

Prelims Exam Topics

INDIA'S NUCLEAR SUBMARINE PROGRAMME AND STRATEGIC DETERRENCE

Context

- India's sea-based nuclear deterrence has strengthened with the commissioning of **INS Aridhaman**, reinforcing India's **nuclear triad capability (land, air, sea delivery systems)**.

India's Submarine Programmes

Programme	Details
Arihant Class SSBNs	India's indigenous nuclear ballistic missile submarines under the Advanced Technology Vessel project forming the sea leg of the nuclear triad. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● INS Arihant (2016), INS Arighat (2024), INS Aridhaman (2026) and ● upcoming S4/S4 star variants (~6000–7000 tonnes; capable of carrying K-15 ~750 km and K-4 ~3500 km SLBMs).
SLBM Missile Systems	Submarine launched ballistic missiles include K-15 Sagarika (~750 km) and K-4 (~3500 km) with future K-5 and K-6 longer-range SLBMs under development.
Nuclear Attack Submarine Programme SSN	Indigenous nuclear attack submarines being planned for conventional naval warfare, sea control and anti submarine operations;(expected ~2036).
Conventional Submarine Modernisation	Kalvari class Scorpene submarines under Project 75 and planned Project 75I submarines with Air Independent Propulsion technology .
Strategic Infrastructure	Development supported by Ship Building Centre Visakhapatnam, BARC reactor design, DRDO missile integration and Indian Navy Strategic Forces Command .

Strategic Importance of the Nuclear Triad

- **Credible Second-Strike Capability:** Sea-based nuclear weapons ensure retaliation even if land-based assets are destroyed (key principle of **credible minimum deterrence**).
- **Survivability and Stealth:** SSBNs remain **hidden underwater for long durations**, making them difficult for adversaries to detect or destroy.
- **Strategic Stability:** Triad capability stabilises deterrence among nuclear powers (possessed by **US, Russia, China, UK, France and India**).
 - Counters **China's expanding submarine presence in IOR and Pakistan's evolving nuclear delivery systems**.
- **Sea Lane Security:** Supports protection of **critical maritime trade routes in the Indian Ocean (Hormuz, Malacca, energy shipping lanes)**
- **Multi-domain Warfare Preparedness:** Modern conflicts increasingly span **land, air, cyber, and maritime domains**, making sea-based nuclear deterrence essential.

- **Indigenous Capability:** Strengthens India's self-reliance in strategic technologies (nuclear reactors, SLBMs, submarine design under ATV project).
- **Technological Spillover:** Boosts domestic expertise in nuclear engineering, stealth technology, missile systems, metallurgy and advanced shipbuilding.

DELHI-DEHRADUN WILDLIFE CORRIDOR

Context

Ahead of the official inauguration on April 14, 2026, a joint study by the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) and the National Highway Authority of India (NHAI) has validated the functional success of Asia's largest wildlife elevated corridor.

About Delhi-Dehradun Wildlife Corridor

- The specialized animal underpass stretch is 12 km long, part of an 18-km eco-sensitive section between Ganeshpur (UP) and Asharodi (Uttarakhand).
- The road is elevated to a height of 7 meters, specifically designed to allow the passage of Asian Elephants, which require significant overhead clearance to feel secure.
- **Target Species:** The corridor protects a high-biodiversity zone home to Tigers, Asian Elephants, Leopards, Greater Hornbills, and King Cobras.
- **Regional Connectivity:** This corridor is vital for the **Shivalik-Elephant Reserve**, maintaining the migratory path between the Yamuna and Ganges rivers for the north-western elephant population.
- **Significance**
 - Recent Wildlife Institute of India (WII) studies recorded over 40,000 images of wild animals using the corridor in just 40 days, including 60 documented instances of elephants
 - The most frequent users identified include the Golden Jackal, Nilgai, Sambar, Spotted Deer (Chital), and smaller mammals like the Indian Hare.
 - : The project utilized **Audiomoth acoustic recorders** to study how traffic noise affects movement; results showed that while jackals are noise-tolerant, elephants and deer prefer quieter segments.

Eco-bridges

- They serve as "connective tissue" in landscapes bisected by linear infrastructure (highways, railways).
- Modern eco-bridges are not "one-size-fits-all." They are engineered based on the target species' behavior:
 - **Canopy Bridges:** For arboreal species like the Red Panda or Slender Loris.
 - **Underpasses:** With specific height clearances (e.g., 7 meters for Elephants).
 - **Amphibian Tunnels:** Small, moist culverts designed for frogs and reptiles to avoid roadkill.
- Under the **Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980** and the **Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972**, the inclusion of these structures is often a mandatory condition for "Forest Clearance."
- Proponents must conduct a **Biological Impact Assessment** to ensure the placement of the bridge

aligns with documented "animal strike" hotspots or traditional migratory paths.

NATIONAL INTEREST VS. GLOBAL STEWARDSHIP: DECODING INDIA'S WITHDRAWAL FROM THE COP33 HOST BID

Context

In a significant recalibration of its international climate strategy, India has decided not to pursue its earlier offer to host the 2028 UN Climate Change Conference (COP33).

Strategic Rationale: Why India Withdrew the COP33 Host Bid

1. The Shift to a "Development-First" Paradigm

India's withdrawal reflects a strategic hardening of its stance, moving away from a "mitigation-centric" global approach toward one that prioritizes domestic growth.

- **Carbon Space vs. Temperature Goals:** India has questioned the feasibility of the **1.5°C and 2°C targets**, arguing these goals unfairly restrict the "carbon space" needed for developing nations to eradicate poverty.
- **Adaptation as the Best Insurance:** The current policy maintains that rapid economic development is the most effective way to build societal resilience against climate impacts, prioritizing **adaptation** over aggressive emission cuts.
- **The "Major Power" Trajectory:** Following the examples of the U.S. and China, India is prioritizing its industrial and energy security before committing to high-pressure international mandates.

2. The "Host's Dilemma" and Conflict of Interest

The role of a COP President is to be a neutral mediator, a position that would have directly conflicted with India's increasingly vocal national interests.

- **Hardening on Climate Finance:** India has shifted from seeking "mobilized" private funds to demanding the direct "provision" of public resources from developed nations under **Article 9.1** of the Paris Agreement.
- **Energy Security vs. Fossil Fuel Phase-out:** As the host, India would have been pressured to lead the transition away from fossil fuels, a move that could jeopardize its energy stability in a volatile geopolitical climate.
- **The 2028 Global Stocktake (GST):** Since COP33 coincides with the critical second GST, the President is expected to deliver a "high-ambition" outcome.
 - India feared being boxed into leading by example with commitments that might hamper its own economic growth.

3. Scientific and Geopolitical Variables

External factors made the 2028 timeline particularly disadvantageous for an Indian presidency.

- **The IPCC AR7 Timeline:** There is a global push to expedite the **Seventh Assessment Report (AR7)** by 2028. India opposes this, fearing that a grim scientific report would be used to force the third-largest emitter into fresh, legally binding commitments.
- **The "U.S. Factor" and Trust Deficit:** With the U.S. periodically cooling toward the Paris Agreement, India is wary of doing more while historical emitters retreat. Furthermore, the widening trust gap between the Global North and South makes forging a consensus nearly impossible for any host.

- **Preserving Policy Space:** Ultimately, India chose to protect its sovereign policy space rather than succumb to the international scrutiny and pressure that naturally accompanies the COP Presidency.

ALTERNATIVE TO THE VIKSIT BHARAT SHIKSHA ADHISTHAN (VBSA) BILL

Context

The proposed Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhistan (VBSA) Bill seeks to institutionalise the implementation of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. However, it has raised serious concerns regarding federal balance, institutional autonomy, and governance structures in higher education.

Significance of an alternative framework

- **Preserve federalism:** Education lies in the Concurrent List, requiring shared responsibility between the Centre and States.
- **Protect institutional autonomy:** Universities, including premier institutions, require academic and administrative independence.
- **Ensure inclusive governance:** Participation of faculty, students, and institutional bodies is essential for democratic functioning.
- **Promote social justice:** Higher education must uphold equity, reservations, and inter-regional balance.
- **Align with national priorities:** Focus should extend beyond global rankings to innovation, self-reliance, and societal outcomes.

Proposed alternative framework

- **Shared governance structure:** Establish joint decision-making mechanisms involving the Union and State governments.
 - Provide (50:50) representation to State Higher Education Councils (SHECs) and central bodies in regulation, accreditation, and standard-setting.
 - Introduce regional councils to reflect local socio-economic and ecological contexts.
- **Strengthening institutional participation:** Ensure formal roles for universities' senates, academic councils, and stakeholder associations (teachers, students, staff).
 - Promote consultative and deliberative processes rather than top-down regulation.
- **Independent funding mechanism:** Create a Higher Education Grants Council (HEGC) for transparent and equitable fund allocation.
 - Provide block grants to State universities, especially to bridge regional and historical disparities.
- **Balanced regulatory architecture:** Limit excessive central control over recognition, inspection, and closure of institutions.
 - Require State consent before institutional closure.
- **Reforming accreditation and standards:** Avoid over-reliance on third-party accreditation agencies.
 - Shift from output-based metrics (publications, patents) to outcome- and impact-based evaluation.
- **Equity and public purpose:** Mandate affirmative action policies for SCs, STs, and OBCs.
 - Emphasise public funding of education rather than excessive reliance on loans.

Challenges in implementing the alternative

- **Centre-State coordination issues:** Divergence in priorities may slow consensus-building.

- **Institutional capacity constraints:** Many State bodies may require strengthening.
- **Risk of regulatory fragmentation:** Decentralisation may lead to inconsistencies if not carefully designed.
- **Political and ideological differences:** Disagreements over curriculum and knowledge frameworks.
- **Funding limitations:** Ensuring adequate and sustained public investment remains a challenge.

Way forward

- **Amendment:** Amend the Bill to clearly define roles and responsibilities of the Centre and States.
- **Institutionalise:** Cooperative federalism through legally mandated consultation mechanisms.
- **Autonomy:** Strengthen SHECs with financial and administrative autonomy.
- **Collective participation:** Build a transparent, accountable, and participatory governance model.
- **Public good:** Prioritise equity, innovation, and public good over narrow performance indicators.
- **Reforms:** Ensure that higher education reforms are context-sensitive, inclusive, and constitutionally aligned.



Mains Exam Topics

A MODEST PLEA FOR CONSTITUTIONAL MORALITY

Context

The debate around constitutional morality has resurfaced in judicial and political discourse, particularly during hearings related to the Sabarimala case. Questions have been raised about the legitimacy and clarity of the concept, with some arguing that it is prone to judicial overreach.

About Constitutional Morality

- **Definition:** Constitutional morality refers to the commitment to uphold the ideals, values, and principles embedded in a Constitution within a democratic framework. It seeks to maintain a balance between liberty and discipline requiring individuals to respect constitutional authority while preserving their right to question and critique those in power.
- **Introduction of the concept:** The concept was first articulated by **George Grote in 1846**. He described it as a deep respect for constitutional forms and processes, which includes:
 - Respect for established political institutions and procedures
 - The freedom to criticise governing authorities
 - Self-discipline among citizens and those in power to ensure smooth functioning of the system

Constitutional Morality in the Indian Context

Constitutional Basis

- **Preamble:** Reflects foundational values such as justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity
- **Fundamental Rights (Part III):** Safeguards individual freedoms against arbitrary state action (e.g., Article 32)
- **Directive Principles (Part IV):** Provides ethical guidance for governance and social justice
- **Fundamental Duties (Part IV-A):** Emphasises citizens' responsibilities toward the nation
- **Checks and Balances:** Separation of powers among the legislature, executive, and judiciary prevents concentration of authority
- The term “**morality**” itself appears in specific provisions, including:
 - **Article 19(2) and 19(4)** (reasonable restrictions on freedoms)
 - **Article 25(1) and Article 26** (freedom of religion subject to morality)

Judicial Interpretation

- **Rathinam v. Union of India (1994):** Recognised that laws are rooted in moral principles such as fairness.
- **Naz Foundation v. Government of NCT of Delhi (2009):** Distinguished constitutional morality from societal morality, giving primacy to constitutional values.
- **Manoj Narula v. Union of India (2014):** Defined it as adherence to constitutional norms and governance free from arbitrariness.
- **K. S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India (2017):** Linked it to rule of law, dignity, and protection of individual rights.

- **Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India (2018):** Reinforced its role in promoting inclusivity and protecting LGBTQ+ rights.
- **Indian Young Lawyers Association v. State of Kerala (2018):** Held that constitutional morality prevails over public morality in ensuring gender equality in religious spaces.
- **Government of NCT of Delhi v. Union of India (2018):** Expanded its scope to include cooperative federalism, institutional respect, and participatory governance.

Views of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar

B. R. Ambedkar highlighted during the Constituent Assembly debates that the success of a Constitution ultimately depends on the conduct of those who implement it. He viewed constitutional morality as:

- Respect for the constitutional framework and institutions
- Obedience to lawful authority
- Exercise of free speech within legal limits
- Trust that all actors, regardless of political differences, will uphold constitutional values

Significance of Constitutional Morality

- **Guiding constitutional interpretation:** It reflects core values such as liberty, equality, pluralism, and respect for due process.
- **Protecting individual rights:** It provides a framework to question entrenched social practices that may undermine dignity and civic equality.
- **Enabling reasoned adjudication:** It encourages courts to engage with substantive questions rather than relying on majoritarian or traditional norms.
- **Acting as a normative compass:** Even if not a strict legal rule, it helps identify when power becomes arbitrary or unaccountable.
- **Balancing competing claims:** It frames critical questions such as reconciling institutional autonomy with individual freedoms.

Alternative perspective

- **Guiding principle, not a rigid doctrine:** It should shape reasoning rather than act as a standalone legal test.
- **Emphasising procedural virtues:** These include judicial restraint, respect for institutional processes, and openness to criticism.
- **Balancing judicial and legislative roles:** Avoid excessive judicial dominance while preserving the Court's role as a rights protector.
- **Rejecting blind reliance on "societal morality":** Social norms should not be used to shield practices from constitutional scrutiny.
- **Focusing on substantive values:** The emphasis should remain on freedom, equality, and dignity rather than labels.

Associated challenges

- **Conceptual ambiguity:** The term lacks precise definition, leading to varied interpretations.
- **Judicial inconsistency:** Uneven application across cases creates unpredictability in outcomes.
- **Risk of judicial overreach:** Courts may expand their authority under its broad umbrella.

- **Misuse of societal morality:** Invoking tradition or majority views can suppress critical reasoning.
- **Erosion of institutional credibility:** Perceived arbitrariness in judicial conduct weakens trust in constitutional governance.

Way forward

- **Clarify its role:** Treat constitutional morality as a normative guide rather than a binding rule.
- **Ensure judicial discipline:** Promote consistency, transparency, and reasoned decision-making.
- **Strengthen institutional balance:** Maintain a healthy equilibrium between judiciary, legislature, and executive.
- **Encourage reasoned debate:** Courts must engage with competing values rather than foreclose discussion.
- **Reaffirm core constitutional values:** Liberty, equality, and dignity should remain central to all adjudication.

