
Prelims Exam Topics

123 AGREEMENT

Context

The **United States and Saudi Arabia** have signed a **30-year civilian nuclear cooperation agreement**, raising concerns over its potential implications for **nuclear proliferation** in West Asia.

About 123 Agreement

- **Nature:** A **bilateral civilian nuclear cooperation agreement** governed by **Section 123 of the U.S. Atomic Energy Act, 1954**.
- **Purpose:** Enabling the transfer of **nuclear materials, equipment, and technology for peaceful purposes**, subject to **nuclear non-proliferation norms** and **approval by the U.S. Congress**.
- **Outcome:** Facilitates cooperation in **nuclear power generation and related nuclear commerce** between the United States and its partner country.
- **Saudi Agreement:** Gives **U.S. companies** access to Saudi Arabia's civilian nuclear programme.
- **India's Agreement (2008):** Ended decades of nuclear technology restrictions by placing **designated civilian nuclear facilities under India-specific IAEA safeguards** in exchange for **assured nuclear fuel supply**.
- **Concerns:** Domestic **uranium enrichment** could increase proliferation risks, trigger a **regional arms race** in West Asia, and raise questions over the adequacy of **inspection and safeguard mechanisms**.

INS MALVAN

Context

The **Indian Navy** commissioned **INS Malvan**.

About INS Malvan

- **Nature:** An **Anti-Submarine Warfare Shallow Water Craft (ASW-SWC)** designed for **anti-submarine operations and coastal patrol** in shallow waters.
- **Class & Builder:** The **second Mahe-class vessel**, built by **Cochin Shipyard Limited (CSL)**; being constructed by **CSL and Garden Reach Shipbuilders & Engineers (GRSE)**.

FAST TRACK COURTS (FTCS)

Context

The Prime Minister proposed establishing **Fast Track Courts (FTCs)** for **paper leak cases** to ensure their speedy disposal.

About Fast Track Courts (FTCs)

- **Nature:** Special courts created to **expedite the trial of specific categories of cases** by prioritising their disposal over regular court dockets.
- **Legal Status:** **No single central legislation** governs FTCs; they are established under **government schemes or judicial/administrative decisions**.
- **Objective:** Reduce judicial delays in **serious offences and cases involving vulnerable groups**, while improving timely access to justice.
- **Coverage:** Handle cases such as **heinous crimes, long-pending disputes, offences against women and children, senior citizens, persons with disabilities, terminally ill persons, and rape/POCSO cases** through **Fast Track Special Courts (FTSCs)**.
- **Constitutional Basis:** Creation of FTCs must satisfy **Article 14 (Right to Equality)** by adopting a **reasonable and objective classification** of cases; speed alone cannot justify establishing a special court.
- **Timeline:** Under the **Bharatiya Nagrik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS)**, criminal trials should **ideally be completed within two years**, while **sexual offence trials** should ideally conclude **within two months**; however, litigants have **no statutory right** to these timelines.
- **Disposal Target:** Under the Centrally Sponsored Scheme, each FTSC is expected to dispose of **41–42 cases per quarter (about 165 cases annually)**.

RIGHT TO PROTEST

Context

The "**Chalo Sansad**" protest over alleged examination paper leaks renewed debate on the **constitutional right to protest** and the **limits of police powers** to regulate public assemblies.

About Right to Protest

- **Constitutional Basis:** The **right to assemble peacefully and without arms** is guaranteed under **Article 19(1)(b)** of the Constitution.

- **Restrictions:** It is subject to **reasonable restrictions** under **Article 19(3)** in the interests of **public order, sovereignty and integrity of India**, and other constitutionally permissible grounds.
- **Regulation:** Public protests are regulated through laws governing **public order, policing, and criminal procedure**, including the **Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS)** and **Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS)**.
- **Unlawful Assembly:** Under the **BNS**, an assembly of **five or more persons** becomes unlawful if its **common object** includes using criminal force, resisting execution of law, committing an offence, or compelling a person through force or criminal intimidation.
- **Police Powers:** Under the **BNSS**, an **Executive Magistrate** or an **authorised police officer** may order an **unlawful assembly**, or one likely to disturb public peace, to disperse; if it refuses, **minimum necessary force** may be used.
- **Judicial Interpretation:**
 - **Anita Thakur v. State of J&K (2016):** SC held that **excessive police force against peaceful protesters violates fundamental rights**.
 - **Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan v. Union of India (2018):** SC held that the **right to protest may be reasonably regulated but cannot be extinguished**.
 - **Amit Sahni v. Commissioner of Police (2020):** SC held that **public spaces cannot be occupied indefinitely in the name of protest**.

AEROSOLS

Context

A recent study found that **South Asia experiences the highest climate impacts from dust-pollution aerosols**.

About Aerosols

- **Definition:** Tiny **solid or liquid particles suspended in the atmosphere**.
- **Sources:** Generated from **natural** sources such as **desert dust, sea spray, volcanic eruptions, and forest fires**, and **anthropogenic** sources including **vehicle emissions and industrial pollution**.
- **Climate Role:** Influence the **Earth's radiation balance** by **reflecting or absorbing sunlight**, thereby affecting **temperature, cloud formation, and rainfall**.

- **Properties:** Typically range from a few tens of nanometres to several tens of micrometres in size; though often **invisible to the naked eye**.
- **Types:** **Primary aerosols** are emitted directly into the atmosphere (e.g., **sea spray, mineral dust, smoke, volcanic ash**), while **secondary aerosols** form through **atmospheric chemical reactions** from precursor gases (e.g., **sulfate aerosols**).

PICRORHIZA KURROA (KUTKI)

Context

A sustainable cultivation model adopted by farmers in **Himachal Pradesh's Mandi district** is helping conserve the **Picrorhiza kurroa (Kutki)**.

About Picrorhiza kurroa (Kutki)

- **Nature:** A **perennial medicinal herb** with underground **rhizomes**, commonly known as **Kutki**.
- **Habitat & Distribution:** Native to the **alpine and sub-alpine Himalayas (2,700–4,500 m)**.
- **Climatic Requirements:** Grows best on **moist, north-west facing slopes** with **porous sandy-clay soil** that supports rhizome spread; prolonged heavy rainfall causes high mortality.
- **Medicinal Uses:** Used as an **antipyretic, anthelmintic, carminative, stomachic, hepatoprotective, antimalarial, and laxative**; also helps improve **appetite** and is traditionally used for **asthma, cold, and cough**.
- **Conservation Status:**
 - **IUCN Red List – Endangered**
 - **CITES – Appendix II**

KUSHA MISSILE

Context

DRDO conducted the **maiden flight-test** of the indigenous **Kusha Missile**.

About Kusha Missile

- **Nature:** An **indigenously developed long-range surface-to-air missile (LR-SAM) system** developed by **DRDO in collaboration with Indian industry partners**.

- **Capability:** Provides **long-range, all-weather air defence** by **detecting, tracking, and intercepting** high-speed, high-altitude aerial threats, including **fighter aircraft, missiles, UAVs, and large enemy aircraft**.
- **System Components:** An **integrated indigenous weapon system** comprising **missiles, radars, and command-and-control centres**, designed to strengthen self-reliance in long-range air defence.

EAST ASIA SUMMIT (EAS)

Context

At the **21st East Asia Summit (EAS)** in **Manila**, India's External Affairs Minister emphasised that **global maritime channels must remain safe and unimpeded**.

About East Asia Summit (EAS)

- **Nature:** The **Indo-Pacific's premier leader-led forum** for strategic dialogue on **political, security, and economic issues**.
- **Establishment:** Launched in **2005** with the **first Summit held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia**; **India is a founding member**.
- **Membership:** Comprises **19 members**—the **10 ASEAN member states, Timor-Leste, and Australia, China, India, Japan, New Zealand, Republic of Korea, Russia, and the United States**; **Timor-Leste joined following its ASEAN accession in 2025**.

ARUNACHALESWARAR TEMPLE

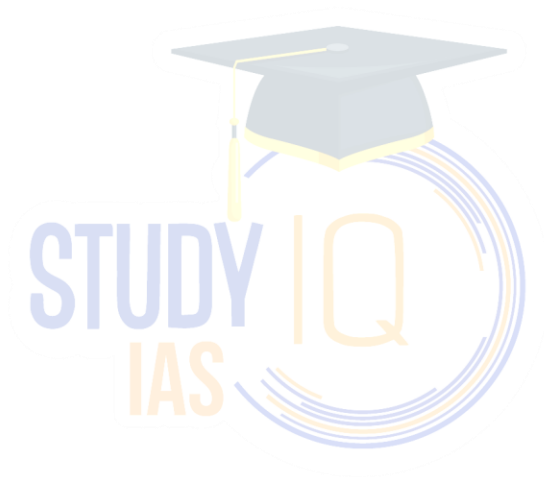
Context

A man was arrested for using duplicate keys to facilitate unauthorised entry for devotees at the **Arunachaleswarar Temple**.

About Arunachaleswarar Temple

- **Nature:** A **Hindu temple (dravidian style architecture)** dedicated to **Lord Arunachalesvara (Shiva)**, situated at the **base of Arunachala Hill in Tiruvannamalai, Tamil Nadu**; also known as the **Annamalaiyar Temple**.
- **History:** One of **India's largest and oldest temples**, with references in **ancient scriptures and Tamil Saiva literature**; the present structure was built by the **Early Cholas (9th century CE)** and expanded by the **Later Cholas, Hoysalas, and Vijayanagara Nayakas**.

- **Mandapas:** Houses several halls, including the renowned **Thousand-Pillared Hall**, constructed during the **Vijayanagara period**.



Mains Exam Topics

PRESSURE GROUPS

Context

The ongoing student protests led by the CJP pressure group over examination irregularities have highlighted the growing role of pressure groups in shaping public policy, holding governments accountable, and articulating issue-specific demands.

Why are issue-based pressure groups replacing ideology-based mass organizations in contemporary India?

- **Economic Fragmentation:** Liberalisation shifted employment from stable factory jobs to informal, contract and gig work, eroding the shared class identity that sustained ideology-based mass organisations.
 - e.g., Ola/Uber drivers and Swiggy/Zomato delivery workers formed platform-specific unions rather than joining traditional industrial unions like CITU or INTUC.
- **Grievance-Based Mobilisation:** As common ideological identities weakened, people increasingly united around a shared grievance rather than a shared political worldview.
 - e.g., Narmada Bachao Andolan brought together farmers, tribal communities and environmental activists solely around displacement and rehabilitation.
- **Institutional Incentives:** PILs and rights-based governance made targeted legal claims more effective than broad ideological struggles, encouraging issue-specific advocacy.
 - e.g., The T.N. Godavarman case reshaped India's forest governance through litigation rather than prolonged mass mobilisation.
- **Low-Cost Digital Mobilisation:** Digital platforms enable rapid, decentralized mobilisation around a specific issue without permanent cadres or long-term ideological organisation.
 - e.g., The Save Aarey movement mobilised thousands through social media to oppose tree felling without relying on a traditional mass organisation.
- **Selective State Accommodation:** Governments can concede narrow demands without challenging the broader political-economic order, reinforcing issue-based mobilisation as a more effective strategy than ideological confrontation.

- e.g., Sustained mobilisation by the Dongria Kondh tribe and civil society groups led the Odisha government to halt Vedanta's Niyamgiri mining project, while the state's broader mining policy remained unchanged.

How are pressure groups reshaping democratic accountability beyond Parliament, judiciary and media?

- **Administrative Accountability:** Pressure groups subject executive decision-making to continuous public scrutiny by demanding transparency, consultation and public justification before policies are implemented.
 - e.g., The Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS) institutionalised *Jan Sunwais* (public social audits), compelling local officials to publicly verify expenditure records and wage payments before affected communities.
- **Evidence-Based Policy Accountability:** Independent civil society research generates credible empirical evidence that compels governments to respond to actual policy outcomes rather than administrative claims.
 - e.g., Pratham's Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) exposed foundational learning deficits despite rising school enrolment, shifting policy attention from enrolment to learning outcomes.
- **Corporate Market Accountability:** Pressure groups extend democratic oversight to private market actors by exposing unsafe commercial practices and mobilising public demand for stronger regulatory standards.
 - e.g., The Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) exposed pesticide residues in major soft drink brands, triggering stronger regulatory scrutiny and higher food safety standards.
- **Algorithmic and Digital Infrastructure Accountability:** Technology advocacy groups scrutinise digital governance systems to improve operational transparency, data protection and safeguards against technology-driven exclusion.
 - e.g., The Internet Freedom Foundation (IFF) documented biometric authentication failures in welfare delivery, prompting governments to strengthen offline grievance redress and fallback mechanisms in digital welfare systems.
- **Participatory Environmental Accountability:** Grassroots movements hold governments and project authorities accountable by making environmental approvals contingent upon ecological safeguards and the informed consent of affected communities.

- e.g., The Dongria Kondh tribe, supported by Survival International, used Gram Sabha consent in the Niyamgiri Hills to prevent bauxite mining, reinforcing community participation in environmental decision-making.

How has digital technology redefined the nature of pressure-group politics?

- **Decentralised Organisation:** Digital platforms enable leader-light, networked structures where dispersed citizens can coordinate collective action without permanent hierarchies or formal organisational infrastructure.
 - e.g., The Save Aarey movement mobilised thousands through instant social media coordination without relying on a centralised leadership or traditional mass organisation.
- **Crowdfunded Advocacy:** Online fundraising reduces dependence on large institutional donors by enabling micro-donations, giving advocacy groups greater financial autonomy.
 - e.g., The Internet Freedom Foundation (IFF) finances its legal advocacy through public subscriptions rather than corporate funding.
- **Direct Narrative Building:** Social media allows pressure groups to communicate directly with citizens, bypassing traditional media gatekeepers and shaping public discourse in real time.
 - e.g., During the 2020–21 farmers' protests, the **Tractor2Twitter** campaign enabled farm unions to communicate their demands directly despite hostile television coverage.
- **Scalable Policy Participation:** Digital tools transform individual grievances into large-scale policy feedback by enabling mass participation in public consultations and regulatory processes.
 - e.g., During consultations on the Draft Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) 2020 Notification, environmental groups coordinated over 17 lakh public objections through digital campaigns.
- **Continuous Citizen Engagement:** Digital platforms enable pressure groups to sustain public awareness, coordinate follow-up actions and rapidly adapt campaigns, making civic engagement continuous rather than episodic.
 - e.g., The **#SaveTheInternet** campaign continuously mobilised citizens through online petitions, explainers and coordinated outreach until TRAI prohibited discriminatory data pricing.