

PSIR Pulse

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By- Shashank Tyagi
Ex Consultant, Office of Minister Social
Welfare, GNCTD
Faculty - PSIR Optional, StudyIQ IAS



Table of Contents

GEOPOLITICS AT GLANCE	3
• India–Nepal Relations in the Shadow of the 2025–26 Political Crisis	3
• World Trade Organization	6
• India–China Relations: Significance, Challenges, and the Road Ahead	9
• The 25th SCO Summit: India at Tianjin, 2025	12
• India–Japan: From Cultural Bridges to Strategic Pillars	15
• India-US Relationship	18
• India–US Tariff War: Sanctions, Sovereignty & Strategic Autonomy	21
INDIAN GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS (IGP)	25
• National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) – Appointment & Debate	25
• Judiciary as a Pillar of Democracy and Concerns Over Accountability	28
• AI in Judiciary: Promise or Peril?	31
• Finance Commission of India	34
• Jan Vishwas 2.0: Decriminalisation or Dilution?	37
MAINS PRACTICE QUESTIONS	40
SCHOLAR DIGEST: KNOW YOUR SCHOLARS	43
• M.N. Roy: From Radical Nationalist to Radical Humanist	43
• John Joseph Mearsheimer	44
• Karl Popper: Defender of the Open Society	46
• Henry Kissinger	47
ENRICH YOUR ANSWERS	49

GEOPOLITICS AT GLANCE

INDIA–NEPAL RELATIONS IN THE SHADOW OF THE 2025–26 POLITICAL CRISIS



Nehru's vision: "No country is more closely related to us in terms of history and culture than Nepal."

Strategic Autonomy: Shyam Saran on Nepal: "We must recognize Nepal's sensitivities as we expect ours to be respected."

BACKGROUND OF THE NEPAL CRISIS AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR INDIA

Nepal, long celebrated for its democratic transition of 2006, is now gripped by its deepest political crisis in decades. The immediate trigger came in September 2025, when Gen Z-led protests erupted across the country against the CPN-UML government's corruption, poor governance, and curbs on dissent, including a controversial ban on 23 social media platforms.

The demonstrations escalated violently, leaving 74 people dead and key state institutions such as Parliament and the Supreme Court attacked and partly burned, with economic damages estimated at over NPR 10 billion. Under

pressure, Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli resigned, and Parliament was unconstitutionally dissolved, in violation of Article 76 of the 2015 Constitution.

In a dramatic turn, Sushila Karki, Nepal's former Chief Justice, was installed as interim Prime Minister on 12 September 2025 with support from protest leaders. She became Nepal's first woman to hold the post, pledging to curb corruption and oversee elections by March 2026. Her cabinet included anti-graft figures such as Rameshwar Prasad Khanal in Finance and Kulman Ghising in Energy.

For India, the crisis presents both risks and opportunities. Ambassador Naveen Srivastava attended Karki's swearing-in, signalling New Delhi's support for constitutional order. Yet India faces challenges of potential refugee flows across the 1,770 kilometre open border, the possible revival of Madhesi-style movements, and the danger of hostile powers exploiting Nepal's instability.

IMPORTANCE OF INDIA–NEPAL RELATIONS

1. **Historical and Cultural Ties:** Civilisational links through Hinduism and Buddhism form the backbone of bilateral relations, with sacred sites such as Pashupatinath and Lumbini symbolising shared heritage. The 1950 Treaty of Peace and Friendship formalised these ties. Over 8 million Nepalis live in India, and the presence of Gurkha regiments in the Indian Army underscores enduring people-to-people and military connections.
2. **Strategic Significance:** Nepal is vital to India's Himalayan security and serves as a buffer between India and China. Its political orientation directly influences regional stability. India's role in supporting Nepal's democratic transition in 2006 highlights its long-term strategic engagement.
3. **Economic Interdependence:** India accounts for 60 to 65 percent of Nepal's trade, amounting to USD 8.5 billion in 2024. Nepal relies on India for petroleum, electricity, and essential commodities, while offering vast hydropower potential that can support India's clean energy transition. The remittances of 600,000 Nepali workers in India further cement interdependence.
4. **Developmental Partnership:** India has extended USD 1.5 billion in aid since 2008, covering earthquake reconstruction, highways, railways, education, and health. These investments strengthen resilience and confirm India as Nepal's leading development partner.
5. **Political and Governance Cooperation:** Since Nepal's adoption of federalism in 2015, India has supported capacity building, governance reforms, and inclusive democracy, which are key to ensuring that instability in Nepal does not undermine India's Neighborhood First Policy.
6. **Geopolitical Relevance:** As China deepens its footprint through BRI projects such as Pokhara Airport, India–Nepal ties act as a balancing force. Stronger relations allow India to safeguard its northern frontier and prevent Nepal from becoming a theatre of great-power rivalry.

KEY AREAS OF COOPERATION

1. **Trade and Investment:** Bilateral trade touched USD 8.5 billion in 2024, with India as Nepal's top FDI source. Infrastructure such as Integrated Check Posts and the Motihari–Amlekhgunj petroleum pipeline enhance cross-border efficiency.
2. **Energy and Hydropower:** Both countries have a joint goal of developing 10,000 MW of capacity by 2030 to 2035, including Arun-3 with 456 MW commissioned in 2024. The Dhalkebar–Muzaffarpur 400 kV line enables Nepal to export surplus electricity, making it a potential regional renewable hub.
3. **Connectivity and Infrastructure:** India's USD 1.5 billion Line of Credit backs cross-border rail links including Jayanagar–Kurtha and Jogbani–Biratnagar, highways such as East–West Highway upgrades, and earthquake reconstruction. Plans for digital and air connectivity aim to expand integration and tourism.

4. **Defence and Security:** The 1950 Treaty enables Nepali citizens to serve in the Indian Army, with more than 30,000 Gurkhas currently enlisted. The annual Surya Kiran exercise and India's USD 50 million military aid strengthen border security, counterinsurgency, and intelligence cooperation.
5. **Development and Capacity Building:** Over 200 grassroots projects worth USD 100 million in health, education, and water, along with 1,500 scholarships annually, highlight India's contribution. Humanitarian aid such as 10 million COVID vaccine doses further cements goodwill.
6. **Cultural and People-to-People Ties:** The open border and rupee trade facility support seamless interaction. Initiatives like the Ramayana Circuit, the Buddhist Circuit, and joint cultural festivals reinforce civilisational bonds and sustain grassroots trust.

CHALLENGES

- ❑ **Political Instability:** Frequent government changes, corruption, and weak institutions, exemplified by the 2025 crisis, delay projects and invite external meddling.
- ❑ **Anti-India Nationalism:** Episodes like the 2020 map row and 2015 blockade feed mistrust, amplified by Gen Z activism and social media rhetoric.
- ❑ **Chinese Expansion:** BRI loans worth USD 3 billion and projects like the Trans-Himalayan Railway intensify Beijing's influence and strategic rivalry with India.
- ❑ **Economic Asymmetry:** A USD 6 billion trade deficit and delays in hydropower imports create perceptions of dependency.
- ❑ **Water Disputes:** Stalled treaties such as Mahakali and recurring floods in shared river basins affect millions.
- ❑ **Border Issues:** Open borders allow people-to-people links but also smuggling, trafficking, and disputes in Lipulekh–Kalapani.

WAY FORWARD

- ❑ **Support Democratic Stability:** Assist free 2026 elections through Election Commission of India; engage Nepal's youth leadership.
- ❑ **Balance Trade:** Push for a Bilateral Economic Partnership Agreement covering services and e-commerce; invest in hydropower, IT, and tourism.
- ❑ **Boost Connectivity:** Fast-track BBIN projects, cross-border railways (Jayanagar–Kurtha), and link Nepal to India's Act East supply chains.
- ❑ **Strengthen Border Security:** Deploy joint patrolling, drones, biometric systems, and expand Gurkha recruitment and intelligence sharing.
- ❑ **Counterbalance China:** Offer transparent grants, sustainable infrastructure alternatives, and pursue trilateral dialogue under BIMSTEC.
- ❑ **Deepen Cultural Ties:** Expand scholarships, pilgrim circuits, and skill-development centres to reinforce civilisational bonds.

WHERE TO USE

- ❑ **GS2 (IR, India & Neighborhood):** Direct question on India–Nepal relations, China factor, or Neighborhood First Policy.
- ❑ **Essay:** "India and its Neighbourhood Policy," "Civilizational Ties as Strategic Assets."

- ❑ **Optional PSIR (Paper 2, Section B):** South Asia, bilateral relations, regional stability.
- ❑ **Current Affairs Enrichment:** 2025 Nepal crisis, Gen Z protests, Chinese BRI footprint.

WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION



INTRODUCTION

One of the major headwinds in international trade today is the wave of **reciprocal tariffs**, popularly called the “Trump Tariffs.” Imposed by the United States to penalize even close trade partners, these measures echo the **Smoot-Hawley Tariffs of 1930**, which hastened the Great Depression. Unlike the 1930s, however, the world now has the **World Trade Organization (WTO)** to regulate trade through a rule-based system. Yet, critics argue that the WTO has lost relevance, given the rise of protectionism, stalled negotiations, and weakened enforcement mechanisms.

WHAT IS WTO?

The World Trade Organization (WTO), established in 1995, replaced the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). It regulates international trade through a rule-based order, ensuring predictability and fairness in global commerce. Its core principles include Most-Favoured-Nation (MFN), National Treatment, reciprocity, transparency, binding commitments, gradual trade liberalization, and a rules-based dispute settlement system.

ACHIEVEMENTS OF WTO

1. **Expansion of Trade:** Real global trade volume expanded 2.7 times since 1995, aided by predictable rules.

2. **Negotiation Platform:** Provides a multilateral forum for continuous liberalization.
3. **Reduction in Tariffs:** Average tariffs halved, from 10.5% to 6.4%, boosting market access.
4. **Boost to National Incomes:** Accession provided sustained income growth to several developing nations.
5. **Global Value Chains:** Predictability under WTO enabled the rise of value chains, now accounting for ~70% of merchandise trade.
6. **Poverty Reduction:** Share of global population under extreme poverty fell from ~33% in 1995 to ~10%.
7. **Dispute Settlement:** Over 600 disputes resolved through the Dispute Settlement Body, preventing trade wars.
8. **Support for Developing Countries:** Flexibilities, Aid for Trade initiative, and capacity building.
9. **Transparency:** Regular Trade Policy Reviews ensure openness and monitoring.

CHALLENGES FACING WTO

1. **Negotiation Deadlock:** The Doha Round failed due to disagreements between developed and developing countries.
2. **Bias Towards Developed Nations:** Rich countries continue subsidies while pressing poorer countries to open markets.
3. **Protectionism and Retreat from MFN:** Rise of reciprocal tariffs and preference for bilateral FTAs undermines multilateralism.
4. **Dispute Settlement Paralysis:** Appellate Body appointments blocked since 2019, paralyzing enforcement of rules.
5. **Misuse of Special and Differential Treatment (S&DT):** Self-declaration allows countries like China to benefit unfairly.
6. **Shift to Plurilateralism:** Agreements like TPP bypass WTO consensus, weakening inclusivity.
7. **Consensus Deadlock:** Slow negotiations and lack of consensus on new issues like e-commerce, digital trade, climate.
8. **Neglect of LDCs:** High compliance costs and poor representation keep them disadvantaged.
9. **China Factor:** WTO rules unprepared for China's scale; massive exports distort markets without technical violations.
10. **India-specific Challenges:**
 - Agricultural subsidies capped at 10%, conflicting with India's food security needs.
 - Public stockholding program disputes unresolved despite Peace Clause.
 - Services exports blocked by visa restrictions and weak GATS progress.
 - TRIPS hinders India's generic pharma sector.
 - Non-tariff barriers like SPS and TBT increase costs for Indian exporters.

SUGGESTED WTO REFORMS

1. **Revival of the Dispute Settlement System:** A credible WTO requires an effective dispute resolution mechanism.
 - **Restoring the Appellate Body:** Expand its panel from seven to nine judges, convert it into a full-time body, and allocate more resources to its secretariat.
 - **Depoliticized Appointments:** The process of appointing judges should be insulated from political vetoes, particularly by powerful members.

- **Timely and Transparent Procedures:** Clear timelines for cases, simplified procedures, and stricter compliance with rulings are necessary to prevent delays.
 - **Interim Solutions:** Explore mediation and arbitration mechanisms to ensure continuity until Appellate Body reforms are fully operational.
2. **Reform of Special and Differential Treatment (SDT):** Current self-declaration of “developing country” status is widely misused.
- **Objective Criteria:** Use indicators such as GDP per capita, trade share, and human development to define eligibility.
 - **Graduation Mechanism:** Advanced developing economies (e.g., G20 members) should gradually lose SDT benefits, while Least Developed Countries (LDCs) continue to enjoy protections.
3. **“30 for 30” Proposal (India’s Initiative):** India suggested at least 30 operational improvements before WTO turned 30 (January 2025).
- **Cooling-off Period:** A one-year gap before diplomats take roles in the WTO.
 - **Address Old Issues First:** Commit to resolving pending disputes before introducing new agendas.
 - **Time-Bound Programmes:** Ensure that dispute settlement is affordable and accessible, especially for developing countries.
4. **New Rules for Emerging Trade Domains:** WTO must adapt to changing realities of trade.
- Areas like e-commerce, digital trade, investment facilitation, and domestic regulation in services need consensus-based agreements.
 - Predictable rules in these cutting-edge sectors will strengthen global supply chains and innovation-led growth.
5. **Inclusive Trade Participation**
- Promote women entrepreneurs and small businesses in international trade by reducing entry barriers and providing safeguards.
 - Inclusivity will enhance legitimacy and widen the benefits of globalization.
6. **Reforming the Voting and Consensus Process**
- Clear guidelines are required on the use of veto powers to prevent misuse.
 - Decision-making should weigh national vetoes against the collective mandate of WTO.
7. **Independent Arbitral Panels:** An impartial panel of experts can act as arbiters in case of persistent deadlocks, ensuring political disputes do not paralyse the organization.
8. **Enhancing Transparency**
- Member states should proactively disclose subsidies and trade-related data.
 - Transparency would reduce mistrust and prevent sudden market distortions

WHERE TO USE

- ☐ **GS2 (IR, Global Governance):** Questions on WTO, multilateralism, trade challenges.
- ☐ **GS3 (Economy):** Trade policy, agriculture subsidies, services exports.
- ☐ **Essay:** “Is globalization reversing?” or “Future of multilateralism.”
- ☐ **PSIR Optional:** Role of global institutions, WTO crisis of legitimacy.

VALUE-ADDING QUOTES AND REPORTS

- ❑ **Pascal Lamy (Former WTO DG):** “Without the WTO, we would be living in the law of the jungle.”
- ❑ **Raghuram Rajan:** WTO has been a “shock absorber” for global trade conflicts.
- ❑ **World Bank Report (2024):** Global value chains account for 70% of world trade.
- ❑ **Indian Context:** Economic Survey often highlights India’s cautious stance on WTO agricultural reforms.

INDIA–CHINA RELATIONS: SIGNIFICANCE, CHALLENGES, AND THE ROAD AHEAD



INTRODUCTION

Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s visit to China for the SCO Summit, after a gap of seven years, came at a crucial juncture. Since the border clashes in Ladakh in June 2020, both sides have attempted to stabilize ties through dialogue and engagement. The visit provided an opportunity to assess the importance, challenges, and evolving pathways of India–China relations.

SIGNIFICANCE OF INDIA–CHINA RELATIONS

- ❑ **Economic and Trade Importance:** China is India’s largest trading partner, with bilateral trade crossing \$118 billion in 2024–25. India depends on Chinese supplies of pharmaceutical APIs, rare-earth metals, solar

modules, and other key components vital for manufacturing, technology, and renewable energy. Stable relations thus remain central to India's economic growth and supply chain resilience.

- ❑ **Geostrategic and Regional Stability:** Both India and China are leading Asian powers whose rivalry or cooperation impacts South Asia, the Indo-Pacific, and Eurasia. Peaceful engagement reduces the risk of conflict along sensitive borders and contributes to regional security. Their bilateral equation influences the trajectory of multilateral bodies like BRICS and SCO.
- ❑ **Global Governance:** Together, India and China act as a powerful bloc representing developing countries in institutions such as the WTO, IMF, and UN. Their cooperation helps push for reforms in the global order and provides alternatives to Western-led development and trade models.
- ❑ **Collaboration on Global Challenges:** Climate change, energy security, and public health emergencies require coordinated leadership from both countries. Constructive engagement allows them to play a decisive role in addressing transnational challenges.
- ❑ **Historical and Cultural Ties:** Civilizational links, rooted in Buddhism and cultural exchanges dating back centuries, provide a foundation that extends beyond contemporary political and economic concerns.

CHALLENGES IN THE RELATIONSHIP

- ❑ **Border Disputes and Military Tensions:** The Line of Actual Control (LAC) remains the core problem, with contested claims in Aksai Chin (controlled by China) and Arunachal Pradesh (administered by India). Incidents such as Galwan (2020) and Doklam (2017) have heightened distrust. Differing perceptions of the LAC perpetuate instability.
- ❑ **Strategic Rivalry and Regional Competition:** Both nations aspire for leadership in Asia. China's growing footprint in South Asia, particularly through the Belt and Road Initiative and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), is viewed by India as a direct strategic threat.
- ❑ **Trade Imbalance and Economic Friction:** Despite robust trade, India suffers a large trade deficit, with limited access to Chinese markets. Non-tariff barriers and regulatory hurdles restrict Indian exports, reinforcing economic asymmetry.
- ❑ **Political Trust Deficit and Nationalism:** Border incidents and historical conflicts fuel mutual suspicion. Nationalist sentiments in both countries create narratives of rivalry that complicate normalization.
- ❑ **Geopolitical Alignments and External Partnerships:** India's closer ties with the US and participation in Quad contrast sharply with China's strategic rivalry with Washington. This dynamic introduces skepticism into the India-China equation.
- ❑ **String of Pearls vs. Necklace of Diamonds:** China's investments in ports and bases across the Indian Ocean (the "String of Pearls") are perceived as encirclement strategies. India has countered with the "Necklace of Diamonds," bolstering naval cooperation and presence in key maritime locations.
- ❑ **China-Pakistan Nexus:** China's close strategic alignment with Pakistan, including the CPEC that passes through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, undermines India's sovereignty and heightens security concerns.
- ❑ **Water Security:** China's control over the upper reaches of transboundary rivers, particularly the Brahmaputra (Yarlung Tsangpo), raises fears of diversion projects or ecological harm, threatening India's water security.

INITIATIVES TO IMPROVE RELATIONS

- ❑ **High-Level Diplomatic Engagements:** Summits between Modi and Xi, as well as foreign minister-level meetings, provide platforms for dialogue. Engagements at SCO and BRICS summits in 2025 underscore efforts to stabilize relations.

- ❑ **Border Management Mechanisms:** Confidence-building measures such as flag meetings, military hotlines, and disengagement agreements aim to prevent accidental escalation. Protocols for maintaining peace along the LAC remain central to crisis management.
- ❑ **Reopening Border Trade Points:** After five years, border trade resumed through Shipki La, Lipulekh, and Nathu La in August 2025. This move restores economic and cultural linkages and supports border communities.
- ❑ **Expanding Economic and Trade Ties:** Efforts are being made to ease restrictions on both sides, particularly in critical sectors such as fertilizers, minerals, and technology inputs. Cooperation at BRICS, SCO, and G20 forums provides space for economic coordination.
- ❑ **People-to-People and Cultural Exchanges:** The resumption of direct flights and the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra signals intent to revive cultural and religious ties. Educational programs and tourism exchanges aim to rebuild trust.
- ❑ **Strategic and Multilateral Cooperation:** India and China engage in regional organizations like SCO and BRICS to coordinate positions on climate change, health, and global governance, despite underlying bilateral frictions.

WAY FORWARD

- ❑ **Maintain Border Stability:** Sustained disengagement, new confidence-building measures, and regular military dialogues are essential for avoiding accidental escalations and ensuring peace along the LAC.
- ❑ **Address Economic Concerns:** India must seek greater market access in China and work toward reducing the trade deficit. Collaboration in green energy, infrastructure, and digital technologies could provide fresh avenues.
- ❑ **Leverage Multilateral Forums:** Engagement in SCO, BRICS, and G20 can be used to align on global challenges, even if bilateral tensions persist. Joint action on issues like climate change or pandemics can build limited trust.
- ❑ **Promote People-to-People Engagement:** Tourism, academic exchanges, and cultural diplomacy must be encouraged to counter prevailing stereotypes and build constituencies of trust in both societies.
- ❑ **Balance Geopolitical Alignments:** India's strategy of strategic autonomy must continue — cooperating with China where interests converge, while safeguarding sovereignty and security by deepening ties with the US, Quad, and other partners.
- ❑ **Strengthen Track-II Diplomacy:** Academic, civil society, and business forums should be used to sustain dialogue outside official channels, which can prepare ground for political negotiations.

CONCLUSION

India and China must prevent differences from escalating into disputes. Respecting sensitivities, addressing grievances through dialogue, and focusing on mutual interests in trade, climate, and regional stability can create space for coexistence between the two Asian giants.

WHERE TO USE IN UPSC/PSIR

- ❑ **GS-II (International Relations):** Questions on India–China relations, border disputes, or India's role in SCO/BRICS.
- ❑ **PSIR Paper II (Comparative/IR Section):** To illustrate regionalism in Asia, multipolarity, and balance-of-power strategies.

- ❑ **Essay Paper:** Themes like “Cooperation amidst competition,” “India’s neighborhood policy,” or “Asian century: promise and paradox.”
- ❑ **GS-I (Culture/History):** For linking Buddhism and civilizational ties to modern diplomacy.

USEFUL QUOTES

1. **Jawaharlal Nehru (1947):** “It is on the basis of peaceful coexistence and cooperation that India and China must work together to shape Asia’s destiny.”
2. **Henry Kissinger (on Sino-Indian relations):** “The world order will not be shaped in Washington or Beijing alone. The equation between India and China will be decisive for Asia’s future.”

THE 25TH SCO SUMMIT: INDIA AT TIANJIN, 2025



INTRODUCTION

The **25th Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Summit** (Aug 31 – Sep 1, 2025) in Tianjin, China, is the **largest gathering in SCO history**, with leaders from 20+ countries and 10 international organizations. For PM **Narendra Modi**, this marks the **first visit to China since 2019**, giving the event added significance for India-China ties.

WHAT IS SCO?

- ❑ **Origins:** Began as the Shanghai Five (1996) – China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan – to address border security post-USSR.
- ❑ **Formation:** Transformed into SCO in **2001** with the inclusion of **Uzbekistan**.
- ❑ **Current Membership (10 states):**

- Founders: China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan
- New Members: India & Pakistan (2017), Iran (2023), Belarus (2024)

Today, SCO is a **Eurasian political, economic, and security bloc**, with deep influence in regional and global affairs.

SIGNIFICANCE OF SCO

1. Geopolitical Weight

- World's **largest regional bloc** by geography (80% of Eurasia) and population (40% of humanity).
- Members include **nuclear powers** (India, China, Russia, Pakistan, Iran) and resource-rich Central Asia.
- Serves as a unique platform bridging diverse political systems and cultures.

2. Economic & Connectivity Potential

- Accounts for **~30% of global GDP**.
- With **Iran on board**: controls ~20% of global oil & ~44% of gas reserves.
- **SCO Energy Club** fosters cooperation among producers and consumers.
- Strong linkages with **China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)** — though India remains cautious.
- Infrastructure push: pipelines, transport corridors, cross-border trade routes.

3. Security Cooperation

- Flagship agenda = fight against **terrorism, separatism, extremism**.
- **RATS (Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure)** in Tashkent enables intelligence-sharing & coordinated counter-terror operations.
- SCO has emerged as the **primary security forum in Central Asia**.

4. Regional Stability

- Provides a forum to manage issues like **Afghanistan's instability**, border conflicts, and Central Asian security concerns.
- Promotes peace-building through coordination rather than military interventions.

5. Dialogue Platform

- Enables political and security dialogue even among rivals (India-China, India-Pakistan).
- Serves as a rare venue for confidence-building and crisis de-escalation.

6. Consensus-Based Decisions

- Though China and Russia dominate, decisions require **unanimity**, ensuring India has a meaningful voice.
- Slow at times, but inclusive by design.

7. Balancing East & West

- For India, SCO complements **Quad membership** (with US, Japan, Australia).
- Being in both blocs highlights India's **strategic autonomy**: engaging with Western democracies while also staying relevant in Eurasian platforms led by China & Russia.

LIMITATIONS AND CHALLENGES OF SCO

1. Internal Conflicts and Bilateral Tensions

- **India–China disputes**: Border tensions (e.g., Ladakh standoff) spill over into SCO deliberations.

- **India–Pakistan hostility:** Cross-border terrorism concerns and political mistrust obstruct consensus.
 - **Central Asian disputes:** Conflicts such as Kyrgyzstan–Tajikistan weaken regional stability.
 - **No dispute resolution mechanism:** SCO has no institutional process to mediate bilateral conflicts, leaving tensions unresolved.
2. **Dominance of China and Russia:** China and Russia dominate decision-making. Smaller members worry about disproportionate influence, particularly from China’s economic might. The use of Russian and Chinese as official languages reflects this imbalance.
 3. **Lack of a Free Trade Area:** No comprehensive free trade agreement exists among SCO members, restricting deeper economic integration compared to ASEAN or EU.
 4. **“Anti-Western” Perception:** Though the SCO claims neutrality, Western powers often see it as a bloc countering the US and NATO. This perception limits SCO’s ability to engage globally.
 5. **BRI Concerns:** Most SCO members endorse China’s Belt and Road Initiative. India rejects it due to sovereignty issues with the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) through Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir, isolating India in economic initiatives.
 6. **Limited Mandate:** The SCO’s primary focus is on security (terrorism, separatism, extremism). Economic, cultural, and climate cooperation remain secondary, reducing the organization’s broader effectiveness.

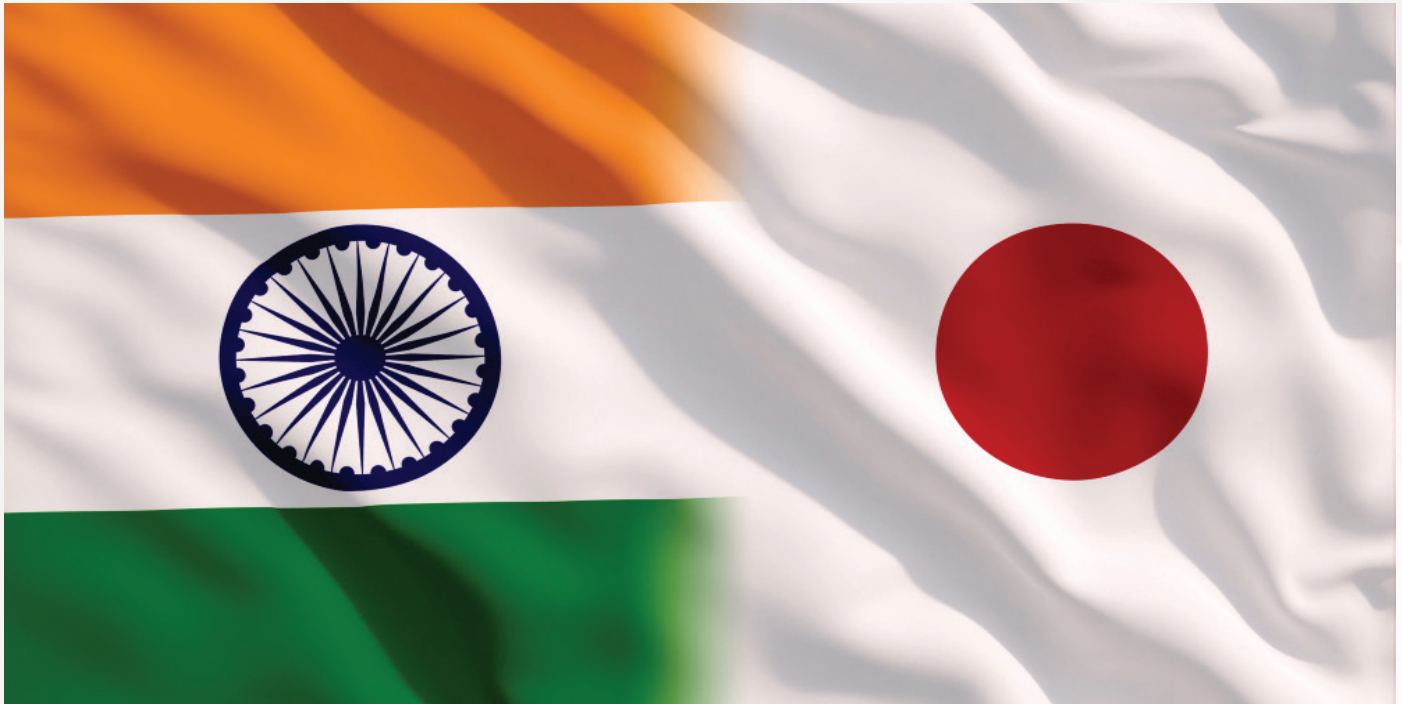
WAY FORWARD

1. **Strengthening Trust and Dialogue:** Use SCO summits as opportunities for bilateral meetings (e.g., India–China, India–Pakistan) to reduce mistrust and manage disputes.
2. **Unified Stance on Terrorism**
 - Adopt a **zero-tolerance approach**, without differentiating “good” and “bad” terrorists.
 - Make **RATS more effective** through actionable intelligence sharing and depoliticized joint initiatives.
3. **Deepening Economic and Connectivity Cooperation**
 - Identify priority sectors: energy, food security, pharmaceuticals, digital tech.
 - Utilize corridors like INSTC, linking them to SCO transport networks.
 - Expand **digital public infrastructure cooperation**, showcasing India’s UPI as a model.
4. **Tackling Non-Traditional Security Threats**
 - Strengthen anti-narcotics operations through RATS.
 - Build regional cybersecurity capacity.
 - Develop joint disaster management frameworks.
 - Promote climate and water security cooperation.

WHERE TO USE IN EXAMS

- ☐ **GS Paper II (IR & Organizations):** “Discuss the significance and challenges of SCO for India.”
- ☐ **GS Paper III (Security):** Use SCO’s role in counter-terrorism (RATS, intelligence sharing) while discussing regional security.
- ☐ **Essay Paper:** In themes on multipolarity, Eurasian geopolitics, or India’s strategic autonomy.
- ☐ **PSIR Paper II (IR Section-B):** Fits under Regional Organizations (SCO, BRICS, QUAD) and debates on India’s multilateral diplomacy.

INDIA–JAPAN: FROM CULTURAL BRIDGES TO STRATEGIC PILLARS



"Two ancient civilizations, bound by Buddhism, now anchor the Indo-Pacific in an age of turbulence."

EVOLUTION OF INDIA–JAPAN RELATIONS

- ❑ **Ancient Civilizational Ties:** Buddhism travelled from India to Japan in the 6th century, leaving a lasting imprint on Japanese spirituality, art, and culture. Importantly, **India and Japan have never been adversaries** in history — a rarity in Asian geopolitics.
- ❑ **Post-War Foundations:** In **1952**, India signed one of Japan's first peace treaties after WWII, paving the way for formal diplomatic ties.
- ❑ **Economic Pillar Emerges:** Japan supported India during the 1991 Balance of Payments crisis and became a trusted partner under India's **Look East Policy** in the 1990s.
- ❑ **Strategic Elevation:**
 - **2006** → Relations upgraded to Global and Strategic Partnership.
 - **2014 (Shinzo Abe's visit)** → Elevated to Special Strategic and Global Partnership.
 - **2013–14 high-level visits** → infused new energy, signalling trust at the highest levels.
- ❑ **Indo-Pacific Convergence:** Shared concerns over China's assertiveness and commitment to a **Free, Open, and Inclusive Indo-Pacific** drew India and Japan closer, with the US and Australia as key partners in **QUAD**.

CURRENT DIMENSIONS OF THE PARTNERSHIP

STRATEGIC & DEFENCE COOPERATION

- ❑ **Security Frameworks:**
 - 2008 Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation.
 - Institutionalised dialogues: 2+2 Ministerial, Annual Defence Dialogue, Coast Guard meetings.

- ❑ **Logistics Pact (ACSA, 2020):** Reciprocal logistics and supplies agreement → India among only 5 such partners of Japan.
- ❑ **Military Exercises:**
 - Dharma Guardian (Army)
 - Shinyuu Maitri (Air Force)
 - JIMEX (Navy)
 - Sahyog-Kaijin (Coast Guard)
 - Malabar (with US & Australia).
- ❑ **Multilateral Coordination:** QUAD → technology, maritime security, critical supply chains.
- ❑ **Global Governance:** Both back each other's **UNSC permanent membership bids**; Japan supported India's MTCR entry.

TRADE & ECONOMIC COOPERATION

- ❑ **CEPA (2011)** boosted bilateral trade → \$22.8 bn (2023–24).
- ❑ India exports: petroleum, chemicals, ores, fish, clothing.
- ❑ Imports from Japan: machinery, vehicles, steel, electronics, chemicals.
- ❑ Yet trade is modest — only **1/5th of India–China trade**.

INVESTMENTS & DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE

- ❑ **Japan = India's 5th largest FDI source** (autos, telecom, chemicals, finance, pharma).
- ❑ **Largest bilateral donor:** JICA's ODA shaping India's modern infrastructure.
- ❑ Flagship Projects:
 - Mumbai–Ahmedabad High Speed Rail.
 - Western DFC & Delhi–Mumbai Industrial Corridor.
 - Chennai–Bengaluru Industrial Corridor.
- ❑ These projects reflect “**quality infrastructure**” **diplomacy**, contrasting with China's BRI.

TECHNOLOGY & DIGITAL COOPERATION

- ❑ India–Japan Digital Partnership (2018).
- ❑ Startup Hub in Bengaluru → Indian startups have raised **\$10+ bn** from Japanese VCs (SoftBank as anchor).
- ❑ S&T Cooperation since 1985 → robotics, ICT, nuclear energy, 5G, space, AI/ML.
- ❑ Quad Tech Working Group → shaping standards, supply chains, next-gen telecom.

SKILL DEVELOPMENT

- ❑ 2016 MoC → 30,000 shop-floor leaders trained.
- ❑ 12 Japan-India Institutes of Manufacturing (JIM) & 4 Endowed Courses in Indian colleges.
- ❑ TITP (Technical Intern Training Programme) → Indian workers in Japanese industries.

CHALLENGES & CONSTRAINTS

1. **Russia Factor:**
 - India: multi-alignment, dependence on Russian defence.

- Japan: alignment with West, sanctions against Moscow.
 - Ukraine war exposed divergences → Japan critical of India's participation in Vostok-2022.
- 2. Trade Imbalance:**
- Despite CEPA, Japan not in India's top 10 partners.
 - Bilateral trade far below potential; dwarfed by India–China trade.
- 3. Global Issue Divergences:**
- WTO disputes (India's tariffs vs Japan's liberalisation stance).
 - Climate and developmental divides between Global South & developed economies.
- 4. Slow Projects:**
- Asia–Africa Growth Corridor (India–Japan alternative to BRI) underperformed.
 - Japanese firms complain of **regulatory & logistical hurdles** in India.

THE WAY FORWARD

- ❑ **Trade Push:** Simplify trade processes, reduce tariffs, expand CEPA → make trade the strongest pillar of ties.
- ❑ **Managing Russia Divergence:** Practice diplomatic compartmentalisation — cooperate on Indo-Pacific despite differing Russia positions.
- ❑ **Supply Chain Resilience:** Co-develop industries in semiconductors, rare earths, green tech.
- ❑ **Skill & Digital Synergy:** Use India's IT workforce to accelerate Japan's digitisation.
- ❑ **Tech & Green Transition:** Expand cooperation on 5G, space, AI, and green hydrogen.
- ❑ **Northeast & Connectivity:** Partner in India's Northeast and link to Southeast Asia → Indo-Pacific supply chain bridges.
- ❑ **Maritime Architecture:** Broaden port connectivity with other Indo-Pacific partners → shaping an inclusive maritime order.

CONCLUSION

India and Japan, as **two vibrant democracies**, are more than bilateral partners — they are co-architects of a **rules-based Indo-Pacific**. At a time of Chinese assertiveness, Ukraine war divides, and supply chain disruptions, the “**confluence of two seas**” acquires renewed significance. The task ahead is to **consolidate trust, scale up economic ties, and anchor a resilient Indo-Pacific order**.

“The Lotus from India and the Cherry Blossom from Japan — together they must define Asia's future.”

EXAM VALUE (WHERE TO USE)

- ❑ **GS-II (IR):** India–Japan ties, QUAD, Indo-Pacific strategy.
- ❑ **GS-III (Economy):** FDI, infrastructure, trade diversification.
- ❑ **Essay:** “Confluence of two seas: India–Japan and the quest for an Asian century.”
- ❑ **PSIR Paper II:** Strategic partnerships, great power politics, Asia-Pacific security.

INDIA-US RELATIONSHIP



IMPORTANCE OF INDIA-US RELATIONS

- ❑ **Economic Importance:** The US is among India's largest trading partners and a major investor, contributing to growth, job creation, and technology transfer. The bilateral trade ties provide opportunities in innovation sectors such as clean energy, pharmaceuticals, and technology, while also reinforcing global supply chains.
- ❑ **Strategic Importance:** India-US relations are central to ensuring stability in the Indo-Pacific. Both share concerns over China's assertiveness and coordinate to strengthen a free, open, and rules-based order. Defense partnership enhances India's military capability and interoperability, deepening strategic convergence.
- ❑ **Geopolitical Importance:** The two collaborate on transnational issues like counter-terrorism, non-proliferation, and climate change, rooted in their shared democratic values. This partnership enhances their ability to shape global governance and strengthens their influence in multilateral platforms.
- ❑ **Diaspora and Cultural Relations:** The 4.8 million-strong Indian diaspora in the US is a vital link. From leading over 150 global corporations to shaping Silicon Valley's innovation ecosystem, the diaspora reinforces bilateral ties. Similarly, US entrepreneurs and investors actively engage with India's startup ecosystem in hubs like Bengaluru, making people-to-people ties an enduring pillar.

KEY AREAS OF COOPERATION

- ❑ **Economic Cooperation**
 - The US is India's largest trading partner.
 - American firms invest heavily in India's technology, manufacturing, and services sectors.
 - Indian companies also invest significantly in the US.
 - In 2024, India exported goods worth \$87.3 billion to the US.

❑ **Defence & Security Cooperation**

- Agreements like GSOMIA, LEMOA, COMCASA, and BECA facilitate secure communication, geospatial exchange, intelligence sharing, and logistics support.
- The US designates India a Major Defense Partner, allowing access to advanced defense technology.
- Joint exercises such as Malabar (naval, with Japan & Australia) and Yudh Abhyas (army) demonstrate interoperability.
- The Defense Trade and Technology Initiative (DTTI) promotes co-development and co-production of technologies like drones and jet engines, supporting Make in India.

❑ **Science, Technology & Innovation**

- Collaborations extend into AI, quantum computing, semiconductors, and cybersecurity.
- The Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies (iCET) strengthens innovation bridges.
- ISRO and NASA cooperate on joint missions and space exploration projects.

❑ **Security & Counterterrorism**

- Intelligence sharing, diplomatic coordination, and capacity-building measures strengthen counter-terrorism frameworks.
- Partnership contributes to both regional stability and global counter-terrorism efforts.

❑ **Climate & Clean Energy**

- Joint efforts focus on clean energy technology, sustainable development, and climate change mitigation.
- Cooperation supports global climate goals and India's energy transition strategies.

CHALLENGES IN INDIA-US RELATIONS

❑ **Trade & Economic Challenges**

- **Tariff Disputes:** The U.S. has often raised concerns about India's high tariffs, while India is affected by U.S. visa policies. Disagreements also persist over intellectual property rights and market access. The U.S. imposed sweeping tariffs on Indian exports in August 2025, raising duties up to 50% on many goods, hurting India's export competitiveness in sectors like pharmaceuticals, textiles, gems, and electronics.
- **Trade Imbalances:** Persistent trade deficits and disputes over market access have triggered retaliatory tariffs and restrictions, straining economic ties.
- **Investment Barriers:** India's restrictions in certain sectors remain a sticking point, as the U.S. seeks greater openness in Indian markets.

❑ **Defence & Geopolitical Differences**

- **Russia Relationship:** India's continued defense purchases and energy imports from Russia conflict with U.S. sanctions and expectations, creating alignment issues.
- **Geopolitical Divergence:** India's neutral stance on the Russia-Ukraine conflict and its engagement with Iran and Russia create diplomatic friction.
- **Strategic Autonomy:** India's multipolar policy, balancing ties with the West, China, and Russia, often contrasts with U.S. expectations of closer alignment. India resists external pressure on sovereign decisions, especially in defense procurement and energy policy.

- ❑ **Immigration Issues:** Tightening of U.S. visa policies and H-1B caps negatively affects Indian IT professionals and companies, limiting opportunities and goodwill.

❑ Technology & Data Policy Issues

- India's data localization and digital policies are viewed by the U.S. as trade barriers, affecting American tech firms.
- U.S. restrictions on advanced technologies like AI, drones, and missile components constrain India's defense modernization.

WAY FORWARD

❑ Expanding Bilateral Trade & Investment

- Pursue the "Mission 500" target of doubling trade to \$500 billion by 2030 through a Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA).
- Reduce tariffs and non-tariff barriers, strengthen supply chain integration, and enhance market access for industrial and agricultural products.
- Continue structured dialogue to resolve trade disputes and restore balance in economic ties.

❑ Strengthening Security & Strategic Partnership

- Build on the U.S.–India COMPACT initiative to expand defense partnerships and industrial cooperation.
- Accelerate talks on a Reciprocal Defense Procurement (RDP) agreement for defense trade and co-production.
- Scale joint collaborations in autonomous systems and advanced technologies for Indo-Pacific security.
- Deepen cooperation in forums like the Quad and the India–Middle East–Europe Corridor for connectivity and stability.

❑ Advancing Technology & Innovation Collaboration

- Launch INDUS Innovation for industry-academic cooperation in areas like space, AI, energy, and strategic minerals.
- Develop a joint roadmap on accelerating AI infrastructure and strengthen cooperation in critical and emerging technologies.
- Expand research collaborations between U.S. NSF and India's Anusandhan National Research Foundation.

❑ Managing Differences through Dialogue

- Address tariffs and trade disputes constructively to rebuild trust.
- Maintain strategic communication to align global stances while respecting India's strategic autonomy.

WHERE TO USE THIS IN ANSWERS?

- ❑ **GS Paper II (IR):** Questions on "India–US Relations" or "India and Major Powers" often expect a balanced analysis—importance + challenges + way forward.
- ❑ **PSIR Optional, Paper II:** Can be used under India–USA Relations topic, especially for "convergences and divergences in Indo–US ties" or "impact of U.S. policies on India's autonomy."
- ❑ **Essay Paper:** Themes like India's role in a multipolar world or Strategic autonomy vs. alliance politics.
- ❑ **Interview stage:** Useful to explain trade disputes, tariffs, and technology cooperation in current affairs questions.

QUOTES TO STRENGTHEN THE ANSWER

1. **Ashley J. Tellis (strategic expert):** "The U.S.–India relationship is not an alliance, but an alignment driven by interests."
 - Use when explaining why trade disputes or Russia factor don't derail the partnership.

2. **PM Modi (2016 US Congress address):** “India and the U.S. are natural allies.”
 - Use when highlighting shared democratic values, people-to-people ties.
3. **Former U.S. President Obama:** “India and America are indispensable partners in the 21st century.”
 - Fits well in conclusion/importance part of the answer.

INDIA–US TARIFF WAR: SANCTIONS, SOVEREIGNTY & STRATEGIC AUTONOMY



“Can trade survive when geopolitics becomes the battlefield?”

INTRODUCTION

On **August 6, 2025**, President Donald Trump signed an executive order imposing an **additional 25% ad valorem duty** on Indian imports linked to Russian oil purchases, effective **August 27**. This comes on top of a **25% reciprocal tariff** (effective August 7), raising the **total tariff burden to 50%** on most Indian goods.

This is among the **steepest tariffs ever levied by the US on a major partner**, affecting India’s **export-driven sectors**, with far-reaching consequences for both economics and diplomacy.

KEY FEATURES OF THE TARIFFS

- ❑ **50% Tariff Rate:** Doubling to a flat 50% across most Indian goods — unprecedented in US trade history.
- ❑ **Sectors Hit Hardest:** Textiles, gems & jewelry, footwear, leather, furniture, seafood, chemicals — highly labour-intensive sectors forming the backbone of India's export economy.
- ❑ **Exemptions:** Steel, aluminum, passenger vehicles, pharma, electronics largely exempt. Humanitarian donations & in-transit shipments spared.
- ❑ **Timeline:** Applies to goods cleared in the US after **Aug 27**, unless shipped before the cut-off.

WHY DID THE US IMPOSE THESE TARIFFS?

- 1. Russian Oil Purchases**
 - India's continued large-scale imports of discounted Russian crude → seen by Washington as undermining Western sanctions.
 - Direct message: "Energy choices have geopolitical costs."
- 2. Stalled Trade Talks**
 - US-India trade deal negotiations deadlocked.
 - Tariffs as bargaining tool to push India into concessions.
- 3. Trade Deficit Politics**
 - US perceives its persistent trade deficit with India as "unfair."
 - Tariffs positioned as tools to "level the playing field."

THE ECONOMIC IMPACT

- ❑ **Exports in Freefall:** 50% tariffs make Indian goods prohibitively expensive → sharp decline in exports.
- ❑ **Job Losses:** Labour-intensive industries (textiles, gems, leather) at risk; millions of livelihoods jeopardised, especially in Tirupur, Surat, Noida clusters.
- ❑ **GDP Slowdown:** Shrinking export markets → dampened growth, cascading supply chain disruptions.
- ❑ **US Consumers Lose Too:** Price hikes for jewelry, garments, furniture; US importers may shift to **Vietnam, Bangladesh, Mexico** — India's competitors.

DIPLOMATIC & GEOPOLITICAL FALLOUT

- ❑ **Strain in Strategic Ties:** Tariffs cloud the broader "comprehensive global partnership" narrative.
- ❑ **Reduced Bargaining Power:** India's leverage in trade talks diminishes, tariffs becoming a US pressure point.
- ❑ **Energy Sovereignty vs Strategic Partnership:** India's Russian oil stance signals that strategic autonomy will not be compromised, even at the cost of economic penalties.

DOMESTIC REPERCUSSIONS

- ❑ **Market Glut:** Export-oriented goods redirected to domestic markets → oversupply, falling prices, squeezed margins.

- ❑ **Government Under Pressure:** Support packages, subsidies, or trade diversification strategies urgently needed.
- ❑ **Political Dimension:** Rising job losses in MSME-heavy export hubs → could translate into political discontent.

WAY FORWARD

1. Diplomacy Without Retaliation

- India refrains from tit-for-tat tariffs.
- Use dialogue to assert energy sovereignty and highlight unfair costs of politicising trade.

2. Diversify Markets

- “40-country outreach” to Latin America, Europe, Middle East, Africa.
- Accelerate FTAs — UK, EFTA, EU.

3. Boost Domestic Resilience

- GST rationalisation to ease compliance.
- Credit support, subsidies, and cheaper inputs (like duty-free cotton for textiles).

4. Address Trade Deal Roadblocks

- Balance US demands for agricultural access with domestic farmer/MSME protection.
- Seek reciprocal concessions on mobility, services access.

5. Reform Trade Policy & Tackle NTBs

- India must address **non-tariff barriers** (standards, certification, licensing) that often frustrate trade partners.

6. Uphold Strategic Autonomy

- India signals clearly: partnerships yes, dependence no.
- Energy security and domestic welfare take precedence over external pressure.

CONCLUSION

The **Trump tariffs** are more than a trade measure — they are a **geopolitical message**. For India, the challenge lies in balancing **strategic autonomy** with **economic pragmatism**. While diversification, domestic reforms, and careful diplomacy can soften the blow, this episode reminds us that in today’s world, **trade wars are never just about trade**.

“The real test of sovereignty lies not in isolation, but in charting an independent course despite pressure from great powers.”

EXAM VALUE (WHERE TO USE)

- ❑ **GS-II (IR):** India–US relations, trade diplomacy, strategic autonomy.
- ❑ **GS-III (Economy):** Impact of tariffs on MSMEs, exports, GDP.
- ❑ **Essay:** “Trade wars in the age of multipolarity: Economics as geopolitics.”
- ❑ **PSIR Paper II:** US foreign economic policy, India’s strategic autonomy.

QUESTIONS

MAINS

Q: "India's energy sovereignty and strategic autonomy are being tested by US tariffs. Critically evaluate in light of India-US relations." (250 words)

MCQ:

Q. Trump's Aug 2025 tariffs on Indian goods were triggered by:

- (a) India's export subsidies
- (b) India's Russian oil imports
- (c) India's dairy protectionism
- (d) Trade deficit

(Answer: b)

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INDIAN GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS (IGP)

NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION (NHRC) – APPOINTMENT & DEBATE



"Can a human rights watchdog remain credible if its own selection process is questioned?"

INTRODUCTION

Former Supreme Court judge **Justice V. Ramasubramanian** has been appointed by the President of India as the new **Chairperson of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC)**. However, the principal opposition party has issued a **dissent note**, calling the selection process "fundamentally flawed". It alleged that the process was a **pre-determined exercise**, relying on numerical majority rather than consensus, thereby undermining the tradition of **mutual consultation**.

WHAT IS NHRC?

The **National Human Rights Commission** is a **statutory body** established under the **Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993**. It functions as the **watchdog of human rights** in India.

COMPOSITION:

- ☐ **Chairperson** – Retired Chief Justice of India or Judge of the Supreme Court.
- ☐ **Members** –
 - One Supreme Court Judge (sitting/retired).

- One High Court Chief Justice (sitting/retired).
- Three persons with knowledge/experience in human rights, including **one woman**.
- ☐ **Appointment:** Done by the President on the recommendation of a **six-member committee** – PM (Chair), Speaker of Lok Sabha, Deputy Chairman of Rajya Sabha, Leaders of Opposition in both Houses, and the Home Minister.
- ☐ **Tenure:** 3 years or till the age of 70 (whichever is earlier). Eligible for reappointment.

MANDATE OF NHRC

1. **Investigation** – Inquire into complaints of human rights violation (suo motu or petitions).
2. **Prevention & Safeguards** – Monitor prison/living conditions; review legal safeguards and treaties.
3. **Intervention** – Join court proceedings on human rights violation with court approval.
4. **Review** – Study factors inhibiting human rights (including terrorism) and suggest remedies.
5. **Awareness** – Spread literacy on rights through publications, media, and seminars.

HUMAN RIGHTS FRAMEWORK IN INDIA

- ☐ **Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR):** Principles adopted by India.
- ☐ **Fundamental Rights:**
 - **Equality (Arts. 14–18):** Equality before law, no discrimination, abolition of untouchability/titles.
 - **Freedom (Arts. 19–22):** Speech, association, movement, profession, right to life & liberty, safeguards against arbitrary detention.
 - **Against Exploitation (Arts. 23–24):** Prohibits forced labour, child labour, and trafficking.
- ☐ **Judicial Expansion:** Bandhua Mukti Morcha v. Union of India (1984) – Right to Life under Art. 21 means **life with dignity**, not mere existence.

SUCCESSES OF NHRC

- ☐ Campaigns against discrimination of HIV patients.
- ☐ Intervention in cases of **child sexual abuse** (e.g. Nithari Village, Noida).
- ☐ **Suo motu** action in Tuticorin police firing during Anti-Sterlite protests (Tamil Nadu).
- ☐ Response to the **killing of journalist Shujaat Bukhari** in Kashmir after appeal by media networks.

FAILURES OF NHRC

- ☐ **Custodial torture & extrajudicial killings:** e.g. Sathankulam case (Tamil Nadu).
- ☐ **Arbitrary arrests & detention:** Lack of enforcement powers makes NHRC/SHRC ineffective.
- ☐ **Gender-based violence:** Crimes like rape, murder, and sexual abuse remain rampant.
- ☐ **Manual scavenging persists:** Despite laws and NHRC's recommendations, Census 2011 recorded over **26 lakh** insanitary latrines.

CHALLENGES BEFORE NHRC: THE WATCHDOG WITHOUT TEETH

1. **Status of Recommendatory Body:** NHRC functions only as an advisory body. Its recommendations are not binding, leading to frequent rejection or neglect of its decisions.

2. **Weak Investigative Powers:** It lacks an independent investigative wing and is bound by the Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993, which bars inquiry into complaints made more than a year after the incident — leaving many genuine grievances unaddressed.
3. **Jurisdictional Constraints:** NHRC cannot directly act against private parties. In cases involving armed forces, it depends entirely on reports submitted by the central government.
4. **No Enforcement Authority:** The Commission cannot penalize officials or agencies that ignore its orders, reducing its effectiveness to mere persuasion.
5. **Post-Retirement Club:** The body is often criticized as a rehabilitation post for retired judges, police officers, and bureaucrats with political links. Its judicial-heavy composition gives it a court-like, less diverse character.
6. **Resource Limitations:** Inadequate funds, lack of trained staff, and bureaucratic style of functioning weaken its capacity to deliver effectively.

WAY FORWARD

1. **Strengthening Enforcement Powers:** NHRC decisions should be made binding on governments to enhance credibility and impact.
2. **Broadening Membership:** Include voices from civil society, human rights activists, and minority groups — not just ex-bureaucrats — to diversify perspectives. Transparency in the selection process is crucial.
3. **Independent Investigative Staff:** Recruit staff directly under NHRC, ending the current practice of deputation, to ensure autonomy in fact-finding.
4. **Scientific Human Rights Framework:** Develop a tailored human rights framework for India, combining global best practices with local socio-political realities.

CONCLUSION

While the NHRC has played a vital role in promoting and protecting rights, its functioning has also faced criticism due to **structural limitations and continuing violations**. The present controversy around its **appointment process** once again raises questions about its **independence, credibility, and effectiveness** as India's premier human rights institution.

"A human rights commission that cannot stand above politics is like a court without justice—present in form, absent in spirit."

EXAM VALUE

- ☐ **GS-II (Polity & Governance)** → Statutory bodies, human rights, accountability of institutions.
- ☐ **PSIR Paper II** → Democratic accountability, role of institutions in safeguarding rights.
- ☐ **PSIR Paper I** → Statutory Institutions: NHRC
- ☐ **Essay** → "Human rights commissions in India: watchdogs or toothless tigers?"

JUDICIARY AS A PILLAR OF DEMOCRACY AND CONCERNS OVER ACCOUNTABILITY



JUDICIAL ACCOUNTABILITY

INTRODUCTION

The judiciary is one of the three foundational pillars of democracy, drawing its authority from the Constitution. However, recent incidents, such as the recovery of a significant amount of cash from the official residence of Delhi High Court Justice Yashwant Verma after a fire, and the Supreme Court discontinuing its probe into alleged hate speech by Allahabad High Court Justice Shekhar Yadav following Rajya Sabha's intervention, have sparked concerns about judicial accountability and independence. These events raise a pivotal question: Who judges the judge?

MEANING OF JUDICIAL ACCOUNTABILITY

Judicial accountability refers to the systems and duties that ensure judges and courts answer for their actions, decisions, and behavior, especially when these deviate from constitutional or legal norms. It is a cornerstone of a just legal system, balancing judicial independence with transparency, integrity, and public trust.

In India, the judiciary does not face the same accountability as the executive or legislature. This stems from the perception that judicial independence, viewed as crucial for safeguarding liberty and the rule of law, clashes with accountability. Making the judiciary accountable to the legislature or executive could compromise its autonomy. Thus, unique provisions exist to enforce judicial accountability while protecting independence.

CURRENT FRAMEWORK OF JUDICIAL ACCOUNTABILITY IN INDIA

❑ Constitutional Provisions for Impeachment:

- Articles 124(4) (Supreme Court judges) and 217(1)(b) (High Court judges) permit judges' removal for misconduct or incapacity via impeachment.

- Only one impeachment motion against a Supreme Court judge has been attempted (unsuccessfully), and no High Court judge has ever been impeached.
- ❑ **Judges (Inquiry) Act, 1968:** Governs the process for investigating judicial misconduct or incapacity.
- ❑ **Article 235 – Oversight of Subordinate Judiciary:** Grants High Courts authority to ensure accountability in lower courts.
- ❑ **Restatement of Values of Judicial Life (1997):** A voluntary code of conduct adopted by the Supreme Court and High Courts, outlining ethical standards for judges.
- ❑ **In-House Procedure (1999):** Allows the Chief Justice to convene a 3-judge committee to examine complaints against judges. Its impact is limited, no judge has resigned due to adverse findings, and serious complaints have been dismissed without deeper scrutiny.
- ❑ **Judicial Standards and Accountability Bill (2010, Lapsed):** Proposed an external oversight body (National Judicial Oversight Committee) but lapsed in Rajya Sabha.

NEED TO STRENGTHEN JUDICIAL ACCOUNTABILITY

- ❑ **Enhancing Judicial Performance:** Accountability would encourage better rulings, avoiding contentious judgments (e.g., Bombay HC's "skin-to-skin contact" POCSO verdict).
- ❑ **Rebuilding Public Confidence:** Transparent handling of misconduct cases (e.g., the sexual harassment allegation against a former CJI, investigated internally without the complainant's legal representation) is vital for institutional credibility.
- ❑ **Reducing Case Pendency:** With over 4 crore pending cases, accountability could push the judiciary to address delays.
- ❑ **Ineffective Existing Systems:** The Judges (Inquiry) Act and in-house processes are slow, opaque, and rarely lead to consequences, no judge has been impeached despite grave allegations. FIRs against sitting judges require the CJI's approval, obstructing probes (e.g., the burnt cash case involving a judge).
- ❑ **Balancing Independence and Oversight:** While independence shields judges from political interference, excessive autonomy risks abuse. A middle ground is essential.
- ❑ **Curbing Corruption and Misconduct:** Weak accountability fosters corruption and arbitrary decisions.
- ❑ **RTI Limitations:** Courts limit RTI disclosures (e.g., Bombay HC exempting file notings), fueling opacity concerns. A former CJI remarked, "Judiciary can't be destroyed in the name of transparency."
- ❑ **Absence of Annual Reporting:** Unlike the executive, courts aren't mandated to publish annual reports, only Madras, Himachal Pradesh, and Tripura High Courts have done so sporadically.
- ❑ **No External Review of Supreme Court Rulings:** The Constitution lacks provisions for reviewing Supreme Court decisions outside the Court itself.

CHALLENGES IN ENHANCING JUDICIAL ACCOUNTABILITY

- ❑ **Cumbersome and Ineffective Impeachment Process:** The only formal removal mechanism for higher judiciary judges is impeachment, requiring a two-thirds parliamentary majority and limited to "proved misbehaviour or incapacity." This high threshold makes consensus difficult, especially in a polarized political climate. No judge has been successfully impeached since 1993, underscoring the process's futility.

- ❑ **Judicial Independence vs. Accountability Conflict:** While judicial independence is essential, unchecked autonomy has led to minimal external scrutiny, fostering a culture of impunity. The judiciary often invokes independence to resist accountability, eroding public trust.
- ❑ **Opacity in Appointments and Disciplinary Mechanisms:** The collegium system lacks transparency and external oversight, raising concerns about favoritism and homogeneity. Internal disciplinary processes (e.g., in-house committees) operate confidentially, with outcomes rarely disclosed, diminishing systemic credibility.
- ❑ **Immunity and Evasion Tactics:** Judges enjoy substantial immunity and can resign before formal disciplinary action, retaining post-retirement benefits despite misconduct allegations (e.g., Justice Soumitra Sen and Justice P.D. Dinakaran). This loophole enables evasion of consequences.
- ❑ **No Independent Oversight Body:** Complaints against judges are either handled internally or require parliamentary intervention, with no dedicated external agency for impartial investigations.

WAY FORWARD TO STRENGTHEN JUDICIAL ACCOUNTABILITY

- ❑ **National Judicial Oversight Committee:** Establish a statutory, independent body (with retired judges, legal experts, and civil society members) to investigate judicial misconduct impartially, free from political influence.
- ❑ **Reforming Impeachment and Inquiry Procedures:** Introduce transparency and deadlines in impeachment proceedings. Mandate public disclosure of inquiry reports to prevent delays and political interference.
- ❑ **Mandatory Public Asset Declarations:** Legally require all judges (SC, HC, and district courts) to disclose their and their families' assets annually, moving beyond voluntary resolutions.
- ❑ **e-Courts and Performance Monitoring:** Expand digital platforms (e.g., National Judicial Data Grid) to track caseloads, pendency, and disposal rates, making judicial performance data publicly accessible.
- ❑ **Full RTI Implementation in Judiciary:** Enforce RTI compliance for administrative matters and appointments, addressing delays and denials (as upheld by the SC in Central Public Information Officer v. Subhash Chandra Agarwal).
- ❑ **Mandatory Annual Judicial Reports:** Enact a law requiring courts to publish annual reports detailing performance, pending cases, and reforms, with fixed timelines for submission.
- ❑ **Contempt of Court Act Reforms:** Narrow the "scandalizing the court" provision to balance judicial dignity with free speech, aligning with global trends (e.g., the UK abolished this clause in 2013).
- ❑ **Performance Review System:** Introduce periodic, anonymized evaluations of judges (judgment quality, ethics, disposal rates) with aggregate results made public. Individual data should guide internal improvements.
- ❑ **Bringing Judiciary Under Lokpal:** Include judges within the Lokpal's jurisdiction, as seen in Sweden's ombudsman model, to bolster accountability.
- ❑ **Adopting Law Commission Recommendations:** Implement the 195th Report's proposal for a National Judicial Council (headed by the CJI) to inquire into misconduct, aligning with international standards like the Siracusa Principles (1981).

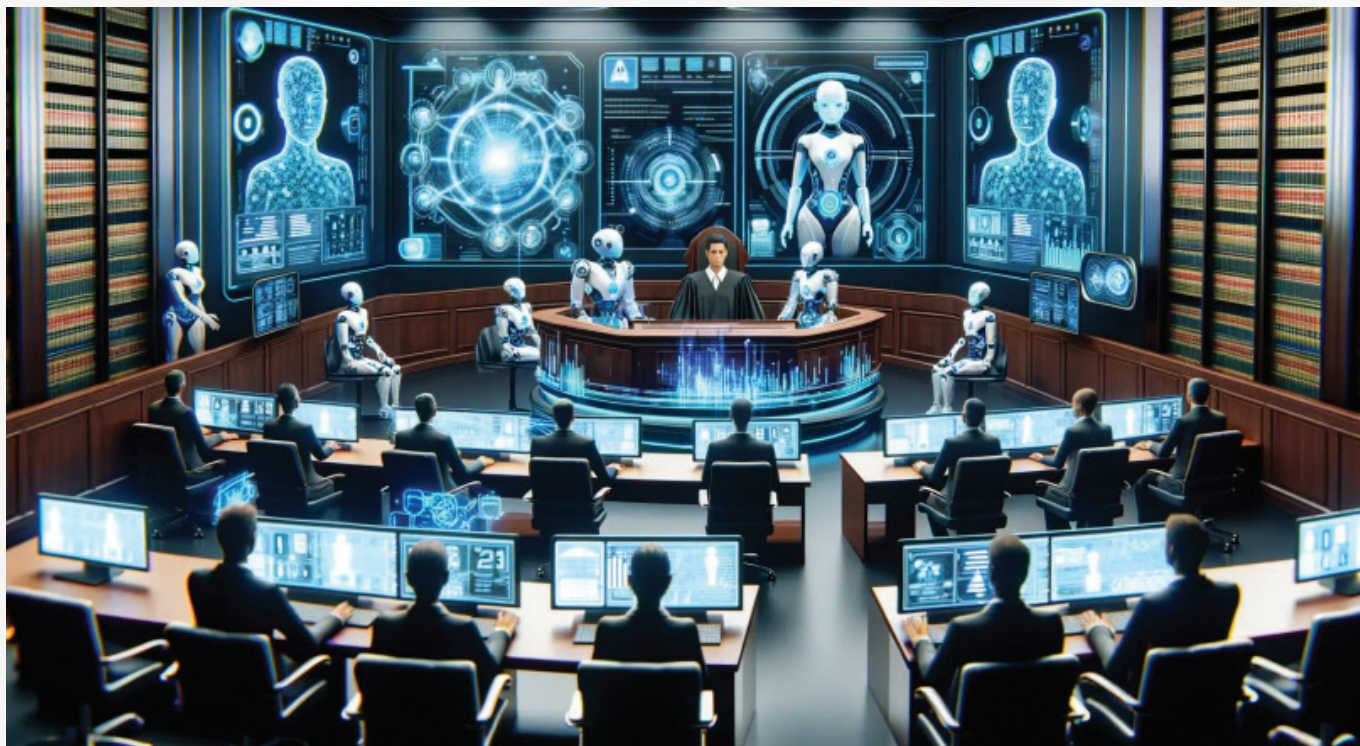
CONCLUSION

The judiciary must be accountable, but within a framework that safeguards its independence from political pressures. The rule of law requires justice to be delivered not just fairly, but through transparent and equitable processes. Reforms balancing autonomy with oversight are vital to restore public confidence while preserving judicial integrity.

WHERE TO USE THIS IN ANSWERS?

- ❑ **GS Paper II (Polity):** Questions on Judicial Review, Judicial Overreach etc.
- ❑ **PSIR Optional, Paper I Part B:** Principal Organs of Union Government
- ❑ **Essay Paper:** Themes like accountability, judiciary etc.

AI IN JUDICIARY: PROMISE OR PERIL?



"Can algorithms deliver justice, or will they only mirror our prejudices in code?"

INTRODUCTION

The Kerala High Court has become the first in India to issue guidelines on the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the district judiciary.

- ❑ The guidelines are significant as they directly address AI adoption in judicial processes, while also emphasizing strict safeguards.
- ❑ Tools such as legal translation, case defect identification, and e-court dashboards are expected to enhance efficiency. Yet, concerns remain about bias, hallucinations, and over-reliance on machines in sensitive judicial matters.

WHY AI MATTERS IN THE JUDICIARY

- ❑ **Reducing Delays and Backlogs:** India faces over 5 crore pending cases. AI-assisted case scheduling and tracking can help prioritize hearings and allocate resources more effectively.
- ❑ **Accessibility and Inclusivity:** Software like SUVAS (Supreme Court Vidhik Anuvaad Software) enables translation of judgments into Indian languages, breaking linguistic barriers and expanding citizen access to justice.

- ❑ **Legal Research at Scale:** AI can sift through statutes, precedents, and case histories in seconds, offering judges and lawyers faster, sharper references.
- ❑ **Predictive Analytics:** Pattern analysis of past judgments can provide insights into possible outcomes, promoting consistency. However, predictions cannot replace judicial discretion.
- ❑ **Transparency and Public Trust:** E-courts and AI dashboards enable real-time case monitoring, making proceedings and orders more visible and improving public accountability.

CHALLENGES AND RISKS

- ❑ **Bias in Data → Bias in Justice:** AI systems trained on skewed data risk reinforcing caste, class, or gender-based prejudices in legal outcomes.
- ❑ **Accuracy and Hallucinations:**
 - ❑ AI tools may fabricate legal citations or misinterpret speech, creating serious risks in judicial reasoning.
- ❑ **Limits of Legal Reasoning:** Human judgment involves empathy, moral reasoning, and contextual analysis — elements that AI cannot replicate.
- ❑ **Threat to Rights and Due Process:** Over-reliance on algorithms risks reducing the complexity of trials into mechanical processes, undermining fair trial guarantees under Article 21.
- ❑ **Absence of Legal Framework:** India lacks an AI-specific law for judiciary use. Current adoption is fragmented — with Kerala HC banning AI in rulings while the Supreme Court experiments with SUVAS.

THE WAY FORWARD

- ❑ **Capacity Building:** Train judges, lawyers, and clerks in AI literacy — not just its uses, but also its limitations.
- ❑ **Human Oversight:** AI must remain an assistive tool. The final decision should rest with the human judge.
- ❑ **Clear Legal and Ethical Codes:** India needs a national framework defining permissible AI uses, mandating audits, and ensuring transparency.
- ❑ **Bias-Proofing the System:** Training datasets must be diverse, representative, and continuously updated. Regular validation and review are essential.
- ❑ **Litigant Rights:** Parties must be informed if AI tools are used in their cases and given the option to opt out in sensitive matters.
- ❑ **Expert Involvement:** Courts should employ AI specialists to guide adoption. The e-Courts Phase III Vision Document already envisages such technology offices.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE DEBATE

- ❑ **For Efficiency:** AI can reduce pendency, increase accessibility, and improve transparency.
- ❑ **For Democracy:** Risks turning justice into a “black box” where citizens do not fully understand algorithmic decisions.
- ❑ **Philosophical Dilemma:** Is justice only about efficiency and consistency, or does it also require human moral imagination?

CONCLUSION

AI is not the judge of the future, but it will shape how judges of the future work. India's challenge is to strike the right balance: using AI to strengthen speed, access, and transparency, while ensuring human judgment and constitutional morality remain at the heart of justice.

"Courts may become faster with machines, but they can only remain just with humans."

EXAM VALUE

- ❑ **GS-II (Polity & Governance):** Judicial reforms, e-courts, technology in governance.
- ❑ **Essay:** "Technology and Justice: Can AI Replace the Human Judge?"
- ❑ **PSIR Paper I:** Judiciary, Rights, and Constitutional Morality.
- ❑ **Ethics Paper:** Human discretion vs. algorithms in justice delivery.

QUESTIONS

MAINS

Q: "AI in judiciary can reduce pendency but may erode due process and fairness. Critically analyze." (250 words)

MCQ:

- Q. Which AI initiative translates SC judgments into Indian languages?
- (a) Bhashini
 - (b) SUVAS
 - (c) Vidhik Bandhu
 - (d) Nyaya Mitra

(Answer: b)

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FINANCE COMMISSION



INTRODUCTION

The **Finance Commission (FC)** is a constitutional body under Article 280 of the Indian Constitution. Constituted every five years (or earlier) by the President, it plays a pivotal role in **maintaining fiscal federalism** by recommending how tax revenues are shared between the Union and the States.

COMPOSITION

The Commission consists of **one Chairperson and four members**, whose qualifications are laid down by Parliament.

- ☐ **Chairperson:** Must have experience in public affairs.
- ☐ **Other Members:** Should include expertise in High Court-level judicial matters, finance and government accounts, financial administration, and economics.

FUNCTIONS OF THE FINANCE COMMISSION

1. **Tax Revenue Distribution**
 - **Vertical Devolution:** Recommends how the Union's tax pool is divided between Centre and States.
 - **Horizontal Devolution:** Recommends principles for distributing funds among States, using criteria such as population, area, forest and ecology, income distance, and tax effort.
2. **Grants-in-Aid:** Provides support to fiscally weaker states for essential services like health and education.

3. **Strengthening Local Governance:** Advises measures to augment the **Consolidated Fund of States** for Panchayats and Municipalities.
4. **Fiscal Discipline and Stability:** Reviews fiscal consolidation, debt management, and expenditure efficiency at Union and State levels.
5. **Contemporary Fiscal Issues:** Examines emerging challenges such as GST impact, disaster management, and public sector reforms (as referred by the President).
6. **Promoting Cooperative Federalism:** Encourages dialogue and collaboration between Centre and States for balanced development.

IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS

- ☐ FC recommendations are **advisory, not binding**.
- ☐ Union government accepts them (with minor deviations) through a **Presidential Order**.
- ☐ An **explanatory memorandum** is tabled in Parliament, detailing action taken and reasons for deviations.
- ☐ Implementation is monitored by respective ministries and departments at Union and State levels.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE 15TH FINANCE COMMISSION (2020–26)

- ☐ **Vertical Devolution:** 41% of Union taxes devolved to States; 1% separately for J&K.
- ☐ **Horizontal Devolution Indicators:**
 - 45% – Income distance
 - 15% – 2011 population
 - 10% – Area
 - 10% – Forest and ecology
 - 5% – Demographic performance
 - 5% – Tax and fiscal effort
- ☐ **Grants-in-Aid/Performance Incentives** in social sector, rural economy, governance reforms, and power sector.
- ☐ **Local Body Grants:** ₹4.36 lakh crore (₹2.4 lakh crore rural, ₹1.2 lakh crore urban).
- ☐ **Disaster Risk Management Fund:** Centre-State share of 90:10 for NE/Himalayan states, 75:25 for others.
- ☐ **Modernisation Fund for Defence and Internal Security (MFDIS):** Corpus of ₹2.4 lakh crore (₹1.5 lakh crore from Consolidated Fund of India).

ACHIEVEMENTS OF FINANCE COMMISSIONS

- ☐ Increased States' share of Union taxes from **10% to 42%**, deepening fiscal federalism.
- ☐ Introduced **performance-based incentives** for reforms (population control, forest conservation, fiscal discipline).
- ☐ Established **disaster relief funds** for state preparedness.
- ☐ Strengthened **local body finances** through grants.
- ☐ Addressed gaps in **critical sectors** like health, education, justice delivery, and statistics.

CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS

1. **Data Gaps and Reliability:** Outdated or inconsistent official data hampers accurate recommendations.
2. **Centre–State Tensions:** Rising centralisation vs. demands for fiscal autonomy create political friction.
3. **Limited Enforcement:** FC recommendations are not binding, and delays or non-compliance are frequent.
4. **Resource–Responsibility Imbalances:** States face growing expenditure needs with limited revenue-raising powers.
5. **GST Overlap:** Ambiguities in jurisdiction between FC and GST Council complicate fiscal coordination.
6. **Third-Tier Constraints:** Dependence on State Finance Commissions weakens direct FC impact on Panchayats and Municipalities.
7. **Dynamic Contexts:** Pandemic shocks, climate disasters, and growing inequality complicate fiscal balancing.

WAY FORWARD

- ☐ **Improve Data Quality:** Build robust real-time data-sharing mechanisms, enhance transparency with digital tools.
- ☐ **Enhance Accountability:** Create monitoring frameworks, fiscal audits, and incentive-linked transfers.
- ☐ **Strengthen Fiscal Federalism:** Balance vertical and horizontal sharing while fostering cooperative federalism.
- ☐ **Better Coordination:** Harmonize with GST Council; expand FC's role in empowering local bodies.
- ☐ **Outcome-Oriented Transfers:** Link grants to performance in development and fiscal reforms.
- ☐ **Institutional Strengthening:** Expand expert capacity of FC secretariat; collaborate with research institutions.

WHERE TO USE

- ☐ **GS2 (Indian Polity):** Topic on constitutional bodies, Centre–State relations, fiscal federalism.
- ☐ **GS3 (Economy):** For questions on resource distribution, cooperative federalism, fiscal discipline.
- ☐ **PSIR Paper II (Indian Government & Politics):** Role of constitutional bodies in Centre–State relations.
- ☐ **Essay:** Use FC examples in themes like cooperative federalism, Centre–State dynamics, fiscal policy reforms.

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The advertisement features a background image of a ship at sea. In the bottom left corner, there is a row of various national flags. The text is primarily in bold, dark blue and black fonts. The name 'SHASHANK TYAGI' is highlighted in a red box at the bottom right.



"Should a paperwork error land you in jail, or should law focus on reforming rather than punishing?"

INTRODUCTION

The government has introduced the **Jan Vishwas (Amendment of Provisions) Bill, 2025** in Lok Sabha.

- ❑ It seeks to **amend 16 central Acts**, decriminalising **288 provisions** and rationalising penalties.
- ❑ This follows the **Jan Vishwas Act, 2023**, which had decriminalised **183 provisions across 42 Acts**.
- ❑ Together, the reforms represent a push towards "Minimum Government, Maximum Governance" and a friendlier regulatory climate.

KEY PROVISIONS

- ❑ **Decriminalisation of Minor Offences**
 - Removes imprisonment for minor/technical violations.
 - Converts punishment into fines/warnings (e.g. non-compliance under Electricity Act → fine of ₹10,000–₹10 lakh instead of jail).
- ❑ **Ease of Living & Doing Business**
 - Simplifies 355 provisions: 288 decriminalised + 67 rationalised.
 - Part of India's global competitiveness drive.
- ❑ **Graduated Penalties**
 - Fines to rise automatically by 10% every 3 years.
 - Aims to keep deterrence relevant without constant legal amendments.

❑ **Adjudication Mechanism**

- Creates adjudicating officers and appellate authorities to resolve cases administratively.
- Expected to reduce judicial pendency.

❑ **Focus on First-Time Offenders**

- 76 offences across 10 Acts → warning/improvement notice first, penalties later.
- Shifts from “punish first” to “warn–correct–penalise” model.

❑ **Amendments in Specific Acts**

- Motor Vehicles Act: simplified registration, grace period for licence renewals.
- Drugs & Cosmetics Act: rationalised compliance norms.
- NDMC Act: easier civic compliance.

WHY JAN VISHWAS 2.0 WAS NEEDED

❑ **Over-Criminalisation of Everyday Acts**

- 75% of criminal provisions in central laws regulate non-core areas.
- Example: paperwork errors → potential jail term.

❑ **Ease of Doing Business & Living**

- ORF (2022): out of 1,536 business laws, >50% carried imprisonment clauses; most had minimum 1-year jail term.
- Harsh laws deterred entrepreneurship & innovation.

❑ **Judicial Burden**

- District courts clogged with 3.6 crore criminal cases; 2.3 crore pending for over a year.
- Minor cases drained judicial time from serious crimes.

❑ **Modernisation of Laws**

- Colonial-era provisions no longer relevant in a tech-driven economy.
- Bill aligns laws with present-day compliance needs.

❑ **Governance Philosophy**

- Supports “Minimum Government, Maximum Governance”.
- Enhances investor confidence & aligns with Make in India, Startup India.

CRITICISMS & CONCERNS

❑ **Risk of Dilution:** Some fear big businesses may escape accountability by paying fines.

❑ **Implementation Gaps:** Success depends on efficiency of adjudicating authorities.

❑ **No Deterrence for Repeat Offenders:** Warning-first approach may embolden habitual violators.

❑ **Need for Uniformity:** Reforms apply to select laws — many still retain harsh imprisonment clauses.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE DEBATE

❑ **For Economy:** Reduces regulatory fear, boosts entrepreneurship, and eases compliance.

❑ **For Judiciary:** Unclogs courts, accelerates justice delivery.

- ❑ **For Citizens:** Makes regulatory environment less punitive for small errors.
- ❑ **For Democracy:** Raises question — does decriminalisation ensure freedom, or dilute accountability?

CONCLUSION

The **Jan Vishwas 2.0 Bill** represents a shift in India's legal philosophy: from punishment to correction, from criminalisation to regulation. Its success, however, will depend on whether it strikes the right balance between **ease of business** and **accountability of violators**.

"The credibility of reforms lies not just in removing jail terms, but in ensuring that compliance is fair, simple, and enforceable."

EXAM VALUE (WHERE TO USE)

- ❑ **GS-II (Governance):** Regulatory reforms, decriminalisation, Minimum Government.
- ❑ **GS-III (Economy):** Ease of Doing Business, Startup ecosystem.
- ❑ **Essay:** "Law as a facilitator, not a roadblock: Decriminalisation and Democratic Governance."
- ❑ **PSIR Paper I:** Indian governance reforms, institutional rationalisation.

QUESTIONS

MAINS

Q: "The Jan Vishwas Bill, 2025 seeks to balance governance with liberty by decriminalising minor offences. Critically evaluate." (250 words)

MCQ:

Q. Jan Vishwas 2.0 decriminalises provisions under how many central Acts?

- (a) 16
- (b) 42
- (c) 19
- (d) 25

(Answer: a)

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MAINS PRACTICE QUESTIONS

Q. Examine the significance of Comparative Politics in political analysis.

Comparative Politics (CP) traces its roots back to Ancient Western Political Thought, with its foundations established by the renowned philosopher Aristotle. He is considered one of the early pioneers of the discipline, employing a traditional institutional approach to comparative politics. Aristotle's groundbreaking work involved the comparison of 158 different constitutions, leaving a significant impact on the effectiveness of political analysis within the field of comparative politics.

The scope of Comparative Politics (CP) has undergone significant evolution, transitioning from the study of political systems using traditional approaches such as Historical, Philosophical, Institutional, and Systems approach (as advocated by David Easton) to more advanced analyses involving cross-regional comparisons of political systems and study of political processes. This progression has led to the development of various models of CP, including the Structural Functional Approach proposed by Gabriel Almond and Powell, as well as the Political Sociology approach and the Political Economy approach. These models have played a crucial role in establishing the groundwork for comparative analysis of political processes and politics in emerging and developing societies.

SIGNIFICANCE OF COMPARATIVE POLITICS

1. Better understanding of Political Systems

- Comparative Politics has broadened the horizon of political science by devising new methodologies to understand state, institutions and other political entities by way of comparisons.
- Post WWII, even developing societies came to be analysed through the Modern Comparative Politics approaches. The Political sociology approach included various methods like Political culture, political development etc.

2. Systematic analysis of Political processes

- For example -Structural Functional approach gives a more detailed view of political systems with focus on seven Input-Output functions as devised by Gabriel Almond and Powell.

3. Help in understanding the developmental needs of different regions/states.

- For example-Political Economy approach led to the study of economic policies of the state, with different schools like Classical Liberalism (Adam Smith), Marxist and Neo-Marxist, Keynesian School, Public Choice, etc tried to bring in quantitative methods by producing testable theories. This helped in analysing the developmental models and economic policies of states.

4. Theory building and generalisation

- Comparative politics helped in developing various theories, for example Prismatic society model (F.W Riggs), overdeveloped state model (Hamza Alavi) etc.

❑ Limitations of Comparative Politics in political analysis

- The traditional comparative politics due to its excessive normative and value laden approach made comparative politics lose its relevance in political analysis.
- Similarly the modern approaches due to its mad craze for scientific theories made comparative politics lose track from normative questions.

However Post behavioralism has led to reestablishing the centrality of comparative politics in political analysis by developing creative theories which are a blend of both scientific method and normative analysis.

Hence the examination of politics in developing regions, the analysis of political modernization, and the shift away from behavioralism have led to a more cross-national and regional approach in studying political systems. This has enhanced the efficacy of Comparative Politics (CP) in studying both historical and future aspects. Furthermore, it has enabled policymakers, leaders, and the public to appreciate the significance of this field of study in a more comprehensive and versatile manner.

Q. "Men being by nature all free, equal and independent, no one can be put out of his estate and subjected to the political power of another without his own consent." (Locke). Elucidate. (20 Marks)

Demand- Basically explain Locke's conception of limited state in detail (As the keyword is 'Elucidate')

STRUCTURE:

- Introduction with book, school of thought and basic idea of Lockean state.
- Body- Give background and elaborate on his ideas with emphasis on consent
- Conclude with contemporary linkage/relevance/significance etc.

John Locke, widely known as the "Father of liberalism," emphasized the supremacy of natural rights over state authority in his work, the 'Second Treatise of Government.' He viewed the state as a social construct and advocated for its limitations based on the rights inherently bestowed upon individuals by nature.

Locke's optimistic outlook on human nature stemmed from the peaceful transition from absolute monarchy to parliamentary democracy during the Glorious Revolution. He believed that reason should prevail over base desires, rejecting the concept of absolute state authority.

In contrast to Hobbes' depiction of the state of nature as a chaotic "war of all against all," where appetite dominates reason, Locke envisioned it as a state of peace, cooperation, and goodwill. In this natural state, people enjoyed fundamental rights such as life, liberty, and property, protected by the guiding force of natural law. According to Locke, reason serves as the law that governs individuals in the state of nature.

Locke considered government not as a necessity but as a practical arrangement. The political sovereign is seen as a participant in the social contract. Locke placed great importance on the primary purpose of establishing a state or commonwealth, which is to safeguard the natural rights of citizens, life, liberty, and property, which they possessed in the state of nature. He referred to these rights as inalienable, meaning they cannot be violated by the state. The state is prohibited from enacting laws that infringe upon these rights since individuals have not consented to transfer them to the state in the social contract.

Consequently, the state is bound to act in accordance with the will of the people. Locke envisioned the state as a trust, with the people serving as trustees. The trust must act in alignment with the wishes of the trustees. Should the state act contrary to the consent of the people, they retain the right to revolt. However, Locke expressed hope for peaceful revolutions due to the rationality of citizens and their entitlement to freedom of speech and expression under the social contract.

Thus, Locke emerges as a proponent of the theory of consent. In contrast to Filmer, who attributed the right of rulers as a divine gift from God (the theory of divine rights of the state), Locke argued that political authority only becomes legitimate when based on consent. The significance of Locke's ideas can be observed in their influence on neo-liberal scholars like Nozick. His conception of a limited state has become the prevailing discourse, not only in political theory but also in international forums such as the UNHRC.

The post-colonial theory of the state provides a critical framework for understanding the nature and function of states that emerged from colonial rule, emphasizing the lasting impact of colonialism on their political, economic, and social structures. This theory primarily critiques the power dynamics and legacies of colonialism, focusing on how former colonies interact with global structures and their internal governance challenges.

One key aspect of the post-colonial theory is the analysis of how newly independent states often find themselves constrained by the economic and political systems established during colonial rule. Modernization theory, often advocated by Western institutions like the World Bank, suggests that by integrating into the global capitalist economy, Third-World nations can achieve development and prosperity. This approach assumes that development follows a linear path similar to that of Western industrialized nations, implying that the global market offers equal opportunities for growth.

However, Marxist scholars such as Andre Gunder Frank, Samir Amin, and Immanuel Wallerstein offer a counter-perspective through dependency theory. They argue that the international economic system is inherently exploitative, benefiting developed nations at the expense of underdeveloped ones. According to them, post-colonial states are trapped in a structure of economic dependence, where the wealth of core nations (primarily in the Global North) grows by exploiting the peripheral nations (largely in the Global South). This dynamic reinforces underdevelopment and poverty in post-colonial states, maintaining their subordination within the global economy.

Hamza Alavi's concept of the "overdeveloped state" provides further insight into the nature of post-colonial governance. Alavi suggests that states in post-colonial societies, particularly in regions like South Asia, inherited bureaucratic and military institutions that were disproportionately large and powerful in comparison to the weak socio-economic structures of their societies. These states, having been shaped to serve colonial interests, were ill-suited to fostering genuine development and democracy. They became "overdeveloped" in terms of state apparatus but "underdeveloped" in their ability to meet the needs of their populations, resulting in political instability and authoritarian governance.

The post-colonial theory of the state critiques the notion that newly independent nations can seamlessly transition into modern, democratic states. Instead, it highlights how colonial legacies continue to shape the political and economic realities of these states. Post-colonial states often face challenges such as weak institutions, economic dependency, and internal divisions that reflect the socio-political fragmentation fostered by colonialism. The theory underscores the importance of understanding these states within the context of both their colonial past and their ongoing entanglement in global structures of power.

Post-colonial theory provides valuable insights into the structural inequalities that persist in the global system, which post-colonial states must navigate in their pursuit of sovereignty and development.

SCHOLAR DIGEST: KNOW YOUR SCHOLARS

M.N. ROY: FROM RADICAL NATIONALIST TO RADICAL HUMANIST



"A revolutionary who began with Marx, parted ways with Moscow, and ended with Man."

EARLY LIFE & POLITICAL JOURNEY

- ❑ **Narendra Nath Bhattacharya (1887–1954)**, later known as M. N. Roy, began as a **revolutionary nationalist** in Bengal, involved in secret societies and armed struggles against colonialism.
- ❑ His global odyssey took him through **Mexico, the USA, and Soviet Russia**, where he became one of the earliest non-European leaders in the international communist movement.
- ❑ He helped **co-found the Communist Party of Mexico (1917)** and later played a role in forming the **Communist Party of India (1920)** from abroad.

ROY & MARXISM

- ❑ Roy was deeply influenced by Marxism but **reinterpreted it for colonial contexts**.
- ❑ At the **Second Congress of Comintern (1920)**, Roy presented his famous **Supplementary Theses on Colonial Question**, arguing that anti-imperialist struggles in colonies could align with proletarian revolutions in the West.
- ❑ This made him a global voice of the colonised world within the communist movement.

BREAK WITH COMMUNISM

- ❑ Roy gradually grew disillusioned with **Stalinist authoritarianism and Moscow's control**.
- ❑ He critiqued the **dogmatism of international communism**, seeing it as unsuited to India's conditions.
- ❑ By the 1930s, he distanced himself from the Comintern and began exploring **democratic socialism and humanism**.

RADICAL HUMANISM

Roy's **final intellectual phase** (1940s) was his most original:

- ❑ **Core Idea:** Human freedom, reason, and scientific outlook should be the foundation of politics.
- ❑ He rejected both **religious orthodoxy** and **dogmatic Marxism**, seeing them as threats to human autonomy.
- ❑ Advocated **"New Humanism"**, later termed **Radical Humanism**:
 - Focus on individual freedom over class struggle.
 - Emphasis on **ethical politics, rational enquiry, scientific temper**.
 - Democracy must be **participatory and decentralised**, not merely electoral.
 - Social progress = liberation of mind from superstition and authoritarianism.

JOHN JOSEPH MEARSHEIMER



INTRODUCTION

John Joseph Mearsheimer, born on December 14, 1947, in New York, New York, is a distinguished American academic specializing in international relations. He is most renowned for developing the concept of offensive realism within this field.

MAJOR WORKS

John Mearsheimer is well known for his work "The Tragedy of Great Power Politics". In 2007, John Mearsheimer collaborated with Stephen M. Walt on a book titled "The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy," which garnered significant attention but also sparked controversy. The book argued that a influential lobby had a distorting effect on U.S. foreign policy, leading it to prioritize unwavering support for Israel over the nation's own interests. While some critics dismissed the work as propagating conspiracy theories or lacking in factual accuracy, supporters commended the authors for their willingness to address a significant policy matter.

Mearsheimer's body of work also encompassed other notable titles such as "Conventional Deterrence" (1983), "Liddell Hart and the Weight of History" (1988), "Why Leaders Lie: The Truth About Lying in International Politics" (2011), and "The Great Delusion: Liberal Dreams and International Realities" (2018).

INFLUENCES

Much like many scholars specializing in international relations from his era, Mearsheimer was significantly shaped by the ideas of Kenneth Waltz, the originator of neorealism in the field. While classical realists like Hans Morgenthau attributed global conflicts to the inherent drive of political leaders to enhance their own power, neorealists (also called structural realists) such as Waltz attributed the root cause of war to the arrangement of international relations. In Waltz's framework, the absence of a higher authority governing states (referred to as anarchy) compels them to form alliances as a means of containing potential threats emanating from competing powers. Essentially, the global order is shaped by the equilibrium of power among states. According to Waltz, the pursuit of security prompts states to support the existing state of affairs and to assume a defensive stance towards their rivals.

THEORY OF OFFENSIVE REALISM IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Mearsheimer's alternative perspective, termed "offensive realism," posits that the pursuit of security and, fundamentally, survival drives states to aggressively seek to maximize their power. Rather than cooperating extensively, states predominantly engage in temporary alliances while consistently striving to weaken rivals and strengthen themselves.

Mearsheimer's theory rests on five fundamental assumptions:

1. The international system operates without a central authority to mediate state conflicts.
2. All states possess some degree of military capability, regardless of its extent.
3. States are unable to definitively discern the intentions of other states.
4. Survival ranks as the paramount concern for states.
5. States act rationally to advance their own interests.

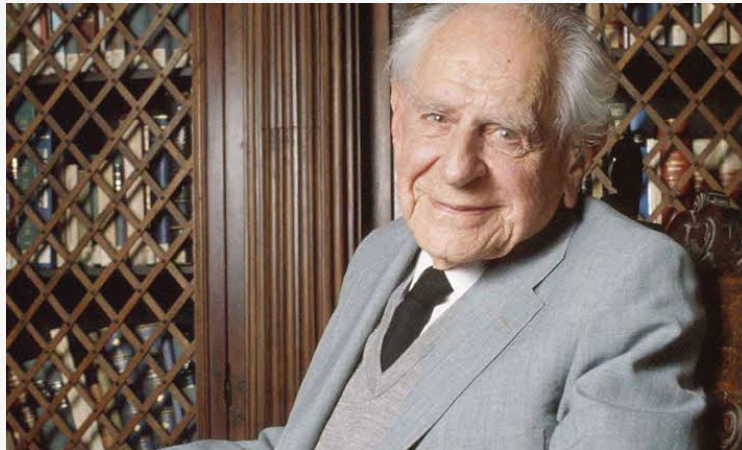
According to Mearsheimer, these conditions generate strong incentives for states to adopt aggressive behavior towards one another. Since states cannot accurately predict the intentions of others, it becomes rational for them to bolster their military strength and adopt assertive stances to counteract potential aggression.

MEARSHEIMER'S CRITICISM OF IRAQ WAR AND USA'S FOREIGN POLICY

While Mearsheimer acknowledged war as a viable tool of statecraft, he held reservations about its blanket justification. He notably expressed strong disapproval of the Iraq War (2003–2011), viewing it as an instance where the United States sought to exert global policing authority. Concerning U.S. foreign policy, his stance favored a strategy of "global balancing" over "global hegemony." He believed that powerful nations, like the U.S., should refrain from imposing their dominion across all continents, intervening selectively when a major rival poses a threat to a strategically significant region.

Mearsheimer applauded U.S. involvement in World War II, deeming it appropriate due to the ambitions of Nazi Germany and imperial Japan to establish dominance in their respective regions. However, he criticized the post-Cold War U.S. foreign policy for overestimating its military prowess and its ability to exert force at its discretion. A notable aspect of Mearsheimer's viewpoint was his proposition for the complete withdrawal of U.S. forces from Europe, contending that their continued presence lacked rationale given the absence of any current dominant threat to the continent.

KARL POPPER: DEFENDER OF THE OPEN SOCIETY



Karl Popper (1902–1994) was a staunch advocate of **liberal democracy, individual freedom, and rationalism**. His political philosophy, primarily expressed in *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (1945), was a response to the rise of **totalitarian ideologies** in the 20th century, particularly **Marxism, fascism, and nationalism**.

CRITIQUE OF HISTORICISM

Popper's central political argument was against **historicism**, the belief that history follows inevitable laws of progress. He criticized thinkers like **Plato, Hegel, and Marx**, who he believed justified **authoritarian rule** by claiming access to historical truths. He argued that historicism leads to **dogmatism and tyranny**, as rulers use it to impose rigid social structures in the name of an inevitable future.

THE OPEN VS. CLOSED SOCIETY

Popper distinguished between **open and closed societies**:

- ☐ A **closed society** is **authoritarian**, valuing tradition and unquestioned obedience.
- ☐ An **open society** is based on **democracy, individual rights, and institutional accountability**. It thrives on **critical discourse and adaptability**, allowing societies to improve through **trial and error** rather than revolutionary upheavals.

PIECEMEAL SOCIAL ENGINEERING

Rejecting **utopian revolutions**, Popper proposed **piecemeal social engineering**, gradual reforms based on **problem-solving and evidence-based policies**. He argued that **social experiments** should be **reversible**, unlike radical ideologies that impose irreversible societal changes.

DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE AND CRITICISM

Popper viewed **democracy** not as rule by the people, but as a system where governments can be peacefully replaced. He emphasized **institutional checks and balances**, arguing that **the ability to remove bad leaders without violence is the true strength of democracy**.

Karl Popper's **political philosophy** remains influential in defending **democratic governance, individual liberty, and rational policymaking**. His critique of totalitarianism and advocacy for **open societies** continue to shape modern political thought.

HENRY KISSINGER



Henry Kissinger, born on May 27, 1923, in Fürth, Germany, is a towering figure in U.S. foreign policy and international relations. A Jewish refugee who fled Nazi persecution in 1938, Kissinger's early experiences deeply shaped his worldview and approach to diplomacy. He is best known for serving as the U.S. Secretary of State and National Security Advisor under Presidents Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford during the 1970s.

Kissinger's academic career began at Harvard University, where he earned a Ph.D. in 1954 with a dissertation on the Congress of Vienna and its impact on international diplomacy. His academic work established him as a leading thinker on *realpolitik*, a pragmatic approach to foreign policy focused on power and practical interests rather than ideological or moral considerations. This approach would later define his political career.

In 1969, Kissinger was appointed National Security Advisor by President Nixon, and in 1973, he became Secretary of State. His tenure was marked by significant achievements that reshaped global geopolitics. One of his most notable accomplishments was the policy of *détente* with the Soviet Union, which sought to reduce Cold War tensions through diplomacy and arms control agreements, including the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT).

Kissinger is perhaps most famously associated with the opening of diplomatic relations between the United States and the People's Republic of China. In 1971, he secretly visited Beijing, paving the way for Nixon's historic visit in 1972. This realignment dramatically altered the global balance of power, isolating the Soviet Union and shifting the dynamics of the Cold War.

Another key aspect of Kissinger's legacy is his role in the Vietnam War. He was instrumental in negotiating the Paris Peace Accords, which led to a ceasefire and the eventual withdrawal of U.S. troops from Vietnam. For his efforts, Kissinger was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1973, a decision that was highly controversial due to the continued fighting in Vietnam after the accords were signed.

Kissinger's foreign policy approach was not without criticism. His support for authoritarian regimes in countries like Chile, Argentina, and Indonesia, often in the name of anti-communism, has been condemned by human rights advocates. His involvement in the 1973 Chilean coup, which led to the overthrow of democratically elected President Salvador Allende and the rise of General Augusto Pinochet, remains particularly contentious.

Despite the controversies, Kissinger's influence on U.S. foreign policy is undeniable. After leaving government, he continued to be an influential voice in international affairs through his consulting firm, Kissinger Associates, and as an author and commentator. His numerous books on diplomacy and international relations, including "Diplomacy" and "World Order," have been widely read and studied.

At over 100 years old, Kissinger remains active in public life, contributing to debates on global issues. His legacy is a complex one, characterized by both groundbreaking diplomatic achievements and contentious moral questions, but his impact on the world stage is enduring.



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ENRICH YOUR ANSWERS

Q. Examine communitarian critique of Rawls theory of Justice.

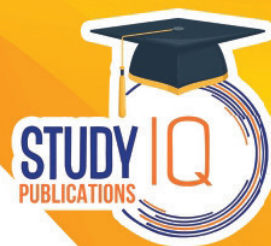
Introduction:

- start with key tenets of Rawlsian 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.

UPSC IAS (Mains)

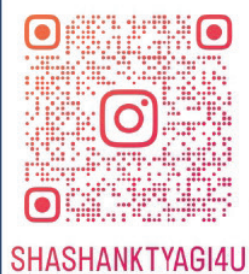
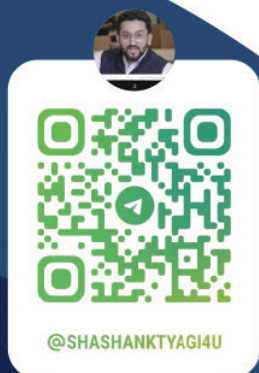


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