivity and geo-economic ambitions:** Israel's participation enhances India's trans-regional connectivity initiatives.
Eg: Israel is part of the **India–Middle East–Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC)**, announced at the **G20 Summit 2023**, aimed at boosting trade and supply-chain resilience across West Asia and Europe.
3. **Energy and regional stability calculus:** Engagement with Israel must be understood alongside India's broader West Asia interests, including energy security and diaspora welfare.
Eg: As per the **Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas**, a substantial share of India's crude oil imports originates from West Asia, making regional stability strategically critical.

Challenges

1. **Balancing de-hyphenation and diplomatic credibility:** India must sustain strong Israel ties while upholding its principled support for a two-state solution.
Eg: India reiterated support for a **two-state solution in UN General Assembly debates (2023–24)** while simultaneously expanding defence cooperation with Israel.
2. **Strategic autonomy and overdependence risks:** Heavy reliance in specific defence segments may constrain diversification of suppliers.
Eg: India continues procurement diversification through partnerships with the **US, France and domestic industry**, reflecting efforts to avoid excessive dependence, as noted in **Defence Ministry annual reports**.
3. **Regional escalation risks involving Iran:** Any Israel–Iran confrontation could complicate India’s connectivity and energy strategies.
Eg: India has strategic stakes in **Chabahar Port in Iran**, highlighting the need to balance relations across rival regional poles.

Conclusion

India’s engagement with Israel today is shaped equally by cutting-edge technological collaboration and evolving geopolitical calculations. The durability of this partnership will depend on India’s ability to balance innovation-driven security cooperation with strategic autonomy and regional equilibrium in West Asia.

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

Q. Discuss the geopolitical implications of expanding International Energy Agency membership beyond OECD countries. Analyse how this could affect global energy governance structures. (10 M)

Introduction

Established in **1974** in response to the global oil crisis, the **International Energy Agency (IEA)** was designed as an OECD-centric mechanism to ensure oil security among industrial economies. However, with emerging economies now driving global energy demand, proposals to expand membership beyond OECD countries carry significant geopolitical consequences.

Body

Geopolitical implications of expanding International Energy Agency membership beyond OECD countries

1. **Rebalancing of global energy power structures:** Inclusion of major non-OECD consumers would shift agenda-setting influence from a transatlantic core towards a more multipolar energy order.
Eg: According to recent **IEA World Energy Outlook reports**, emerging economies account for the bulk of future energy demand growth, making their exclusion increasingly geopolitically untenable.

2. **Enhanced strategic leverage for emerging powers:** Full membership would allow countries like India and Brazil to participate in decision-making on emergency stock releases and transition roadmaps.
Eg: During the **2022 coordinated oil stock release** following the Russia–Ukraine conflict, decisions were led by OECD members; broader membership would diversify crisis leadership.
3. **Reshaping North–South climate politics:** Wider representation may integrate developmental equity concerns into energy transition debates.
Eg: India’s emphasis on **energy justice and lifestyle changes (LiFE initiative)** has been acknowledged in IEA analytical reports, reflecting growing Global South influence.
4. **Pressure for institutional reform in legacy bodies:** Amending OECD-linked eligibility criteria would signal adaptation to changing geopolitical realities and strengthen institutional legitimacy.
Eg: Recent ministerial discussions in **Paris (2026)** welcomed progress on India’s membership request, indicating possible recalibration of the founding framework.

Impact on global energy governance structures

1. **Greater representativeness and credibility:** Expanded membership would transform the IEA from a Western energy club into a more inclusive global governance platform.
Eg: With associate members like **India and China**, the broader IEA family already represents nearly **80 per cent of global energy demand**, enhancing governance legitimacy.
2. **Deepening coordination in emergency response systems:** Inclusion of major consumers would strengthen strategic petroleum reserve coordination mechanisms.
Eg: IEA’s emergency response model, first used during the **1991 Gulf War** and later during supply disruptions in **2022**, would gain greater global reach.
3. **Acceleration of clean energy and critical minerals governance:** Broader membership could align transition strategies with developing country realities.
Eg: The IEA’s recent focus on **critical minerals and renewables** would benefit from participation of mineral-rich and high-demand economies.
4. **Risk of decision-making complexity:** Greater diversity of interests may slow consensus-building within the agency.
Eg: Divergent priorities between industrialised economies and fast-growing developing states on fossil fuel timelines could complicate unified policy statements.

Conclusion

Expanding International Energy Agency membership beyond OECD countries would reflect the realities of a shifting global energy landscape and enhance institutional legitimacy. Its success, however, will depend on balancing inclusivity with effective and timely governance in an increasingly complex geopolitical environment.