PSIR Pulse

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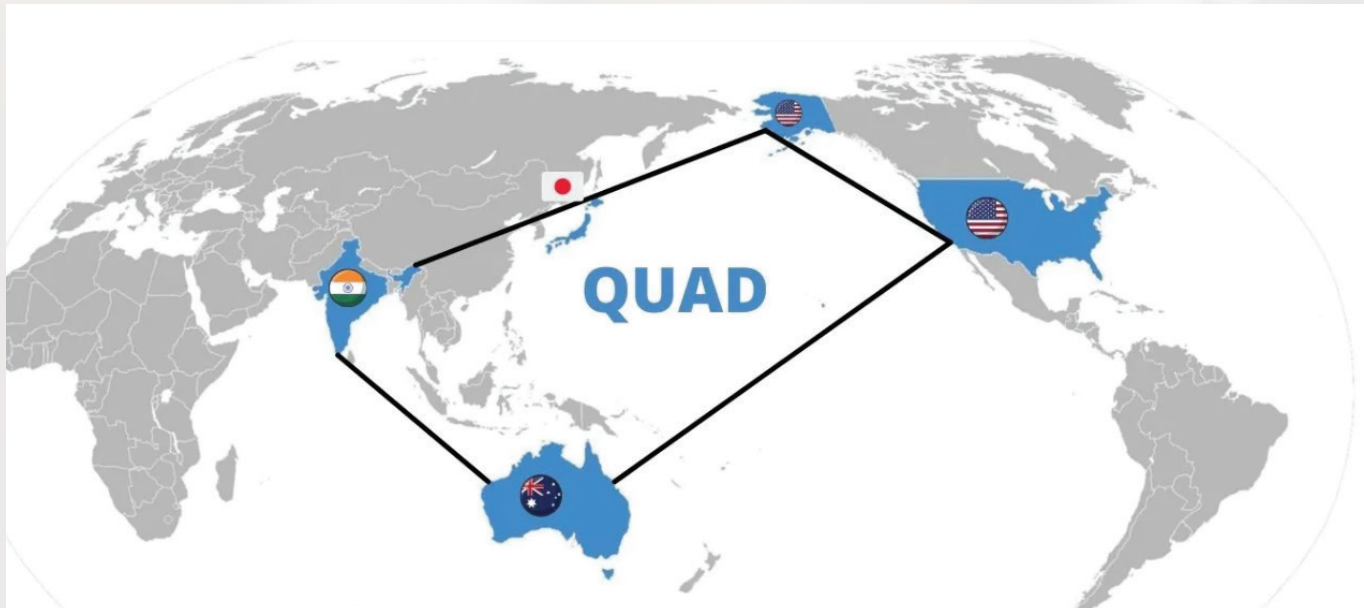
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GEOPOLITICS AT GLANCE

Quad Initiative for
Critical Mineral Supply Chain Security

INTRODUCTION

Recently, the Quad nations — **India, USA, Japan, and Australia** — launched an initiative to **secure supply chains of critical minerals**. This move is aimed at countering **China's dominance** in the global supply and processing of these minerals, which are essential for emerging technologies.

What is Quad Grouping?

The **Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad)** is an **informal strategic forum** between four like-minded democracies — India, USA, Japan, and Australia — committed to ensuring a **free, open, and prosperous Indo-Pacific**.

History of the Quad Formation

Quad 1.0 – Initial Phase

☐ **2004**: Originated as a coordination platform for **tsunami relief efforts** by the four nations.

☐ **2007**: Proposed formally by Japanese PM **Shinzo Abe**. However, it lost momentum after **Australia withdrew** due to Chinese pressure and growing US-China tensions.

Quad 2.0 – Revival Phase

☐ **2012**: Shinzo Abe floated the concept of an **"Asia's Democratic Security Diamond."**

☐ **2017**: The Quad was revived amid rising concerns over **China's assertiveness** in the **South China Sea** and at **India's borders**.

- **2021**: The **first formal summit** was held. The **joint declaration (March 2021)** reaffirmed commitment to a **free, open, inclusive, healthy, and democratic Indo-Pacific**, free from coercion.

Key Outcomes of Quad Summits

Maritime Security

- **MAITRI Maritime Initiative**: Training for Quad partners on maritime law enforcement; India to host the first symposium in **2025**.
- **IPMDA (Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness)**: Enhancing capabilities to counter **illicit maritime activities** through improved training and infrastructure.
- **Quad Coast Guard Cooperation**: Improving interoperability between member countries' coast guards. A **Quad-at-Sea Observer Mission** is set for 2025.

Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR)

- **Indo-Pacific Logistics Network Pilot**: A joint **airlift capability** for efficient disaster response.
- **Cyclone Yagi Assistance**: The Quad pledged **$4 million in aid** to **Vietnam**.

Health Initiatives

- **Quad Cancer Moonshot**: Focus on fighting **cervical cancer** through increased **HPV vaccination**, wider **screening**, and better **treatment access**.

Education and Research

- **Quad Scholarships**: India introduced **50 scholarships** worth **$500,000** for Indo-Pacific students.
- **Quad BioExplore**: A collaborative research effort on applying **AI in agriculture**.

Infrastructure and Connectivity

- **Centre for Cable Connectivity and Resilience**: A hub for developing **undersea cable networks** crucial for global digital infrastructure.
- **Quality Infrastructure Development**: Promoting **sustainable and inclusive infrastructure** in the South Pacific, including **telecom training programs**.

Climate and Clean Energy

- **Q-CHAMP (Quad Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation Package)**: Focused on strengthening **climate resilience** across the Indo-Pacific.

Significance of the Quad Grouping

Strategic Counterbalance to China

Acts as a **geopolitical counterweight** to China's rising assertiveness in the Indo-Pacific.

- Supports **ASEAN centrality**, **UNCLOS**, and peaceful resolution of disputes (e.g., **South China Sea**).

Maritime Security

Strengthens regional maritime security through **joint exercises** and **domain awareness**.

- Example: Annual **Malabar naval exercises** and the **IPMDA initiative**.

Economic Cooperation

Promotes regional **economic resilience** and provides alternatives to **China's BRI (Belt and Road Initiative)**.

☐ Example: Creation of the **Quad Infrastructure Coordination Group**.

Technology and Supply Chain Resilience

Aims to develop **reliable supply chains** for critical technologies and minerals to reduce **dependence on China**, which currently dominates processing of key resources.

☐ Example: **Semiconductor Supply Chain Initiative**, **Cable Connectivity Partnership**.

Public Goods Provision

Goes beyond security to deliver **public health and development benefits**.

☐ Example: **Quad Vaccine Partnership**, **Cancer Moonshot Initiative**.

HADR Operations

Provides **quick-response disaster relief** in the Indo-Pacific.

☐ Example: Aid to Vietnam during **Cyclone Yagi**, and the **Indo-Pacific Logistics Network Pilot**.

Significance of the Quad Grouping for India

1. **Enhances India's Global Profile**
   - India's active engagement in Quad elevates its position as a major Indo-Pacific power.
   - Strengthens its global diplomatic presence as the **"Voice of the Global South."**

2. **Reinforces India's Indo-Pacific Vision**
   - Quad supports India's **'Act East' Policy** and the **Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI)**.
   - Helps India promote security and economic interests in Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean.

3. **Strategic Leverage Against China**
   - Quad infrastructure and financing alternatives offer India tools to counter **China's BRI** dominance.

4. **Boost to Technology & Supply Chain Resilience**
   - Access to joint Quad efforts in **semiconductors, rare earths**, and **advanced tech** benefits India's domestic industries and reduces import reliance.

5. **Support in Health and Vaccine Diplomacy**
   - Quad Vaccine Partnership reinforces India's status as the **"Pharmacy of the World"** through vaccine manufacturing and regional distribution.

Challenges Facing the Quad

1. **Perception of Anti-China Bias**
   - Viewed as a military alliance against China; termed **"Asian NATO"** by Beijing, escalating regional tensions.

2. **Diverging Strategic Priorities**
   - Differences in threat perception, e.g., limited Quad response during the **2020 Galwan Valley clashes**, reveal uneven strategic commitment.

3. **Lack of Institutional Structure**
   – Absence of a formal **secretariat or framework** restricts long-term policy coherence and implementation.

4. **Economic Dependencies on China**
   – Trade ties with China, especially for **Australia, Japan, and India**, act as constraints on aggressive counter-China measures.
   – Example: **Australia's trade retaliation in 2020** and China's **rare earth export embargo** on US-aligned nations.

5. **Security Cooperation Limitations**
   – India's preference for **strategic autonomy** hampers the transformation of Quad into a full-fledged security alliance.

6. **Expansion Challenges**
   – Inclusion of countries like **Vietnam or South Korea** could dilute strategic focus and unity.

7. **ASEAN's Apprehensions**
   – Fears of regional **polarization** and concerns about undermining **ASEAN centrality** in Indo-Pacific cooperation.

Way Forward for the Quad

1. **Institutionalization of Quad**
   – Establish a **formal framework** (e.g., secretariat, regular working group meetings) to ensure coordination and continuity.

2. **Deepening Security Cooperation**
   – Expand **Malabar Naval Exercise** into more complex operations like **anti-submarine warfare** and **amphibious drills**.

3. **Constructive Engagement with ASEAN**
   – Launch a **Quad-ASEAN dialogue** on shared concerns: maritime security, infrastructure, and economic resilience.

4. **Quad Economic Framework**
   – Develop a joint framework focused on **digital trade, high-tech investment**, and **setting global tech standards**.

5. **Quad Plus Collaboration**
   – Explore **Quad Plus** format for specific domains (e.g., infrastructure, climate) by including **South Korea, Singapore, Vietnam**, etc.

Conclusion

The **Quad is a strategic pillar** for promoting security, stability, and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific. For India, it offers diplomatic clout, economic opportunity, and strategic leverage. However, to realize its full potential, the Quad must overcome internal divergences, build institutional strength, and deepen regional cooperation. A balanced, inclusive, and well-structured Quad can become a **model for multilateral cooperation** in the 21st century.

Introduction

In the recently held meeting of SCO Defence Ministers in Qingdao in China, Indian Defence Minister declined to sign the draft statement due to lack of reference to cross-border terrorism & Pahalgam terror attack in J&K. As a result, no joint statement has been issued.

What is SCO?

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) is a major intergovernmental body spanning political, economic, defence, and security dimensions across Eurasia. It was officially formed on June 15, 2001, in Shanghai, China.

SCO originated from the "Shanghai Five" initiative established in 1996, comprising China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. This group initially focused on resolving border-related issues and enhancing security in the post-Soviet era. The inclusion of Uzbekistan in 2001 transformed the "Shanghai Five" into the SCO.

Presently, the SCO includes 10 members: China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, India and Pakistan (both joined in 2017), Iran (joined in 2023), and Belarus (joined in 2024).

What is the significance of SCO?

1. **Geopolitical and Strategic Influence:**
   - The SCO is the largest regional group globally in terms of landmass and population. It spans roughly 80% of Eurasia and includes nearly 40% of the world's people.

- Its members include nuclear-armed powers like China, India, Russia, Pakistan, and Iran, along with resource-rich Central Asian states, making it a unique dialogue platform representing varied political systems and civilizational contexts.

2. **Economic and Connectivity Potential:**
   - Together, SCO nations contribute about 30% of the global GDP. The inclusion of India, a fast-growing economy, and Iran, rich in energy resources, further enhances its economic importance.
   - SCO nations collectively hold approximately 20% of global oil and 44% of natural gas reserves. Energy cooperation is promoted through the SCO Energy Club.
   - The SCO also focuses on improving connectivity, backing transport and infrastructure projects under regional frameworks. Though India has reservations regarding China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the SCO continues to support multi-modal linkages like the Central Asia–China Gas Pipeline.

3. **Counter-Terrorism and Security:**
   - A key function of the SCO is to combat terrorism, separatism, and extremism. Its specialized body, the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) headquartered in Tashkent, coordinates intelligence sharing and joint security operations among member states.
   - This makes SCO the foremost security platform in Central Asia.

4. **Regional Stability in Eurasia:** The SCO plays an important stabilizing role across Eurasia, especially in Central Asia. While it does not engage in direct intervention, it allows its members to engage in coordinated responses to regional crises like the Afghan situation.

5. **Platform for Dialogue:** Despite internal rivalries, the SCO facilitates dialogue between member nations that have complex bilateral ties—such as India-China or India-Pakistan. It enables them to engage diplomatically within a multilateral structure, potentially easing tensions.

6. **Consensus-Based Decision Making:** Although China and Russia are its dominant players, the SCO functions on consensus. Every member has an equal say in decision-making, which empowers smaller nations and gives strategic space to members like India to safeguard their interests.

7. **Quad vs. SCO:** India's participation in both the SCO and the Quad (with the US, Japan, and Australia) reflects its approach of strategic autonomy. While Quad is often seen as a counterweight to China, India's simultaneous engagement with SCO balances its foreign policy across both Western and non-Western blocs.

What are the limitations of SCO?

1. **Internal Conflicts and Bilateral Tensions:**
   - Border tensions between member countries pose a persistent challenge to SCO's unity and effectiveness.
   - The India-China border issues, particularly the recurring standoffs like the one in Ladakh, hamper cooperation between two major powers within the organization.
   - Similarly, historical rivalry between India and Pakistan, especially regarding cross-border terrorism, continues to cause friction. India often raises concerns over Pakistan's support for terrorism, while Pakistan tends to either ignore or deny these accusations within the SCO platform.

– Even among the Central Asian nations, disputes such as those between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan undermine regional harmony and complicate SCO's security agenda.

– A core structural weakness of the SCO is the absence of a dedicated mechanism to resolve disputes between member countries. Without an institutional setup for mediation, these bilateral tensions often linger and obstruct consensus-building.

2. **Dominance of China and Russia:**

– The SCO faces an imbalance of power as China and Russia dominate its leadership and agenda-setting processes.

– This asymmetric structure makes smaller or newer members cautious about their role and influence within the organization.

– China's growing economic clout in particular raises apprehensions among member states. Even structurally, SCO's functioning reflects this imbalance—for instance, the official languages of the SCO are Russian and Chinese, reflecting the primacy of the two powers.

3. **Lack of a Free Trade Area:**

– Despite repeated discussions, the SCO has not yet succeeded in establishing a comprehensive free trade zone among its members.

– This lack of formal economic integration weakens its potential as a trade and investment bloc, especially when compared to more cohesive regional groupings like ASEAN or the European Union.

4. **"Anti-Western" Perception:**

– Though the SCO portrays itself as a neutral and inclusive grouping, it is often seen—particularly in Western circles—as a bloc that seeks to challenge Western dominance in global affairs, especially the US-led world order.

– Such perceptions limit SCO's ability to build bridges with Western institutions or contribute meaningfully to global governance beyond its immediate region.

5. **BRI Concerns:**

– The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), championed by China and endorsed by most SCO members, remains a contentious issue for India.

– Specifically, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which passes through Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir (PoK), directly violates India's sovereignty.

– India's firm opposition to BRI isolates it from many SCO-led economic and infrastructure initiatives, thereby constraining its influence in shaping the organization's development agenda.

6. **Limited Mandate:**

– Although the SCO has gradually broadened its scope, its primary focus remains centered on security concerns—especially the fight against terrorism, separatism, and extremism (the "three evils").

– This heavy emphasis on security often sidelines other potential areas of cooperation, such as cultural exchanges, education, trade, climate resilience, and public health.

What can be the Way forward?

1. **Strengthening Trust and Dialogue:**
   - While SCO is structured as a multilateral forum, its greatest utility in defusing tensions often lies in enabling high-level bilateral meetings on the sidelines of its summits.
   - Informal diplomatic engagement during these events can help manage tensions, foster clarity, and provide momentum for resolution of issues—especially in sensitive cases like India-China and India-Pakistan relations.

2. **Unified Stance on Terrorism:**
   - To remain credible, the SCO must uphold a zero-tolerance approach to terrorism, without making distinctions between various forms or justifying them under political pretexts.
   - The organization must resist attempts to differentiate between so-called "good" and "bad" terrorists.
   - RATS (Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure) should be more dynamically employed for actionable intelligence sharing, capacity building, and joint anti-terror exercises. Importantly, it must be protected from being politicized by individual member agendas and made more accountable to collective outcomes.

3. **Deepening Economic and Connectivity Initiatives:**
   - The SCO can identify and prioritize key sectors like clean energy, agriculture, pharma, and digital technology for enhanced cooperation.
   - There is untapped potential in integrating corridors like the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) with regional trade networks, improving physical connectivity.
   - India's technological innovations—like the Unified Payments Interface (UPI) and digital public infrastructure—can be promoted as models for boosting digital connectivity and e-commerce across the region.

4. **Non-Traditional Security Threats:**
   - The SCO should widen its scope to address newer security challenges.
   - Drug trafficking remains a major funding source for terrorism and organized crime. Joint action through RATS can improve counter-narcotics cooperation.
   - Cybersecurity has emerged as a shared vulnerability—joint task forces, skill development, and technology-sharing agreements can be explored.
   - In the face of increasing climate-linked disasters, the SCO should facilitate regional disaster management protocols and humanitarian relief strategies, drawing from India's strengths in such operations.
   - On environmental fronts, cooperation on issues like water scarcity, land degradation, and climate resilience can strengthen regional solidarity and long-term sustainability.

Conclusion

For India, the SCO presents a mix of strategic opportunities and institutional challenges. While it provides a valuable platform to push its interests in regional security, connectivity, and energy cooperation, India must tread carefully—especially where its sovereignty or national security is concerned.

India's approach should remain firm on non-negotiable issues like terrorism and territorial integrity, yet flexible and pragmatic when it comes to areas of economic collaboration and regional dialogue. Maintaining strategic balance between engagement in Western-led and non-Western groupings will be key to preserving India's foreign policy autonomy in a complex multipolar world.

17th BRICS Summit

INTRODUCTION

India views BRICS as a crucial multilateral platform, especially in today's era where many global institutions are facing a legitimacy and representation crisis. The recent 17th BRICS Summit held in **Rio de Janeiro, Brazil,** further highlights the growing importance of this group in fostering a more inclusive world order. Understanding BRICS, its goals, contributions, and the challenges it faces is essential to assess its global role.

What is BRICS?

BRICS is an international organization currently comprising **10 member countries**:

❑ **Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, Egypt, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Iran,** and **United Arab Emirates (UAE).**

The term **"BRIC"** was first coined in 2001 by **Jim O'Neill**, an economist at Goldman Sachs, to describe a group of rapidly emerging economies.

❑ The **first BRIC Summit** was convened in 2009, bringing together Brazil, Russia, India, and China.

❑ In **2010**, South Africa joined, and the group became **BRICS**.

❑ The term **"BRICS+"** has been informally adopted since **2024** to include newly inducted members.

Timeline of Evolution

Year	Milestone
2001	"BRIC" coined by Jim O'Neill.
2009	First formal summit held in Russia.
2010	South Africa joins; "BRICS" is born.
2024	Iran, Egypt, Ethiopia, and UAE attend as official members.
2025	Indonesia joins, marking the first Southeast Asian inclusion.

Objectives of BRICS

1. **Promote Economic Growth:** Boost trade, investment, and development cooperation among members.

2. **Reform Global Governance:** Push for fairer representation in institutions like the **UN Security Council**, **IMF**, and **World Bank** to reflect emerging economies.

3. **Empower the Global South:** Provide a voice and platform for the developing world to advocate for shared concerns like technology access, sustainable development, and climate finance.

4. **Reduce Western Dependence:** Advance alternatives to Western financial systems by encouraging **local currency trade** and independent development institutions.

5. **Tackle Global Issues:** Collaborate on international challenges such as **terrorism, energy security, food security, health,** and **climate change**.

Major BRICS Initiatives

☐ **New Development Bank (NDB):** Offers development financing, positioned as an alternative to the World Bank.

☐ **Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA):** Aims to protect member economies during currency crises, reducing reliance on the IMF.

☐ **BRICS-PAY Initiative:** A proposed cross-border payment system to link national fast payment networks, enable **CBDC** transactions, and promote **de-dollarization**.

☐ **Anti-Terrorism Cooperation:** Joint strategies to combat terrorism, including intelligence exchange and capacity-building.

☐ **Anti-Corruption Framework:** Shared mechanisms to deny safe havens to corrupt individuals and strengthen anti-corruption infrastructure.

☐ **Health Collaboration:** The "BRICS Partnership for Elimination of Socially Determined Diseases" addresses health disparities among vulnerable groups.

☐ **Opposition to Unilateral Sanctions:** The group consistently denounces unilateral economic sanctions by powerful states.

Significance of BRICS

Economic Clout

☐ BRICS accounted for **35% of global GDP** and **46% of the world's population** before Indonesia's addition.

- Projected to drive **58% of global GDP growth** from **2024 to 2029**, overtaking the G7.
- Post-expansion, the group now controls **44% of global oil production**, strengthening its influence over energy markets.

Global Governance Reform

- BRICS advocates for reforming outdated global institutions to make them more democratic and representative.
- It provides a **counterweight to the G7**, representing the voice of the **Global South** and contesting Western dominance.

Strengthening South-South Cooperation

- The expansion into Africa, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia has deepened the group's influence and strengthened its position as a representative of developing nations.
- It provides a platform to collectively address marginalization in bodies like the **UNSC**.

Building Financial Alternatives

- Through the **NDB and CRA**, BRICS seeks to lessen dependence on the **U.S. dollar** and **Western-dominated financial institutions**, offering independent development funding and economic safety nets.

Common Approach to Global Issues

- BRICS enables member states to align on global challenges such as **terrorism, cybersecurity, peacekeeping, climate change,** and **public health**.
- The **2025 Summit** notably condemned the **Pahalgam terrorist attack** and the **U.S. bombing of Iranian nuclear facilities**, reflecting its growing geopolitical voice.

Challenges Facing BRICS

Despite its growing influence, BRICS faces several internal and external challenges that threaten its coherence and long-term effectiveness:

Political Diversity and Ideological Differences

BRICS encompasses both democracies (India, Brazil, South Africa, Indonesia) and authoritarian regimes (China, Russia, Iran), leading to conflicting views on governance, human rights, and global norms. These fundamental differences can hinder consensus on sensitive geopolitical matters.

China's Economic Dominance

China's GDP surpasses the combined economies of many BRICS nations, creating concerns over unequal influence within the group. Smaller and medium-sized members, particularly India, have expressed unease over Beijing's assertiveness and debt-driven diplomacy.

Divergent Economic Models

The bloc includes commodity-exporting economies (Russia, Brazil, UAE, Saudi Arabia), manufacturing powerhouses (China), and service-based economies (India). These structural differences can lead to diverging trade priorities and economic interests.

Intra-BRICS Trade Imbalances

Trade among BRICS nations remains skewed, especially with China maintaining large trade surpluses over other members. This undermines the idea of balanced South-South cooperation and causes friction in economic relations.

Bilateral and Regional Tensions

Internal rivalries persist, such as the **India-China border dispute** and **Iran-Saudi Arabia tensions**. The inclusion of countries with historic disputes (e.g., Egypt vs. Ethiopia over the Nile) makes unified action increasingly complex.

"Anti-Western" Perception

Western nations, particularly the United States, often perceive BRICS as a counterweight to Western alliances—sometimes branding it an "Asian NATO." This view increases geopolitical friction and complicates diplomatic relations with the West.

Economic Coercion and Retaliation Threats

Recent threats from Western leaders, including U.S. tariffs on BRICS members perceived as undermining the dollar or aligning against Western interests, showcase the external pressure the bloc faces.

Informal Institutional Structure

BRICS lacks a binding charter or permanent institutional mechanism (besides the NDB). This informality, while offering flexibility, often leads to fragmented decision-making and weak implementation of resolutions.

Way Forward for BRICS

To maintain its relevance and enhance internal cohesion, BRICS must adopt a strategic and balanced approach:

Prioritize Shared Developmental Goals

Despite ideological differences, all members share common development objectives like poverty reduction, digital transformation, green energy, and infrastructure development. Focusing on these areas can strengthen collective action and trust.

Address Trade Imbalances

Creating frameworks to reduce asymmetries in intra-BRICS trade is crucial. This could involve:

- Diversifying trade flows,
- Promoting joint ventures,
- Supporting underdeveloped BRICS economies through investment and knowledge-sharing.

Empower the New Development Bank (NDB)

The NDB should:

- Scale up local currency lending,
- Finance inclusive development projects,

- Focus on infrastructure, climate resilience, and digital inclusion across all member states to ensure mutual benefit and avoid dominance by any single country.

Strengthen Institutional Mechanisms

While maintaining its informal spirit, BRICS could establish a **lightweight secretariat** or coordination body to:

- Track progress on summit decisions,
- Facilitate dialogue,
- Ensure follow-through on key initiatives.

Gradual and Strategic De-dollarization

To reduce dependency on Western financial systems, BRICS can take the following steps:

- **Bilateral Trade in Local Currencies:** Expand currency-swap arrangements and trade settlements in national currencies.
- **Accelerate BRICS-PAY Development:** Launch a shared digital payment platform to simplify cross-border local currency transactions.
- **Enhance NDB's Role in Currency Internationalization:** Encourage the use of member currencies in loans and project financing.
- **Explore a BRICS Currency Basket (R5):** Use a reference unit based on BRICS currencies as a precursor to a common currency for valuation and trade settlement.

Conclusion

BRICS is a vital platform for emerging economies to reshape global governance and challenge the dominance of Western-led institutions. Its growing membership and increasing economic influence underscore its potential to foster a **multipolar and inclusive world order**. However, to realize this vision, BRICS must overcome internal divergences, strengthen institutional coherence, and align on key economic and strategic priorities. Only through sustained cooperation and mutual respect can BRICS emerge as a cohesive force in global affairs.
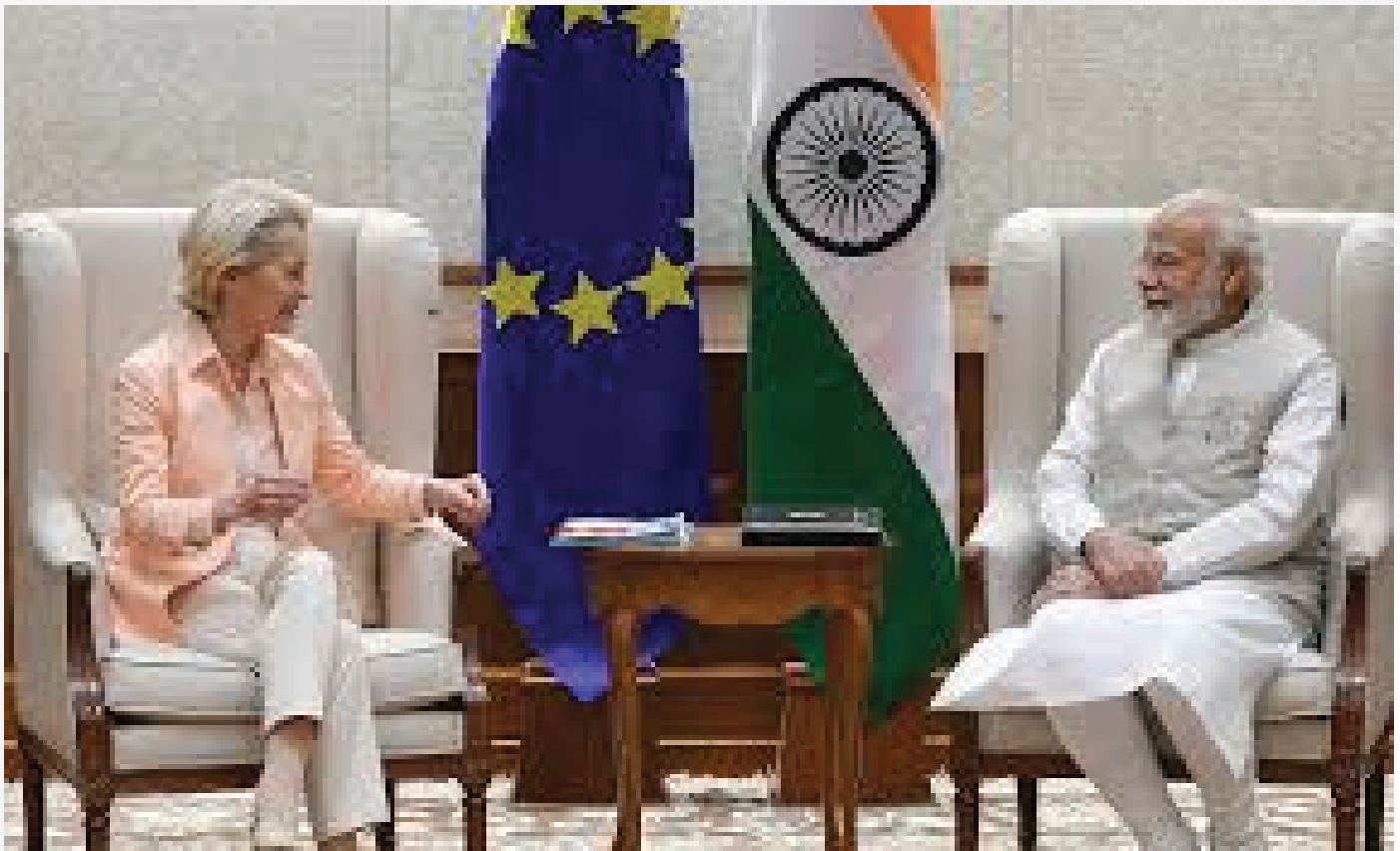
Introduction

As global dynamics grow increasingly unstable and fragmented—driven by the rise of authoritarian regimes and the Trump administration's transactional approach to bilateral relations—middle powers like India and Europe are now striving for stronger mutual integration. Both parties align on the goal of advocating for a multipolar world order grounded in international law, inclusive institutions, and pluralistic values.

Significance of India-EU Relations

❐ **Key Trade Ally:** The European Union remains either the largest or one of the most prominent trading partners for India, with the two-way trade in goods approaching $137 billion in the fiscal year 2024–25. The EU also stands as India's top export market.

❐ **Foreign Direct Investment (FDI):** The EU plays a major role in India's foreign investment landscape, contributing to 17% of the overall FDI inflow and generating substantial employment. Between 2015 and 2022, FDI from the EU into India rose by 70%, with French investments alone surging by over 370%.

❐ **Common Democratic Ethos:** India and the EU, being two of the world's largest democratic entities, are committed to multilateralism, a rule-based global order, and shared ideals like democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. These common values form a strong bedrock for their strategic engagement.

❐ **Advocates of a Multipolar World:** Both India and the EU view themselves as autonomous centers in an evolving multipolar system, striving to sustain international peace and order. Amid rising geopolitical

uncertainties, they regard each other as dependable, like-minded partners capable of preserving strategic autonomy and promoting stability across regions such as the Indo-Pacific.

❑ **FTA (Free Trade Agreement) Dialogue:** Ongoing efforts to finalize a comprehensive FTA aim to enhance market access for Indian exports and services, encourage investment, reduce trade restrictions, and better integrate India with European and global value chains. This agreement also intends to support robust supply chains, digital trade, and environmentally sustainable commerce.

❑ **Leadership in Climate and Clean Energy:** India and the EU share a commitment to addressing climate change and advancing sustainable energy. Joint efforts in fields like solar power, green hydrogen, and energy efficiency bolster India's renewable energy targets and decarbonization roadmap.

❑ **Strategic Concerns over China:** Both view China's growing assertiveness—militarily, economically, and technologically—as a significant strategic concern.

Challenges in the India-EU Relationship

❑ **Stalled FTA Talks:** Negotiations around the Free Trade Agreement have remained unresolved for over 15 years due to ongoing disputes concerning market access, tariffs, and regulatory frameworks—especially in areas like services, agriculture, and intellectual property rights.

❑ **Non-Tariff Challenges:** The EU maintains strict non-tariff requirements involving labor rights, environmental norms, and technical standards, which prove costly and difficult for Indian exporters to comply with.

❑ **Sectoral Disputes:** India is reluctant to open sensitive markets such as dairy and wine to European imports, while the EU insists on deeper tariff reductions. These conflicting interests have complicated negotiations.

❑ **IPR Conflicts:** India's emphasis on the affordability of generic medicines stands at odds with the EU's stringent intellectual property regulations.

❑ **Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM):** The EU's independently implemented climate measures—especially CBAM—pose significant threats to Indian exports of high-emission goods such as steel and cement.

❑ **Technology and Data Governance:** India's push for broader technology access faces challenges from European data privacy rules and cybersecurity laws like the GDPR, which create regulatory roadblocks for Indian tech firms.

❑ **Mobility and Visa Restrictions:** Indian professionals and students encounter restrictive visa and work permit systems in the EU, limiting both business and cultural exchange.

❑ **Strategic and Defence Mismatches:** India's heavy reliance on Russian defense systems inhibits closer military technology cooperation with Europe. Despite active collaborations like the Franco-Indian submarine projects and Spain's C-295 aircraft, India's defense ties with the EU lag behind those with Russia or the US.

❑ **Russia-Ukraine War Fallout:** India's non-aligned position on Russia's invasion of Ukraine stands in contrast with the EU's outspoken condemnation and sanctions, causing diplomatic friction and mistrust. The EU remains uneasy about India's enduring ties with Russia.

- ☐ **China's Dual Role:** Although they share concerns, both India and the EU retain strong economic relations with China. The EU trades far more with China than with India, and China continues to be India's biggest source of imports in 2024.
- ☐ **Different Security Lenses:** India views China as an immediate, militarized regional threat, whereas the EU interprets the China challenge largely through the lens of trade, global norms, and economic resilience—still seeing Russia as the more imminent security concern.

WHAT HAVE BEEN THE INITIATIVES TO BOLSTER THE RELATIONSHIP?

- ☐ **Free Trade Agreement (FTA) Talks:** Both India and the EU have prioritized the finalization of a comprehensive, equitable, and mutually rewarding Free Trade Agreement, aiming for completion by 2025. This agreement spans goods, services, investment safeguards, and geographical indications. Its core objectives are to improve access to each other's markets, reinforce robust supply networks, support digital and ecological shifts, and harmonize with present-day regulatory norms.
- ☐ **Trade and Technology Council (TTC):** Introduced in 2022, the TTC serves as a high-level platform for addressing issues that intersect trade, reliable technology, and security. It deals with matters such as digital innovation, sustainable technologies, AI, semiconductors, and cyber safety.
- ☐ **Ministerial Dialogue on Trade and Investment:** This top-level forum offers political leadership for the trade and investment partnership, ensuring consistent interactions and addressing obstacles related to market entry and trade regulations.
- ☐ **India-EU Strategic Partnership: Roadmap to 2025:** Formulated in 2020, this roadmap provides direction for collaborative efforts and aims to fortify strategic engagement in areas like commerce, climate cooperation, security, and sustainable progress. **Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) & Maritime Strategy:** India's participation in the EU's IPOI and Maritime Security Strategy underlines a mutual commitment to safeguarding a free, inclusive, and rules-based Indo-Pacific. Joint naval drills, including those in the Gulf of Aden and Gulf of Guinea, have further advanced maritime defense cooperation.
- ☐ **Clean Energy and Climate Partnership (CECP):** Launched in 2016 and now entering its third stage (2025–2028), the CECP targets intensified collaboration in green hydrogen, offshore wind power, and energy efficiency. India served as the exclusive partner for the European Hydrogen Week in 2024, while the EU was a key participant in the Green Hydrogen Conference in Delhi the same year.
- ☐ **Scientific and Research Cooperation:** India's associated status in CERN and agreements on peaceful nuclear R&D demonstrate growing collaboration in science and technology between both sides.
- ☐ **India-EU Connectivity Partnership:** Established in 2021, this initiative is focused on improving physical, digital, and energy connectivity, as well as strengthening people-to-people links. It supports sustainable, reliable infrastructure growth and aligns with the EU's Global Gateway framework.
- ☐ **India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC):** Though not solely a bilateral project, IMEC represents a major strategic initiative aimed at enhancing transport and trade links between India and Europe via the Middle East. It strengthens commercial routes and energy reliability. With potential to serve as a modern Silk Road, IMEC connects regions through commerce, energy, enterprise, and innovation. It answers the Indo-Pacific's need for infrastructure that is open, sustainable, and sovereignty-respecting.

What can be the Way forward?

Speeding Up FTA Negotiations with Realism: Both sides should embrace a balanced and realistic mindset to conclude the FTA, tackling delicate sectors incrementally and improving regulatory alignment via mutual recognition. This includes resolving long-standing differences around intellectual property, market entry, and sustainable norms.

Boosting Technological Cooperation: Future efforts should focus on creating structured mechanisms for tech sharing, equitable access, and strengthened coordination in AI, semiconductors, and cybersecurity. Agreements on data governance that uphold privacy while enabling innovation are essential. The EU's strengths in deep tech, digital manufacturing, and semiconductors complement India's prowess in software, scalable platforms, and digital public goods like UPI. Together, they can lead advancements in green innovation, ocean health, biotech, food systems, and healthcare resilience.

Harmonizing Climate and Energy Agendas: Developing a joint policy blueprint to promote renewable energy, align investment strategies, and tackle challenges like CBAM is crucial to protect Indian exports. Expanding financial and technological backing for hydrogen, carbon neutrality, and sustainability initiatives will be equally important.

Expanding Security and Defence Ties: Opportunities must be explored for collaborative defense production, enhanced Indo-Pacific maritime security, and deeper intelligence and cyber cooperation. India's interest in joining EU's PESCO projects and inking a Security of Information Agreement signals movement in this direction.

Strengthening Global Multilateralism: India and the EU should continue their coordinated efforts in global platforms such as the UN, WTO, and G20, pushing for reforms that reflect the realities of the 21st century and advancing their shared democratic ethos.

Facilitating Human Mobility: A comprehensive framework for student, researcher, and professional mobility would enrich talent exchange, mitigate India's unemployment challenges, and spur bilateral innovation. In today's knowledge-driven world, transnational thinkers are as vital as cross-border capital.

Conclusion

India and the European Union must unlock the vast promise of their alliance by joining forces on key and emerging technologies, creating stable supply chains, and enhancing strategic and security coordination. Together, they should strive to foster trust, reform global governance, and uphold the shared principles of democracy, multilateralism, and rule of law.

Indian Government and Politics (IGP)

Introduction

This year marks the onset of the 50th year since the declaration of the Emergency on June 25, 1975, an event that remains etched as one of the darkest episodes in the annals of India's democratic history. The Emergency period, lasting for 21 months, witnessed the suspension of civil liberties, widespread curbs on press freedom, mass incarcerations, annulment of elections, and governance through executive decrees without legislative oversight.

Constitutional Provisions for Emergencies

The Indian Constitution provides for three categories of emergencies: National Emergency, Constitutional Emergency, and Financial Emergency. Since independence, the country has experienced National Emergency thrice, first during the 1962 war with China, again during the 1971 conflict with Pakistan, and most notably, during 1975 under Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. Among these, the 1975 Emergency is the most controversial and heavily criticized. The justification offered for its imposition was "internal disturbances," which President Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed cited under Article 352 of the Constitution, a provision that allows for such a declaration.

During the Emergency, significant constitutional amendments were enacted that had a long-term impact on the balance of power and the functioning of Indian democracy. The 38th Amendment, passed in 1975, rendered the President's proclamation of Emergency immune from judicial review. It extended this bar

across all forms of emergencies—external, internal, and financial under Article 360—thus considerably enlarging the state's authority to override fundamental rights. The 42nd Amendment, passed in 1976, is regarded as the most sweeping of all. It sought to reduce the authority of the judiciary, particularly the Supreme Court and High Courts, by restricting their power to examine the constitutional validity of laws. It also allowed Parliament to amend any part of the Constitution without checks. After the Emergency ended and the Janata Party came to power in 1977, the 43rd and 44th Amendments were introduced to partially roll back these excessive provisions and restore institutional balance.

Rationale and famous Supreme court judgements for emergency

The rationale for including Emergency provisions in the Constitution stemmed from the need to preserve the nation's sovereignty, unity, and territorial integrity, along with the stability of its democratic polity and constitutional framework. Article 356, which allows for President's Rule in states, was envisioned as a safeguard against complete breakdowns in state governance. Article 360, relating to Financial Emergency, was incorporated to respond to severe economic distress, such as dwindling foreign reserves and macroeconomic instability.

Several landmark judgments from the Supreme Court have addressed the legality and scope of emergency provisions. In the Minerva Mills case (1980), the apex court reaffirmed that even in emergencies, judicial review remains part of the Constitution's basic structure and cannot be suspended. Similarly, in the S.R. Bommai case (1994), the Court ruled that the invocation of Article 356 is subject to judicial scrutiny, thereby curbing potential misuse. In Bhut Nath Mete v. State of West Bengal (1974), the Court clarified that while certain rights may be suspended, legal recourse remains available for violations of statutory procedures, upholding the principle that the rule of law does not vanish even in emergency times.

Reasons for 1975 Emergency Declaration

The 1975 Emergency was declared amid a convergence of multiple political and economic crises. Economically, the country was battling high inflation, sluggish industrial performance, growing unemployment, and spiraling prices of essential commodities. These issues contributed to deep public discontent. Parallel to this, student-led agitations emerged in Gujarat and Bihar in 1974, protesting against inflation and corruption. The defeat of the Congress in Gujarat served as a stark warning to the central leadership of its waning popularity.

Adding to the unrest was the JP Movement, spearheaded by Jayaprakash Narayan. This movement called for the resignation of the Bihar government and quickly gathered nationwide support, attracting backing from major opposition parties such as Jan Sangh and Bharatiya Lok Dal. With slogans like "Singhasan Khali Karo, Ke Janta Aati Hai," JP galvanized mass resistance against Indira Gandhi's administration. The situation further escalated with the massive railway strike led by George Fernandes, which brought transportation across the nation to a halt. The strike raised pressing concerns about labor rights and deteriorating working conditions.

Simultaneously, a prolonged institutional standoff between the executive and the judiciary aggravated the situation. Disputes over the interpretation of fundamental rights, the Constitution's basic structure doctrine, and judicial appointments created a climate of confrontation. Indira Gandhi's government increasingly concentrated power in a single leader, weakened internal democracy, and fostered a culture of sycophancy and corruption. The tipping point came with the Allahabad High Court's judgment on June 12, 1975, which

invalidated Indira Gandhi's 1971 election to the Lok Sabha, citing misuse of state machinery. Within a fortnight, an emergency was imposed, purportedly to maintain national stability.

Impact of 1975 emergency

The impact of the Emergency on Indian democracy was both profound and disturbing. Civil liberties were suspended, and fundamental rights like freedom of expression, movement, and assembly were curtailed. There was a systematic crackdown on dissent, with large-scale arrests of opposition leaders including Jayaprakash Narayan, Morarji Desai, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, and L.K. Advani. Over one lakh individuals were detained under harsh laws such as the Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA), COFEPOSA, and DISIR.

One of the most defining aspects of the Emergency was the strict censorship of the press. Newspapers were required to get government approval before publishing any material. Notably, The Indian Express once protested this censorship by publishing a blank editorial column. Constitutional amendments during this period further consolidated executive power. The 38th and 42nd Amendments significantly weakened the judiciary and increased central authority at the expense of federalism.

Another grave consequence was the coercive family planning campaign. The government conducted forced sterilizations on a massive scale, which triggered public outrage and further alienated citizens. Economically, the period was marked by disrupted trade, declining productivity, and stagnation. Inflation surged, and the overall standard of living deteriorated.

Politically, the Emergency sowed the seeds of its own undoing. Widespread public anger culminated in the defeat of the Congress in the 1977 general elections—its first electoral loss since independence. The excesses of that period turned the tide against Indira Gandhi, ushering in a new political chapter under the Janata Party.

Condemnation of emergency

A number of critical reports and judicial pronouncements have since condemned the Emergency and its implications. Perhaps the most infamous verdict was in ADM Jabalpur v. Shivkant Shukla (1976), where the Supreme Court, in a 4:1 majority, upheld the suspension of the right to life and personal liberty. Justice H.R. Khanna's dissent, which defended the inviolability of fundamental rights, remains a landmark in Indian constitutional thought. In 2017, the Supreme Court in Puttaswamy v. Union of India emphatically overturned the ADM Jabalpur ruling. It held that the right to life and personal liberty is intrinsic and cannot be taken away, even during an Emergency. The Shah Commission, appointed in 1978 under Justice J.C. Shah, conducted a comprehensive inquiry into the Emergency's abuses. Its findings sharply criticized the government for unlawful detentions, censorship, and the sterilization drive, underscoring the extent of executive overreach.

Lessons from emergency

The Emergency offers several enduring lessons for the preservation of democratic governance in India. It underscores the perils of authoritarianism and the need for elected leaders to operate strictly within constitutional boundaries, guided by public accountability and the rule of law. The executive must resist the urge to interpret judicial decisions narrowly, and must maintain institutional harmony. Protecting fundamental rights like freedom of expression and life must remain sacrosanct. Citizens today are highly aware and are likely to respond firmly to any violations of these rights through democratic means.

Moreover, the episode highlighted the crucial role of a free press and an alert civil society. As L.K. Advani famously remarked about the press during the Emergency—"You were asked to bend, but you crawled"—the media must learn from its past subservience and act as a vigilant guardian of liberty.

Conclusion

The Emergency remains a stark reminder of how fragile democratic systems can become when power is concentrated, dissent is criminalized, and institutional checks are eroded. It teaches that the eternal vigilance of both institutions and citizens is necessary to keep democracy thriving and resilient.

SECULARISM
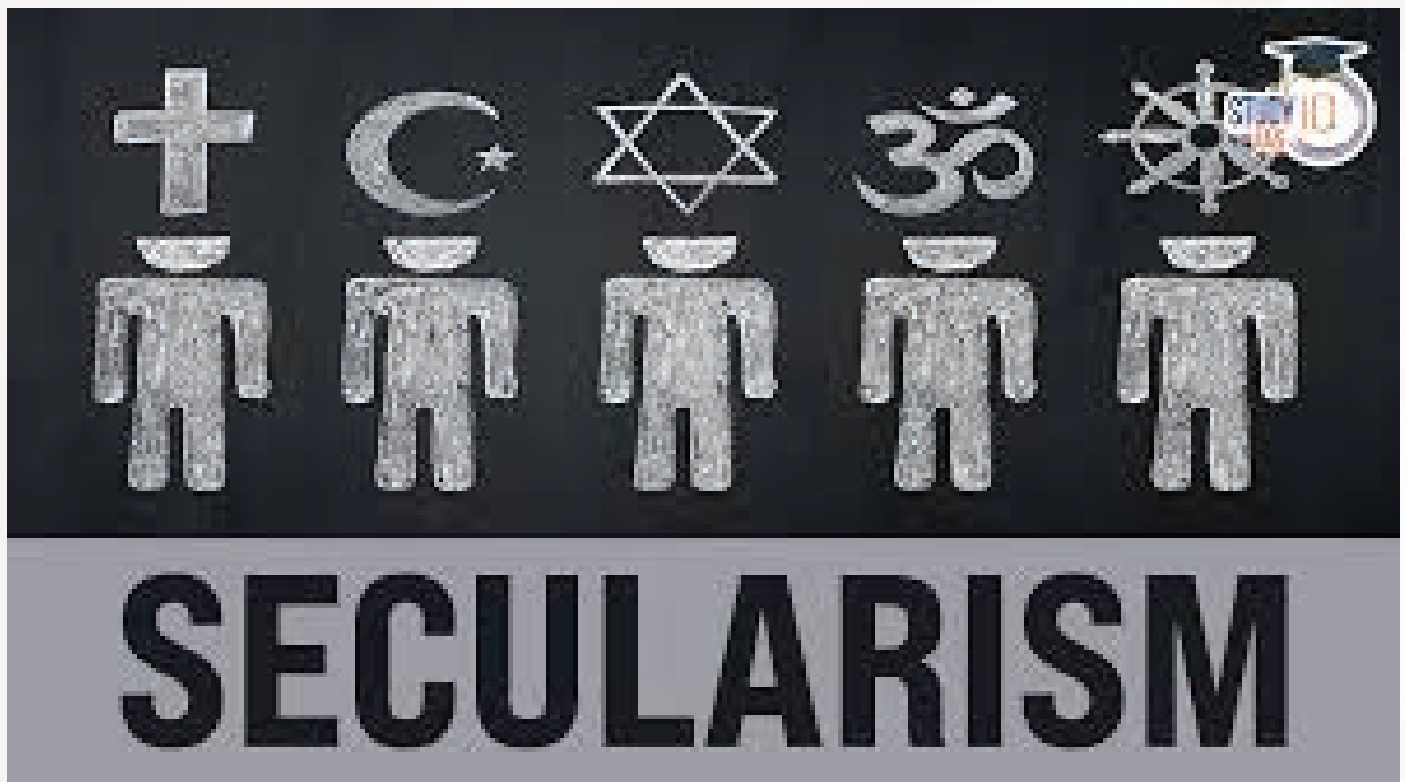
There is a continuing discussion in the country over whether the terms 'Secular' and 'Socialist' should be removed from the Preamble. These expressions were included through the 42nd Amendment to the Constitution in 1976, during the Emergency, a time when most opposition leaders were imprisoned or under detention, raising concerns about the democratic nature of the move. On the other hand, many believe that secularism was inherently part of the Constitution and that the amendment merely made this explicit. Against this backdrop, it becomes essential to analyze the importance and the current challenges to secularism in India, and to understand how Indian secularism diverges from its Western counterpart.

What is secularism?

The word "secular" refers to being "independent" of religion or lacking a religious foundation.

Secularism emphasizes keeping religious influence separate from government affairs, ensuring that the state does not favor any religion and that all individuals are treated equally irrespective of their beliefs.

Key foundations of secularism include:

☐ **Separation of Religion and State:** The government must not adopt an official religion or meddle in religious issues. Similarly, religious bodies should not interfere with state matters.

☐ **Religious Freedom and Freedom of Conscience:** Every individual has the right to follow, practice, and spread any religion of their choice or not follow any religion at all.

☐ **Equality Before Law:** Individuals are treated equally under the law, regardless of their faith or lack thereof.

☐ **State Impartiality:** The government should remain impartial towards all religions, neither promoting nor disadvantageous to any of them.

☐ **Use of Rationality in Public Affairs:** Government actions and policies should be based on reason, scientific evidence, and universally accepted moral values, not religious doctrine.

☐ **Minority Rights Safeguard:** A key role of secularism is to protect religious minorities from marginalization or oppression by majority groups.

What are the constitutional provisions related to Secularism in Indian Constitution?

☐ **Preamble:** The 42nd Amendment in 1976 added the terms 'Socialist' and 'Secular' to the Preamble. Though many changes were reversed by the 44th Amendment under the Janata government in 1978, the Preamble remained unchanged.

☐ **Article 14:** Provides equal treatment under the law and equal legal protection for all.

☐ **Article 15:** Extends the idea of secularism by disallowing discrimination based on religion, race, caste, sex, or birthplace.

☐ **Article 16 (1):** Assures all citizens equal job opportunities in public employment without bias based on religion, race, caste, sex, descent, birthplace, or residence.

☐ **Article 25:** Offers 'Freedom of Conscience,' ensuring everyone has the right to freely adopt, practice, and share their religion.

☐ **Article 26:** Permits religious communities or individuals to create and run institutions for religious or charitable purposes and manage religious affairs.

☐ **Article 27:** Prohibits the state from compelling any citizen to contribute to religious activities or institutions through taxation.

☐ **Article 28:** Allows institutions with religious affiliations to provide religious teachings.

☐ **Articles 29 & 30:** Safeguard the educational and cultural rights of minority groups.

☐ **Article 51A:** Urges citizens to foster harmony, promote fraternity, and preserve the rich composite culture of the country.

☐ **Keshvananda Bharati Case (1973) and SR Bommai Case (1994):** The Supreme Court asserted that secularism is a fundamental component of the Constitution.

What is the significance of Secularism?

1. **Upholding Religious Freedom and Conscience:** Secularism guarantees people the right to adopt, change, or reject any religion without governmental interference, a right central to personal dignity and liberty.

2. **Promoting Democratic Fairness:** A secular democracy ensures equal status for all citizens, with no religion or political alignment offering undue advantage or disadvantage.

3. **Equal Access to Public Resources:** All individuals, regardless of their faith, can access government services such as healthcare, education, and local governance equally.

4. **Encouraging Social Unity:** In a country with many religions, secularism acts as a buffer against potential religious conflicts, promoting peace and reducing the likelihood of communal unrest.

5. **Defending Human Rights:** It upholds basic freedoms of belief, expression, and conscience, which are integral to human rights.

6. **Ensuring Equality and Fairness:** Separating religion from governance guarantees that laws apply evenly to all, preventing religious discrimination.

7. **Strengthening National Unity:** It embraces diverse religious and cultural traditions while building a collective sense of identity and belonging.

What is the Indian concept of Secularism?

India's notion of secularism, championed by figures like Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi, is often described as 'Positive Secularism' and mirrors the cultural fabric of the nation.

The idea of secularism in India aligns with the Vedic notion of 'Dharma Nirapekshata,' which implies the state's impartiality toward religion.

Unlike the Western model, which enforces strict separation, the Indian approach is based on 'Sarva Dharma Sambhava' — or showing equal regard for all religions. It is a form of inclusive secularism where the state does not isolate itself from religious matters but instead acknowledges and respects all faiths while encouraging harmony among them.

Principled Distance and State Engagement: The Indian government is not entirely disengaged from religion. It steps in when necessary to uphold equality, push for social reforms (such as banning untouchability, criminalizing Sati, outlawing Triple Talaq and Nikah Halala), and defend individual rights within religious communities (like in the case of personal laws). This distinct feature strives to promote equality both **among religions** and **within religions** (e.g., addressing caste-based inequality).

Indian secularism functions not as a final goal, but as a tool to manage religious diversity and foster peaceful coexistence of different faiths.

Secularism: Indian vs Western Concept

Indian Secularism	Western Secularism
In India, religion and state are linked by a flexible boundary, not completely isolated from each other.	In the West, religion and state operate independently, divided by a strict, inflexible barrier.
Roots: Traced back to ancient Vedic traditions, promoting religious diversity and neutrality ('Dharma Nirapekshata').	**Roots:** Emerged during the European Renaissance as a counter to the Church's dominance and interference in political matters during the Middle Ages.
Context: Designed for a diverse society with multiple faiths and ethnic backgrounds.	**Context:** Developed within largely homogeneous societies centered around a single dominant religion.

What are the Threats to Secularism in India?

1. **Religion-Based Politics:** Political actors frequently tap into religious identity, rhetoric, and symbolism to gain votes, resulting in communal divides and compromising the state's impartiality.

2. **Sectarian Violence:** Repeated outbreaks of religious violence reveal a failure in maintaining secular values. Such events foster distrust and a sense of insecurity among communities.

3. **Spreading of Hatred and Misinformation:** The increasing use of digital platforms to circulate hate speech and misinformation against religious groups intensifies societal rifts and fuels communal unrest.

4. **Emergence of Religious Majoritarianism/Fundamentalism:** Elevating one religion as synonymous with national identity undermines the pluralistic nature of Indian secularism, often leading to minority exclusion.

5. **Claims of Government Partiality:** While the Indian state intervenes in religious matters to promote equality, it is often accused of showing favoritism—like managing Hindu temples while other religious bodies enjoy autonomy, or the perception of catering to minority groups for political reasons.

6. **No Uniform Civil Code (UCC):** The lack of a UCC, which would apply the same civil laws to all citizens regardless of faith, raises concerns about unequal treatment. Supporters see it as a path to equality, while critics argue it threatens cultural and religious autonomy. This debate reflects the friction between individual and community rights in the Indian secular context.

7. **Increasing Intolerance and Extremism:** A noticeable rise in hostility toward differing opinions, interfaith unions, and religious practices seen as unfamiliar is evident. Acts of extremism by various groups—such as cow vigilantism and "love jihad" narratives—threaten social stability.

What are the lessons that Western countries can learn from Indian Secularism?

1. Indian secularism encourages **Unity in Diversity**, contrasting with the Western focus on **Uniformity**, thus fostering harmonious pluralism instead of division and bias.

2. The Indian state remains neutral and does not affiliate with any religion, allowing all faiths to coexist under a protective framework.

3. India's model respects both **individual and collective religious rights**, unlike the Western emphasis solely on individual freedoms.

4. India adopts a **principled distance** approach—treating every religion with equal regard—unlike the Western model of **equidistance**, where the state stays equally disengaged from all religions. This enables India to financially assist and regulate bodies like Wakf boards, historic Hindu temples, and Buddhist monasteries.

5. Indian secularism accommodates **religious symbols** like the kirpan and hijab in public life, whereas some Western nations (like France) strictly ban such expressions.

6. The Indian system permits religious bodies to run and teach in their own educational institutions, preserving religious education and identity.

7. **Minority rights**, guaranteed by Articles 29 and 30 of the Constitution, are backed by government support and special grants.

CONCLUSION

Secularism is deeply woven into the fabric of the Constitution through various provisions. It is more than just a term in the Preamble — it is a foundational value that defines and sustains India's identity as a pluralistic and inclusive democracy. Whether or not the word remains in the Preamble, the essence of secularism continues to be indispensable for ensuring equality, diversity, and justice in the nation.

Electoral Reforms in India: A Critical Overview

ELECTORAL REFORMS IN INDIA

The Election Commission of India (ECI) is currently undertaking a **Special Intensive Revision (SIR)** of the electoral rolls across the nation, beginning with **Bihar**. This exercise is being carried out ahead of Bihar's upcoming Legislative Assembly elections and is viewed as a major step in the direction of electoral reforms. However, it has also attracted criticism from various civil society members, who argue that the process might result in the **disenfranchisement** of a substantial number of voters.

This situation brings attention to the broader issue of **electoral reforms**, their **importance**, intended **goals**, and associated **difficulties**.

In a democracy like India, **elections are central to the democratic process** — not just sustaining it but energizing it. Therefore, the conduct of **free and fair elections** is essential to uphold the spirit of democracy. Over the years, **numerous reforms** have been introduced to make India's electoral process more credible, transparent, and inclusive — but electoral reform remains an **ongoing journey**.

What are Electoral Reforms? What Reforms Have Been Undertaken?

Electoral reforms refer to changes aimed at improving the functioning of the electoral system so that elections are more **fair, transparent, inclusive, and accountable**. The broader aim is to **cleanse the political process**, uphold the **integrity of elections**, and ensure **representative democracy**.

India has seen several phases of electoral reforms, which can be categorized by time periods:

Major Electoral Reforms Before 1996

☐ **Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) – 1982**: First used in Kerala; by 2004, they were used across all 543 Lok Sabha constituencies.

☐ **Lowering of Voting Age – 1988**: The **61st Constitutional Amendment** reduced the voting age from **21 to 18**, encouraging youth participation.

☐ **Increase in Proposers – 1988**: To curb non-serious candidates, the number of proposers was increased for nominations to the Rajya Sabha and State Legislative Council.

☐ **Anti-Booth Capturing Measures – 1989**: Elections could be adjourned or cancelled in cases of **booth capturing**.

☐ **Elector's Photo Identity Card (EPIC) – 1993**: Introduction of voter ID cards to strengthen voter authentication.

Major Reforms in 1996 (Based on Dinesh Goswami Committee)

☐ **Categorization of Candidates**: Candidates were categorized as belonging to political parties (recognized/unrecognized) or independents.

☐ **Disqualification under Prevention of Insults to National Honour Act (1971)**: Convicted persons barred from contesting elections for **six years**.

☐ **More Proposers for Independents**: Unaffiliated candidates required **10 proposers** from the same constituency.

☐ **Restriction on Multiple Seats**: Candidates barred from contesting from **more than two** seats in elections.

☐ **Time-Bound By-Elections**: Vacancies had to be filled within **six months**.

☐ **Ban on Arms and Liquor Near Polling Booths**: To prevent violence and coercion.

Reforms After 1996:

1997:

☐ Increased the number of proposers/seconders for Presidential and Vice-Presidential elections:
  – **President**: From 10 to 50
  – **Vice President**: From 5 to 20

1999:

☐ **Postal Ballot**: Enabled voting through postal ballots in special cases, subject to ECI approval.

2003 Reforms:

☐ **Proxy Voting for Armed Forces**: Allowed proxy voting for defense personnel.

☐ **Disclosure of Criminal and Financial Background**: Candidates had to disclose convictions, pending cases, assets, and liabilities.

☐ **Free Electoral Rolls and Travel Concessions**: Rolled out to reduce candidate expenses.

☐ **Donation Reporting**: Political parties had to report contributions above ₹20,000 for tax relief.

☐ **Media Time Allocation**: Regulated access to TV and cable for fair visibility.

- ❐ **Braille in EVMs**: For visually impaired voters.

Post-2003 to Present Reforms:

2009:
- ❐ **Exit Poll Ban**: Restrictions on conducting and publishing exit polls.
- ❐ **Time Frame for Disqualification Cases**: ECI given a **3-month window** to decide disqualification cases.
- ❐ **Increased Security Deposit**: Lok Sabha deposit raised from ₹10,000 to ₹25,000.

2010:
- ❐ **NRIs Eligible to Register as Voters**: Indian citizens living abroad could enroll in voter lists of their home constituencies.

2013:
- ❐ **Online Voter Registration**: Enabled online application for inclusion in electoral rolls.
- ❐ **NOTA in EVMs**: Introduced the "None of the Above" option following Supreme Court directive.
- ❐ **VVPAT Introduction**: Enabled **voter verification** of electronic votes.
- ❐ **Jailed Persons Can Contest**: Amendment allowed undertrials to contest elections.
- ❐ **Immediate Disqualification for Convicts**: **Lily Thomas case** ruling by SC disqualified convicted MPs/MLAs immediately.

Post-2013:
- ❐ **2013**:
  - – **Raised Expenditure Limits**: For Lok Sabha elections from ₹40L to ₹70L; for Assembly elections in larger states, from ₹16L to ₹28L.
- ❐ **2015**:
  - – **Candidate Photos on EVMs**: To reduce voter confusion.
- ❐ **2017**:
  - – **Electoral Bonds Introduced**:
    - ✓ Cash donation limit reduced from ₹20,000 to ₹2,000.
    - ✓ **Cap on corporate donations lifted** (earlier 7.5% of net profit).

2025: Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of Electoral Rolls

The ECI's ongoing **Special Intensive Revision** aims to update and purify electoral rolls by eliminating **duplicate entries** caused by urban migration and mobility. Voters are required to submit valid documents as proof of their **birth details** and that of their **parents**, if necessary.

Challenges in Conducting Free and Fair Elections in India

- ❐ **Booth Capturing**: Despite advancements, incidents of **violence and voter intimidation** at polling booths still occur.
  - – Example: Clashes during the **West Bengal Panchayat Elections**.

- ☐ **Criminalisation of Politics**: Though candidates must disclose criminal records, political parties continue nominating those with serious charges.
  - – Example: Around **40% of sitting MPs** have criminal cases, with **25% facing serious charges** like murder.
- ☐ **Violation of the Model Code of Conduct**: Frequent breaches include misuse of public property, excessive use of loudspeakers, and **vote-buying** practices.
  - – Example: Illegal campaign practices during elections.
- ☐ **Electoral Finance Issues**: Black money continues to fuel campaigns.
  - – Example: The **Supreme Court struck down the Electoral Bonds Scheme** due to lack of transparency in political funding.
- ☐ **Electoral Overspending**: Though there are limits on individual candidates' expenses, **party spending has no cap**.
  - – Example: **Star campaigners' expenses** are excluded from the candidates' official expenditure.
- ☐ **Use of Caste and Communal Appeals**: Political parties often exploit **caste, religion, and regionalism** to polarize voters.
  - – Example: **Hate speech and identity-based mobilization** during campaigns.

Objectives of Electoral Reforms

- ☐ **Ensuring Free and Fair Elections**: In line with **Article 324**, reforms aim to eliminate malpractices and uphold democratic integrity.
- ☐ **Boosting Voter Participation**: To counter **voter apathy** and logistical barriers to turnout.
- ☐ **Curbing Money and Muscle Power**: By regulating campaign finances and protecting voter rights.
- ☐ **Promoting Transparency and Accountability**: Through **mandatory disclosures** and technological monitoring of the electoral process.
- ☐ **Reducing Electoral Inequality**: By improving representation for **women and marginalized communities**.

Way Forward (Suggested Reforms by Election Commission)

- ☐ **One Candidate, One Constituency**: Amend the law to prevent candidates from contesting multiple seats in the same election.
- ☐ **Lifetime Ban After Conviction**: Support for a **permanent disqualification** to combat criminalisation in politics.
- ☐ **Ban on Government Ads Pre-Election**: Prohibit **government ads six months** before a House term ends.
- ☐ **Penalising False Declarations**: Treat **false electoral affidavits** as a punishable offense under the RPA.
- ☐ **Rule-Making Powers to EC**: Shift rule-making authority under the RPA from the Centre to the **Election Commission**.
- ☐ **Common Electoral Roll**: Use a **single electoral roll** for both general and local body elections.
- ☐ **Disqualification Under Anti-Defection Law**: Let the **President or Governor decide** on anti-defection cases based on EC's advice.
- ☐ **National Electoral Fund**: Explore creating a fund (as suggested by **T.S. Krishnamurthy**) to **centralize and regulate donations**, with disbursements based on election outcomes or agreed formulas.

Conclusion

Electoral reforms are vital for strengthening India's democratic framework. Moving forward, the focus must remain on **transparent political funding**, **stricter disqualification rules**, **empowering the ECI**, and ensuring **inclusive and error-free voter rolls** without excluding genuine voters.

One Nation, One Election

INTRODUCTION

Recently, 2 former CJIs, appearing before the Joint Committee of Parliament on One Nation, One Election, have said that the Bill to introduce simultaneous elections does not violate the basic structure constitution. However, they have also expressed the concern over the unbridled power granted to ECI without providing any oversight clause.

What is the One Nation, One Election?

The concept of One Nation, One Election involves conducting simultaneous elections for State Assemblies and the Lok Sabha rather than having separate, continuous elections.

Historical Background

Simultaneous elections were the standard practice in India until 1967. Elections for the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies were held together in 1952, 1957, 1962, and 1967.

However, the cycle of simultaneous elections was disrupted due to the early dissolution of certain Legislative Assemblies in 1968 and 1969. Furthermore, the Lok Sabha was dissolved prematurely in 1970, leading to new elections in 1971.

These events caused the breakdown of the simultaneous election cycle in India.

What is the Kovind Panel on One Nation, One Election?

About the Committee: On September 2, 2023, the Union government established a committee led by former President Ram Nath Kovind to explore the feasibility of the One Nation, One Election initiative.

Members of the Committee: The committee is chaired by Ram Nath Kovind and includes Home Minister Amit Shah, former Leader of Opposition in the Rajya Sabha Ghulam Nabi Azad, former Finance Commission chairperson N. K. Singh, former Lok Sabha secretary-general Subhash C. Kashyap, senior advocate Harish Salve, and former Chief Vigilance Commissioner Sanjay Kothari.

What are the recommendations of the Kovind Panel Report on One Nation, One Election?

To implement its recommendations, the committee proposed 15 amendments to the Constitution of India, which include both new provisions and modifications to existing ones, to be executed through two Constitutional Amendment Bills.

First Constitutional Amendment Bill

This bill addresses the transition to a simultaneous election system and outlines the procedure for conducting fresh elections for the Lok Sabha or a State Assembly before their designated five-year terms conclude.

Passage of the Bill: Parliament can pass the bill without needing to consult with state governments or secure ratification from state Assemblies.

Provisions of the Bill:

1. **Insertion of a New Article 82A:** Article 82A will create the framework for transitioning to simultaneous elections for the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies.

    – **Provisions of Article 82A(1):** The President will issue a notification to activate Article 82A on the date of the first sitting of the House of the People after a general election. This notification date will be termed the "Appointed Date."

    – **Provisions under Article 82A(2):** All Legislative Assemblies formed during any general election after the Appointed Date will conclude upon the expiration of the full term of the House of the People.

    – **Provisions under Article 82A(3):** The Election Commission of India (ECI) will conduct general elections for both the House of the People and the Legislative Assemblies simultaneously.

    – **Provisions under Article 82A(4):** If the ECI determines that elections for a legislative assembly cannot be held simultaneously, it can recommend to the President to delay the elections for that assembly.

    – **Provisions under Article 82A(5):** Even if a state assembly election is postponed, its full term will end on the same date as the term of the House of the People constituted during the general election.

2. **Amendment of Article 327:** Article 327 grants Parliament the authority to legislate regarding elections to the Lok Sabha, Rajya Sabha, and State Legislatures, including creating electoral rolls and delimiting constituencies.

    The Kovind Panel Report recommends expanding Parliament's powers under Article 327 to include the "conduct of simultaneous elections."

3. **Amendments for Simultaneous Elections When Lok Sabha or State Assembly Dissolves Early:** Amendments to Articles 83(2) and 172(1) propose defining the five-year duration of the House of People and State Legislatures as the "full term."

Amendments to Articles 83(3) and 172(3) state that if the Lok Sabha or a state assembly is dissolved before the full term ends, the remaining period will be termed the "unexpired term."

New Articles 83(4) and 172(4) establish that a new Lok Sabha or state assembly formed to replace a dissolved one will only serve the "unexpired term."

4. **Amendment of Union Territory Laws for Simultaneous Elections:**

The Kovind Panel recommends amending specific Union Territory laws to facilitate simultaneous elections:

a. The Government of Union Territories Act, 1963

b. The Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi Act, 1991

c. The Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act, 2019

SECOND CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT BILL

This bill addresses municipal and panchayat elections, which fall under Entry 5 of the State List titled "Local Government."

Passage of the Bill: This bill requires ratification by at least half of the state legislatures before Parliament can pass it.

Provisions of the Bill:

1. **Inclusion of a New Article 324A:** This article would enable Parliament to legislate ensuring that municipal and panchayat elections coincide with the General Elections (to the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies).

2. **Amendment of Article 325:**

   a. **Addition of Article 325(2):** This new sub-clause will establish a single electoral roll for every territorial constituency for elections to the House of the People, State Legislatures, municipalities, or panchayats.

   b. **Addition of Article 325(3):** The single electoral roll will be prepared by the Election Commission in consultation with the State Election Commissions, replacing any previously prepared electoral rolls.

WHAT ARE THE ARGUMENTS IN FAVOR OF 'ONE NATION, ONE ELECTION'?

1. **Financial Savings for the State:** Continuous election cycles impose a financial strain on state finances. Implementing One Nation, One Election would lower overall political expenditures by the ECI. For example, the 2014 Lok Sabha elections cost the exchequer ₹3,870 crore, while the 2015 Bihar elections alone amounted to ₹300 crore. The ECI estimates the cost of One Nation, One Election at about ₹4,500 crore.

2. **Efficient Use of Resources by Political Parties:** Simultaneous elections will reduce campaign spending for parties and candidates, assisting smaller regional parties in managing their finances more effectively.

3. **Shorter Model Code of Conduct Duration:** The frequent imposition of the Model Code of Conduct during elections hampers development work for months. This change would lessen the "policy paralysis" resulting from the Model Code of Conduct's implementation during election periods.

4. **Shift in Focus from Elections to Governance:** One Nation, One Election would ensure continuity in policies and programs of both central and state governments, reducing disruptions to public life and limiting political rallies. This would enhance the delivery of essential services.

5. **Boost to Administrative Efficiency:** Conducting simultaneous elections would enhance the effectiveness of the administrative system since entire state machinery and high-ranking officials from other states are deployed as observers during elections.

6. **Enhanced Internal Security:** The frequent need for security forces during elections consumes a large number of armed personnel, which could be more effectively used for managing internal security challenges like naxalism.

7. **Decreased Black Money Usage:** Elections typically involve significant expenditures by candidates, much of which stems from black money. One Nation, One Election could help reduce the flow of black money within the economy.

8. **Less Populist Measures:** Regular elections compel politicians to prioritize immediate electoral gains over long-term policies, which can detract from effective governance. Simultaneous elections could mitigate this trend.

9. **Higher Voter Turnout:** According to the Law Commission, simultaneous elections could increase voter turnout by making it easier for people to cast multiple votes at once.

10. **Promotion of Social Harmony:** Frequent elections can exacerbate caste, religious, and communal tensions, as they tend to be polarizing events. Holding simultaneous elections could reduce these divisions.

What are the arguments against 'One Nation, One Election'?

1. **Decreased Accountability:** Regular elections hold the government accountable to the people's will. Critics argue that guaranteed fixed terms might foster autocratic tendencies.

2. **Erosion of Federal Authority:** In recent years, state-specific issues have gained political importance, demonstrated by the rise of regional parties like the DMK in Tamil Nadu, TDP in Andhra Pradesh, and BJD in Odisha. Simultaneous elections may overshadow state elections by focusing attention on national elections.

3. **Challenges for Regional Parties:** Critics assert that simultaneous elections may disadvantage regional parties, as national issues would dominate the narrative, making it harder for them to compete against national parties in terms of finances and strategy.

4. **Contrary to Democratic Principles:** Opponents argue that enforcing simultaneous elections undermines democracy by creating an artificial election cycle and limiting voter choice.

5. **Influences Voter Behavior:** There is a risk that voters might consistently choose the same party at both national and state levels, disadvantaging regional parties. A study by IDFC Institute suggests that simultaneous elections could result in a 77% likelihood of voters favoring the same party, while this figure drops to 61% when elections are spaced six months apart.

6. **Internal Security Risks:** Organizing simultaneous elections requires extensive security forces, posing logistical challenges that could threaten internal security.

7. **Interference with Democratic Will:** The current electoral system was designed to uphold democratic principles by ensuring regular elections, allowing citizens to express their preferences through voting.

8. **Hastened Legislation:** Legislative measures passed in the midst of simultaneous elections may lack adequate public scrutiny, compromising the legislative process.

9. **Constitutional Viability:** Implementing the One Nation, One Election plan necessitates constitutional amendments, raising questions about its feasibility given the complexities involved.

10. **Failure of Similar Attempts:** Previous initiatives to synchronize elections at local levels have often failed, questioning the viability of such an ambitious plan.

CONCLUSION

The One Nation, One Election proposal aims to streamline the electoral process in India, potentially leading to financial savings, efficient governance, and increased voter turnout. However, the implementation of this initiative raises significant concerns regarding accountability, regional representation, and democratic integrity. Balancing the benefits and challenges of this proposal will be crucial for India's future electoral landscape.

EXECUTIVE ACCOUNTABILITY

The Monsoon Session of Parliament is scheduled to commence next week. In parliamentary systems like India's, the legislature serves three fundamental roles—it enacts laws, represents the people by voicing their concerns, and ensures the government is held accountable for its actions. Parliamentary sessions are essential pillars of democracy as they offer a formal platform to scrutinize the executive.

WHAT IS EXECUTIVE ACCOUNTABILITY TO PARLIAMENT?

Executive accountability to the legislature is a core tenet of parliamentary democracies. It mandates that the executive arm—mainly the Council of Ministers led by the Prime Minister—must be answerable to the Parliament for its actions, decisions, and overall governance.

In this system, the executive is not structurally distinct from the legislature; instead, it is composed of members from it and operates under its oversight. Accountability is maintained on two levels: **collective accountability**, where the entire cabinet is responsible to the Lok Sabha, and **individual accountability**, where each minister must answer for the functioning of their own ministry.

What Instruments Does Parliament Use to Enforce Executive Accountability?

Collective Accountability:

❒ **No-Confidence Motion:**

The most potent parliamentary tool. If passed, it necessitates the resignation of the entire government.

❒ **Budget Discussions and Approvals:** Parliament authorizes the annual financial plan and can question how funds are allocated and utilized. Members can move **cut motions** to reduce allocations and highlight inefficiencies in departments.

Individual Ministerial Accountability:

❒ **Parliamentary Questions:** Members use the **Question Hour** to seek responses from ministers on policy matters and actions. These queries include:

– **Starred Questions:** Require verbal responses and allow supplementary questions.

– **Unstarred Questions:** Receive written replies.

– **Short Notice Questions:** For matters of urgent public interest.

❒ **Zero Hour:** Members raise pressing issues without advance notice, compelling real-time responses from the government.

❒ **Debates and Discussions:** These allow members to examine, evaluate, and critique policy decisions and bills.

❒ **Parliamentary Motions:** Tools like **No-Confidence Motions** and **Censure Motions** are direct ways to challenge the executive. Passage of such motions leads to the government's resignation. Additionally, **Adjournment Motions** allow urgent national matters to be debated.

Oversight through Parliamentary Committees:

❒ **Standing Committees:** These are permanent bodies that review government performance, finances, and proposed laws. Key committees include:

– **Public Accounts Committee (PAC):** Examines whether public money is spent according to parliamentary authorization.

– **Estimates Committee:** Evaluates how efficiently and economically ministries utilize funds.

– **Committee on Public Undertakings:** Monitors the functioning of state-owned enterprises.

❒ **Ad-Hoc Committees:** Temporary committees formed to investigate particular incidents or issues.

Electoral Accountability:

Elections serve as the ultimate accountability mechanism, where the ruling party or coalition must seek the electorate's approval to continue in office.

Why is Parliamentary Oversight of the Executive Crucial in a Democracy?

1. **System of Checks and Balances:** Parliamentary scrutiny ensures the executive does not function arbitrarily or accumulate excessive power. It maintains a healthy distribution of power among different branches of government.

2. **Transparency in Governance:** When the executive is regularly questioned and reviewed, it must defend and explain its policies. Instruments like Question Hour, debates, and committee probes make government operations more visible and open to the public.

3. **Strengthening Good Governance and Public Trust:** Being answerable compels the executive to deliver effective, lawful, and citizen-focused governance. This accountability boosts public confidence and ensures that the administration remains responsive and responsible.

4. **Ensuring Fiscal Responsibility:** Through budget discussions and committees like the PAC, Parliament monitors how government resources are spent. It helps guard against corruption, inefficiency, and wasteful expenditures, thereby ensuring that public funds are used judiciously.

5. **Upholding the Rule of Law:** By enforcing executive accountability, Parliament reaffirms constitutional supremacy and legal compliance, ensuring that the government acts within its legal limits.

6. **Enabling Public Voice and Representation:** Debates, questions, and committee work allow MPs to reflect the aspirations and concerns of their constituents. These mechanisms provide the public with indirect yet meaningful engagement in governance and policy-making.

7. **Political Accountability:** The Parliament possesses the ultimate power to support or topple a government by expressing or withdrawing its confidence. This power ensures that the executive remains firmly accountable to the elected representatives of the people.

What are the Challenges in Ensuring Executive Accountability?

☐ **Frequent Disruptions and Reduced Efficiency:** Regular interruptions, protests, and premature adjournments—especially during critical slots like Question Hour and Zero Hour—drastically cut into the time allotted for Parliament to hold the executive accountable.

☐ **Insufficient Time for Deliberation:** The limited time allocated for in-depth examination of legislative proposals, policies, and executive actions undermines the robustness of parliamentary oversight.

☐ **Decreased Referral of Bills to Committees:** There has been a notable decline in the number of bills sent to parliamentary committees for detailed analysis. For instance, the proportion of bills referred to committees in the current Lok Sabha has fallen from over 60% in earlier sessions to below 15%, weakening institutional scrutiny.

☐ **Rising Concentration of Executive Power:** The increasing use of tools such as ordinances and delegated legislation enables the executive to bypass parliamentary procedures, often relegating the legislature to a ceremonial or approving role rather than a deliberative one.

☐ **Limited Access to Government Data:** Parliament often struggles to acquire comprehensive, accurate, and timely information from the executive, which restricts its capacity to perform effective checks and undertake evidence-based oversight.

- **Lack of Transparency in Committee Proceedings:** Although parliamentary committees are essential for detailed evaluation, their closed-door functioning makes the process opaque, limiting public awareness and reducing the visibility of accountability mechanisms.
- **Decline in Quality Debates:** In recent years, the frequency and depth of meaningful debates and deliberations in Parliament have diminished, reducing avenues for the executive to be thoroughly examined and questioned.
- **Constraints of the Anti-Defection Law:** The anti-defection provisions limit the ability of Members of Parliament to vote against their party lines, even if they disagree with government decisions, thereby weakening individual scrutiny and debate.
- **Inadequate Analytical Support:** Members of Parliament and committees often lack access to dedicated researchers and domain experts, which hampers their ability to thoroughly evaluate complex policy issues, budgets, and administrative data.
- **Limitations in Question Hour Functioning:** Though a crucial accountability tool, Question Hour sometimes loses its effectiveness due to vague ministerial replies, narrow or localized questions, and a lack of structured processes for questions that span multiple departments.

What Can Be the Way Forward?

- **Increase Parliamentary Sitting Days:** To allow for comprehensive legislative scrutiny and debates, Parliament must meet more frequently. Introducing a legally mandated minimum number of sitting days, as recommended by various reform committees, would help institutionalize this.

Strengthen Question Hour and Zero Hour Functioning:

- **Ensure Smooth Conduct:** Enforce stricter norms and decorum to prevent disruptions during these critical hours, thereby maximizing their utility.
- **Address Cross-Ministerial Topics:** Create frameworks that ensure complex, multi-ministerial issues receive comprehensive answers, improving clarity and accountability.
- **Introduce Prime Minister's Question Time:** A weekly or bi-weekly session—modeled on the UK Parliament—where the Prime Minister answers queries from MPs could strengthen direct accountability at the highest executive level.
- **Mandate Pre-Legislative Scrutiny:** All proposed laws should undergo preliminary examination by parliamentary committees or be subjected to public consultations before being introduced. This allows experts and citizens to provide early feedback and improves the quality of legislation.
- **Institutionalize Post-Legislative Review:** Establish a formal mechanism to evaluate laws after implementation—typically 3–5 years later—to determine their real-world impact. Parliamentary committees could review reports from concerned ministries as part of this retrospective analysis, a practice followed in various democratic countries.
- **Improve Research Capacity:** Each committee should be supported by independent research teams and technical consultants to facilitate rigorous policy evaluation, budget scrutiny, and performance tracking.
- **Empower the Opposition:** Allow greater participation of opposition parties in setting discussion agendas and choosing debate topics, enabling them to spotlight important public issues and challenge the executive effectively.

- ☐ **Encourage Internal Party Democracy:** Reforms should provide MPs with more space to voice differing opinions within their parties. For example, limiting anti-defection provisions only to no-confidence votes would enable MPs to contribute more freely to legislative debates and oversight.

Conclusion

The purpose of making the executive accountable to Parliament is not to undermine governance but to enhance it by ensuring that executive power is exercised responsibly and with the support of legislative deliberation. Strengthening the tools of parliamentary oversight is essential for nurturing a vibrant, participatory, and responsive democracy.

MAINS PRACTICE QUESTION

Q. Comment on: "The Constituent Assembly was a one party body in an essentially one party country. The Assembly was the Congress and the Congress was India." (Granville Austin). (2010, 15 marks)

Granville Austin's assertion that the Constituent Assembly was a "one-party body" in a "one-party country," with the Congress as the central force, reflects both the political dominance of the Indian National Congress and the socio-political context of the time.

The Congress, being the preeminent force in the Indian independence movement, had deep roots in mass mobilization across the country, making it the most representative and powerful political entity during the formation of the Indian Constitution.

However, it is essential to recognize that while the Congress had an overwhelming presence, the Constituent Assembly was not exclusively composed of Congress members. The Assembly included representatives from various regions, communities, and political groups, such as the Muslim League, Sikhs, Scheduled Castes, and princely states, reflecting India's diverse fabric. Yet, following the partition and the withdrawal of the Muslim League, Congress's influence became even more pronounced.

Austin's comment can also be viewed through the lens of the **Congress's ideological spectrum**. The party housed a wide variety of views, ranging from **right-wing conservatism to socialist leanings**. Thus, although the Congress was dominant, it allowed for considerable debate and discussion on constitutional matters, reflecting diverse views within the Assembly.

Critics argue that this dominance stifled alternative political voices, particularly those from the left and right of the political spectrum. Yet, the Congress's leadership, particularly through figures like **Jawaharlal Nehru, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, and Sardar Patel**, played a crucial role in ensuring that the Constitution was crafted through democratic deliberation, representing broader Indian aspirations.

While Austin's characterization highlights the Congress's dominance, the Constituent Assembly's work reflected democratic ideals, producing a Constitution that balanced the diverse needs of a newly independent nation.

Q. Fascism is by no means a systematic doctrine. It is a queer mixture of incongruous elements. In the light of the above statement throw light on the liberal and Marxist critique of fascism

Fascism is a complex ideology that incorporates various elements and has been subject to criticism from both liberals and Marxists.

From a liberal perspective, fascism is criticized for its totalitarian nature and rejection of democratic principles and human rights. Liberals argue that fascism undermines individual liberty by subordinating individuals to the absolute authority of the state and reducing them to mere instruments to serve the state's goals. Fascism also emphasizes irrationality, in contrast to liberalism's focus on individual freedom and rationality. Additionally, fascism rejects the idea of natural and social equality, instead promoting hero-worship, elitism, and racist doctrines. Moreover, fascism undermines the pluralistic nature of society by establishing a monopoly of power through a single political party, eliminating free and open competition for political power. Lastly, fascism demolishes constitutional government, which is seen as essential for human freedom, progress, and the functioning of liberal democracy.

From a Marxist perspective, fascism is seen as an attempt to preserve capitalism, particularly during its decadent phase. Marxists argue that fascism creates a nationalistic myth to suppress class conflict and prevent international movements towards communism. Figures like Leon Trotsky have argued that the mass support for fascism comes from desperate and rootless middle-class individuals. Critics suggest that the widespread fear and uncertainty during times of crisis provide fertile ground for the rise of authoritarianism in fascist countries.

Thus, both liberals and Marxists criticize fascism for its rejection of democratic principles, human rights, and individual liberties.

Q. Studying the Jambudvipa mandala from our ancient texts, one is struck by the fact that it does not ascribe centrality and superiority to Bharatvarsha, which is only one among the lotus petals that make up our universe. Discuss the above statement with reference to India's vision of new world order.

India's strategic culture and diplomatic behavior are deeply influenced by its rich tradition of statecraft, as evident in ancient texts like the Jambudvipa mandala. Unlike the Chinese worldview, which considers the Han core as superior and central, India's perspective is more inclusive and multipolar. The Jambudvipa mandala portrays Bharatvarsha (India) as just one among the interconnected lotus petals that make up the universe, signifying India's acceptance of other dvipas (islands) with their own characteristics and values.

This mindset aligns with India's advocacy for a multipolar world in the contemporary context, where it recognizes and respects the diversity of nations and their unique contributions. India does not harbor a 'middle kingdom complex,' which denotes a sense of centrality and superiority. Instead, it embraces a worldview that values the coexistence of various geopolitical and geo-economic units with their distinct histories.

The Indian Subcontinent and the regions surrounding the Indian Ocean are viewed as a cohesive geopolitical and geo-economic unit with shared history. Despite facing partition during Independence in 1947, India's challenge lies in transcending political divisions in the subcontinent and restoring its cohesiveness. It aims to minimize the significance of borders by drawing upon enduring sources of affinity and commonality among the nations in the region.

Looking forward, as India's economic and security capabilities expand, it is likely to extend its influence along historical pathways. This includes reaching out to the eastern and western reaches of the Indian Ocean and engaging with the Central Asian neighborhood to the north and west. By doing so, India can tap into its historical connections and foster stronger economic and strategic ties with its neighbors, contributing to regional stability and cooperation.

Scholar Digest: Know Your Scholars

Aurobindo Ghosh: Political Thought and Contributions
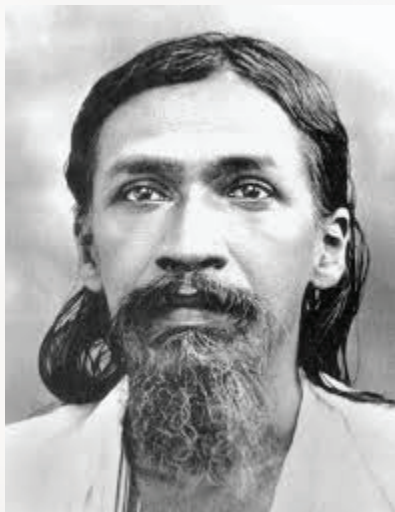
Introduction

Aurobindo Ghosh (1872–1950) was a freedom fighter, nationalist thinker, and spiritual philosopher who played a key role in India's independence movement before turning to spiritual pursuits. His political thought combined nationalism, cultural revivalism, and spiritual idealism, making him a unique figure in India's intellectual history.

Key Political Ideas:

Militant Nationalism – Aurobindo initially supported radical and revolutionary methods to achieve independence, advocating for complete Swaraj (self-rule) rather than mere reforms under British rule. He promoted passive resistance, boycott of British goods, and national education.

Spiritual Nationalism – He believed that India's freedom struggle was not just political but also spiritual. He viewed the nation as a living spiritual entity (Bharat Mata) and saw independence as essential for India's spiritual resurgence.

Critique of Moderate Politics – He rejected the moderate approach of the Indian National Congress, arguing that petitions and negotiations with the British were ineffective. Instead, he encouraged self-reliance, unity, and defiance.

Emphasis on Cultural Revival – Aurobindo saw Indian culture, philosophy, and spirituality as the foundation of national strength. He believed that political freedom must be accompanied by cultural and spiritual awakening.

Later Political Withdrawal – In 1910, he withdrew from active politics and settled in Pondicherry, where he developed his Integral Yoga philosophy, focusing on the spiritual evolution of humanity.

Legacy:

Aurobindo's political ideas influenced later nationalist movements, and his concept of spiritual nationalism inspired leaders like Subhas Chandra Bose. His blend of political radicalism and spiritual philosophy remains significant in Indian political thought.

Derrida

Introduction

Jacques Derrida, (born July 15, 1930, El Biar, Algeria—died October 8, 2004, Paris, France), French philosopher whose critique of Western philosophy and analyses of the nature of language, writing, and meaning were highly controversial yet immensely influential in much of the intellectual world in the late 20th century.

early life&Education

Derrida was born to Sephardic Jewish parents in French-governed Algeria. Educated in the French tradition, he went to France in 1949, studied at the elite École Normale Supérieure (ENS), and taught philosophy at the Sorbonne (1960–64), the ENS (1964–84), and the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (1984–99), all in Paris. From the 1960s he published numerous books and essays on an immense range of topics and taught and lectured throughout the world, including at Yale University and the University of California, Irvine, attaining an international celebrity comparable only to that of Jean-Paul Sartre a generation earlier.

Major Works

Derrida is most celebrated as the principal exponent of deconstruction, a term he coined for the critical examination of the fundamental conceptual distinctions, or "oppositions," inherent in Western philosophy since the time of the ancient Greeks. These oppositions are characteristically "binary" and "hierarchical," involving a pair of terms in which one member of the pair is assumed to be primary or fundamental, the other secondary or derivative. Examples include nature and culture, speech and writing, mind and body,

presence and absence, inside and outside, literal and metaphorical, intelligible and sensible, and form and meaning, among many others. To "deconstruct" an opposition is to explore the tensions and contradictions between the hierarchical ordering assumed or asserted in the text and other aspects of the text's meaning, especially those that are indirect or implicit. Such an analysis shows that the opposition is not natural or necessary but a product, or "construction," of the text itself.

In the 1960s Derrida's work was welcomed in France and elsewhere by thinkers interested in the broad interdisciplinary movement known as structuralism. The structuralists analyzed various cultural phenomena—such as myths, religious rituals, literary narratives, and fashions in dress and adornment—as general systems of signs analogous to natural languages, with their own vocabularies and their own underlying rules and structures, and attempted to develop a metalanguage of terms and concepts in which the various sign systems could be described. Some of Derrida's early work was a critique of major structuralist thinkers such as Saussure, the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, and the intellectual historian and philosopher Michel Foucault. Derrida was thus seen, especially in the United States, as leading a movement beyond structuralism to "poststructuralism," which was skeptical about the possibility of a general science of meaning.

Relevance Today

One might distinguish in Derrida's work a period of philosophical deconstruction from a later period focusing on literature and emphasizing the singularity of the literary work and the play of meaning in avant-garde writers such as Genet, Stéphane Mallarmé, Francis Ponge, and James Joyce. His later work also took up a host of other issues, notably the legacy of Marxism (Spectres de Marx: l'état de la dette, le travail du deuil et la nouvelle Internationale [1993; Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International]) and psychoanalysis (La Carte postale: de Socrate à Freud et au-delà [1980; The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond]). Other essays considered political, legal, and ethical issues, as well as topics in aesthetics and literature. He also addressed the question of Jewishness and the Jewish tradition in Shibboleth and the autobiographical "Circumfession" (1991).

Robert Gilpin

Robert Gilpin was a prominent American political scientist known for his significant contributions to the field of international relations, particularly in the study of political economy and global politics. Born on October 2, 1930, Gilpin's academic career spanned several decades, during which he produced influential works that continue to shape scholarly debates and understanding of international relations theory.

One of Gilpin's most notable contributions to the field was his concept of the "hegemonic stability theory." This theory, outlined in his seminal work "War and Change in World Politics," posits that the stability of the international system is often maintained by a dominant hegemon—a powerful state that provides leadership, stability, and order to the global economy. According to Gilpin, hegemonic stability is essential for ensuring economic openness, trade liberalization, and overall stability in the international system. He argued that periods of hegemonic decline or transition are often characterized by increased competition, protectionism, and geopolitical tensions.

Gilpin's analysis of hegemonic stability has been instrumental in shaping debates about the role of great powers in the international system and the dynamics of global economic governance. His work has influenced scholars, policymakers, and practitioners alike, providing valuable insights into the relationship between economic power, political influence, and international order.

In addition to his contributions to hegemonic stability theory, Gilpin also made significant contributions to the study of international political economy. His book "The Political Economy of International Relations" is considered a seminal work in the field, offering a comprehensive analysis of the complex interplay between economics and politics in the international arena. In this work, Gilpin explores how states and non-state actors navigate economic issues, such as trade, finance, and development, within the broader context of global power dynamics and geopolitical competition.

Gilpin's interdisciplinary approach to the study of international relations, drawing on insights from political science, economics, and history, has been praised for its analytical rigor and theoretical sophistication. His work continues to inspire scholars to explore the multifaceted nature of global politics and the complex interactions between states, markets, and societies in an interconnected world.

Beyond his academic contributions, Gilpin was also a respected educator and mentor, influencing generations of students and scholars through his teaching and mentorship. He held various academic positions throughout his career, including professorships at Princeton University and the University of Denver, where he made significant contributions to the development of international relations as a discipline.

Robert Gilpin's legacy as a pioneering scholar in the field of international relations continues to endure, with his work serving as a foundation for further research and inquiry into the complexities of global politics and economics. His insights into hegemonic stability, international political economy, and the nature of power in world politics have left an indelible mark on the study of international relations and continue to shape our understanding of the dynamics of the international system.

Q. Examine communitarian critique of Rawls theory of Justice.

Introduction:

→ Start with key tenets of Rawlasian theory:

    i) Individualism

    ii) Original position

    iii) Justice as fairness

    iv) Veil of ignorance

→ Mention Rawls book - "A theory of Justice"

→ Communitarian critique of key tenets

    → use Michael Sandel
        ↳ book - Liberalism & the limits of justice"

    → Michael Walzer
        ↳ book → "spheres of justice"

Conclusion

→ Rawls accepted reasonable pluralism as pre-condition in book 'Political Liberalism'

→ gave concept of overlapping consensus.

Q: Discuss the features of Asymmetrical federalism

Approach

(Intro) : Define federalism and Asymmetrical federalism.

(Body) Give features of Asymmetrical federalism
→ Article 371 to 371 J in Part XXI of Constitution contain special provisions for eleven states.
→ Special responsibility of Governor for the development of certain areas of particular states.
→ Presence of Union Territories in India.
→ Unequal Representation of States in Rajya Sabha (eg UP 31 seats, Goa-1 seat)
→ Presence of 5th and 6th schedule to accomodate scheduled and tribal areas.

(Conclusion) : Give justification of Asymmetrical federalism.
eg: to protect diversity without sacrificing unity or imposing uniformity.

Q. Explain the evolution of doctrine of Basic Structure and what are the criticism levelled against the doctrine of basic structure?

Approach

(Intro) Define the doctrine of Basic structure

(Body): Discuss the evolution of the doctrine

⤷ Champakam Dorairajan Case 1951

⤷ 1st Constitutional Amendment Act

⤷ Shankari Prasad Case (1951)

⤷ Sajjan Singh Case 1965

⤷ Golaknath Case 1967

→ 24th Constitutional Amendment Act 1971

⤷ Keshwanand Bharti Case 1973

→ 42nd Constitutional Amendment Act

⤷ Minerva Mills Case 1980

(Criticism)
⤷ No Unanimity in the bench on doctrine
⤷ Judiciary overlooking letters of constitution and inventing its soul
→It brings judicial sovereignty from Constitutional mandate.

Prelims Practice Questions

1. Which of the following initiatives has been undertaken by India to promote the international use of the Indian Rupee (INR)?

   (a) Establishment of the International Financial Services Centre (IFSC).

   (b) Adoption of a fixed exchange rate regime for the INR.

   (c) Imposing strict capital controls to limit INR flows across borders.

   (d) Encouraging the use of foreign currencies for trade transactions.

2. The Cauvery River dispute primarily involves which Indian states, each vying for a fair share of its waters?

   (a) Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka   (b) Karnataka and Tamil Nadu

   (c) Tamil Nadu and Kerala   (d) Kerala and Karnataka

3. The Election Commission of India consists of how many members, including the Chief Election Commissioner?

   (a) One   (b) Two

   (c) Three   (d) Four

4. Which article of the Indian Constitution outlines the provisions for the Election Commission of India?

   (a) Article 320   (b) Article 340

   (c) Article 324   (d) Article 330

Answers

1. **(a)** Establishment of the International Financial Services Centre (IFSC)

2. **(b)** Karnataka and Tamil Nadu

3. **(c)** Three

4. **(c)** Article 324

UPSC IAS (Mains)

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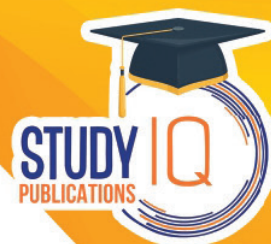
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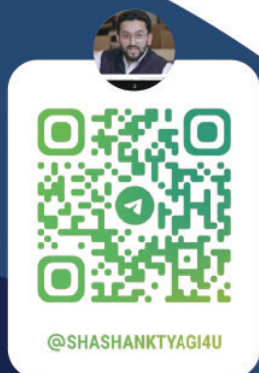
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