

The Hindu Important News Articles For UPSC CSE

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Edition : International Table of Contents

Page 06 Syllabus: GS II : International Relations / Preliminary Examination	Global waterways should be safe, unimpeded: Jaishankar
Page 07 Syllabus : GS II : Social Justice / Preliminary Examination	Building resilience to protect elderly from climate stressors
Page 09 Syllabus: GS II : Governance / Preliminary Examination	Is corruption the biggest threat to India's future?
Page 10 Syllabus: GS I & II : Indian Society & Polity	How should cities reclaim footpaths
Page 10 Syllabus: GS II : Indian Polity / Preliminary Examination	The right to protest and the limits of police power
Page 08: Editorial Analysis Syllabus : GS II : International Relations	Warning signals for India from NATO's Ankara summit

Page 06: GS II : International Relations / Preliminary Examination

In an increasingly multipolar and volatile geopolitical landscape, maintaining security across global maritime trade routes has become a vital national interest for economic and strategic stability. India's participation in the 21st East Asia Summit in Manila highlights New Delhi's dual strategy: asserting itself as a reliable regional security partner in the Indo-Pacific while actively defending rules-based international order across global chokepoints. By balancing maritime governance, regional crises (West Asia, Myanmar), and bilateral firmness against state-sponsored terrorism, India projects a principled, national-interest-driven foreign policy grounded in strategic autonomy.

Core Themes and Key Strategic Takeaways

1. Freedom of Navigation & Protection of Global Commons

- **Context:** Increasing security threats to commercial vessels and seafarers in the Red Sea, Persian Gulf, and the South China Sea.
- **India's Stance:** Unimpeded sea lines of communication (SLOCs) must be maintained under international law. Attacks on non-combatant civilian vessels and maritime crew violate global norms.
- **South China Sea:** India supports a legally binding Code of Conduct (CoC) fully compliant with UNCLOS 1982 that safeguards the legitimate rights of non-signatory global users.

2. Indo-Pacific Architecture & ASEAN Centrality

- **Institutional Alignment:** Reinforces the synergy between the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) and India's Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI).

Global waterways should be safe, unimpeded: Jaishankar

Attacks on seafarers, civilian shipping or infrastructure cannot be countenanced, says External Affairs Minister at East Asia Summit; Ministry hits back at Pakistan Deputy PM's comments

Kallol Bhattacharjee
NEW DELHI

Participating in the 21st East Asia Summit (EAS) in Manila, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar said on Thursday that the global maritime channels "must remain safe and unimpeded".

At the meeting, Mr. Jaishankar also called for dialogue and diplomacy in dealing with the crisis in the Persian Gulf region and a "political solution" to the civil conflict in Myanmar, where Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAOs) have been challenging the authority of the military junta that took power in February 2021.

"Calling for dialogue and diplomacy to end the West Asia/Gulf conflict, India stresses that international waterways must remain safe and unimpeded, fully in consonance with international law. Under no circumstances can attacks on seafarers, civilian shipping or infrastructure be countenanced," said Mr. Jaishankar. He described the evolving condition of the global order as "uncertain and volatile".

He said India will be



External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar addresses the 21st East Asia Summit in Manila on Thursday. ANI

hosting two specific EAS activities in the current year – the seventh EAS conference on maritime security cooperation in Kochi and an EAS Maritime Heritage Festival in the ancient port city of Lothal.

South China Sea

He informed the EAS of the Indian position on South China Sea and said that India supports the "conclusion of a substantive, effective and legally binding Code of Conduct (CoC), fully compliant with UNCLOS 1982 that does not prejudice the legitimate rights of all users". Continuing with the theme, he

called for "ASEAN centrality, regional stability, and the realisation of a free, open and prosperous Indo-Pacific".

Regarding the ongoing civil conflict in Myanmar, he expressed India's support for ASEAN efforts to resolving the situation. "India stands for finding a political solution to the Myanmar issue," said Mr. Jaishankar, who also spoke at the 33rd ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF).

He reiterated India's policy on "zero tolerance for terrorism", and said there should not "be any doubt that acts of terrorism will have consequenc-

es". He said that "collective action against cyberscam centres" should be prioritised. On the Israel-Palestine crisis, he reiterated India's position, and said "a two-state solution can lead to a lasting and durable peace".

Indus Waters Treaty

The External Affairs Ministry separately responded to Pakistan Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar's remarks on Kashmir and the Indus Waters Treaty at the ARF.

"It is no surprise that a multilateral forum has once again been cynically exploited by Pakistan to amplify falsehoods, peddle state-sponsored disinformation, and divert attention from its own well-documented record of sponsoring cross-border terrorism," said the Ministry's official spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal.

Mr. Dar, in his remarks, had said, "... lasting peace in South Asia lies in the just resolution of the Jammu and Kashmir dispute in accordance with UN Security Council".

He further said that upholding the treaty is a "cornerstone of regional peace and stability".

- **Concrete Initiatives:** India's announcement to host the 7th EAS Maritime Security Conference in Kochi and the EAS Maritime Heritage Festival in Lothal highlights its soft-power and security leadership in maritime domain awareness.

3. Pragmatic Diplomacy on Regional Crises

- **West Asia Conflict:** Reiteration of India's stance advocating dialogue, diplomacy, and a sustainable **Two-State Solution** for Israel-Palestine.
- **Myanmar Crisis:** Support for ASEAN's Five-Point Consensus and finding an inclusive political resolution involving all domestic stakeholders.
- **Transnational Threats:** Call for multi-nation intelligence sharing and joint action against illegal cyber scam operations impacting Indian and global citizens.

4. Countering Disinformation & Cross-Border Terrorism

- **Bilateral Response to Pakistan:** Rejection of Pakistan's reference to Kashmir and the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) at the ARF.
- **Firm Stance:** India called out the exploitation of multilateral forums to peddle state-sponsored narratives, reinforcing a policy of zero tolerance toward terrorism and highlighting that terrorism will carry cost and consequences.

UPSC Relevance: Static Dimensions & GS Paper Mapping

1. GS Paper II: International Relations & Bilateral/Multilateral Groupings

- **UNCLOS 1982:** Codification of territorial waters, Contiguous Zones, Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ), and High Seas rights.
- **ASEAN & Regional Groupings:** Role of East Asia Summit (EAS), ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), and Quad in maintaining regional equilibrium.
- **Act East Policy:** Shift from economic integration to comprehensive security, connectivity, and defense engagement in the Indo-Pacific.

2. GS Paper III: Security Challenges & Transnational Maritime Threats

- **Maritime Security & Chokepoints:** Strategic vulnerability of critical trade corridors like the Strait of Malacca, Bab-el-Mandeb, and Strait of Hormuz.
- **Non-Traditional Threats:** Piracy, illegal cyber-syndicates, state-backed proxy attacks on commercial infrastructure, and supply chain disruptions.
- **Terrorism Governance:** Financial Action Task Force (FATF) frameworks, UN Security Council Resolutions on terror financing, and cross-border insurgency.

Analytical Key Points & Strategic Insights

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Daily News Analysis

- **Energy & Economic Vulnerability:** Over 85% of India's trade by volume and major crude oil imports pass via vulnerable maritime corridors; any disruption directly fuels domestic inflation and energy insecurity.
- **Normative Power vs. Security Provider:** By organizing platforms like the Kochi Maritime Security Conference and referencing Lothal's ancient heritage, New Delhi balances its identity as a historic maritime civilizational power with that of a modern net security provider.
- **Preventing Forum Exploitation:** Consistently neutralizing attempts by regional adversaries to internationalize bilateral disputes ensures multilateral platforms remain focused on constructive economic and security architecture.

Conclusion

S. Jaishankar's interventions at the East Asia Summit reaffirm India's positioning as a "Vishwa Bandhu" (global friend) and an anchor of stability in an unpredictable world order. By insisting that international waterways remain open, free, and compliant with UNCLOS, India protects both its economic interests and fundamental global norms. Moving forward, translating these diplomatic stances into operational maritime partnerships, enhanced naval domain awareness, and robust multilateral cyber cooperation will be essential to securing a stable and prosperous Indo-Pacific.

UPSC Prelims Exam Questions

Question: Which of the following is not a key element of India's Indo-Pacific policy?

- (a) ASEAN Centrality
- (b) Freedom of Navigation
- (c) Rules-based international order
- (d) Military resolution of regional disputes

Ans: d)

UPSC Mains Practice Questions

Question: Explain the significance of ASEAN centrality in India's Indo-Pacific policy. (10 Marks, 150 Words)

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Page 07 :GS II : Social Justice/ Preliminary Examination

As global warming accelerates, climate change operates not as an equalizer, but as a risk multiplier that disproportionately harms vulnerable populations. India is undergoing a massive demographic shift, with its senior citizen population projected to more than double from 149 million in 2022 to **347 million by 2050**. Older adults face compounded threats from both sudden climate shocks (cyclones, flash floods) and slow-onset environmental hazards (extreme heat, water scarcity, vector-borne diseases). Building climate resilience for the elderly requires an intersectional approach that bridges social protection, public healthcare, urban planning, and local disaster risk reduction (DRR).

Key Drivers of Elderly Vulnerability to Climate Stress

1. Physiological & Health Fragility

- **Thermoregulatory Decline:** Reduced physical capacity to adjust to extreme heat stress accelerates pre-existing chronic conditions (cardiovascular, respiratory, and renal disorders).
- **Accelerated Ageing:** Emerging studies indicate prolonged exposure to heat stress acts as a bio-physiological stressor, potentially accelerating biological ageing.
- **Mobility Restrictions:** Physical impairments complicate timely evacuation during sudden disaster events, leaving senior citizens trapped in high-risk zones.

Building resilience to protect elderly from climate stressors

There are many other factors including financial capacity, living alone, gender, age that intersect to render senior citizens particularly vulnerable during extreme climate events and slow-onset climate hazards; a recent study calls for a points to a layered response to grow resilience both at the household and community level

Ramya Kannan

In its sweep, climate change is not an equitable overlord, and while it does create havoc, it is true that this impacts some people more than others. There are, now, studies to show that vulnerable groups of people are affected far more than others and the factors that determine how badly you are affected include economic ability, age and gender. A recent study by HelpAge India further highlights the fact that senior citizens form a vulnerable group and are right in the pathway of harm left in the trail of climate change.

There are two ways in which climate change affects older adults – sudden shocks and slow-onset stresses. The report says rising temperatures, erratic rainfall, drought, flooding, coastal erosion, water scarcity, poor ventilation, indoor heat stress, dampness, and environmental degradation can worsen chronic illness, raise the daily risk, reduce mobility, and increase care needs for senior citizens.

For them it could manifest as a number of things – heat-related stress, respiratory problems, reduced mobility, mental distress, sleep disruption, and disruption in access to medicines and healthcare during climatic events.

In addition changing socio-cultural norms and migration patterns indicate that older people can become isolated, leading to an impact on their mental health as well. As the country learns to become more heat resilient, it should also focus on protecting older people's health, dignity, mobility, income, housing and social support structures, without which they will be rendered further vulnerable.

This is particularly relevant to India, where the portion of senior citizens as a part of the overall population is constantly growing. As the nation is steadily moving towards the greys, the older population is projected to rise to about 347 million by 2050 from 149 million in 2022. Naturally, climate stress will make a larger share of the country vulnerable to physical and mental health challenges.

Several factors

The report identifies several factors that sharply reduce resilience: living alone, poor physical or mental health, impairment, advanced age, poverty, financial dependence, weak institutional support, insecure housing, and residence in hazard-prone locations. These disadvantages often overlap, which is why the study uses an "Intersectional Place Perspective" to show that risk is shaped by the interaction of age, gender, widowhood, disability, poverty, social isolation, and local environmental conditions. For example, an uneducated, unskilled older widow with no pension, was at a relatively greater risk from a



Shades of grey: The population of elderly persons is projected to rise from 149 million in 2022 to about 347 million by 2050 in the country. Naturally climate stress will make a larger share of the country vulnerable to physical and mental health challenges. T. ANNIA NAIDU

cyclone, that an able-bodied older man who lived with his family. Anupama Datta, Head, Policy Research & Advocacy, HelpAge India, who led this research study, said the focus was on districts impacted by slow onset climate hazards. "Older persons bring unique strengths as well as vulnerabilities that shape how they experience and respond to climate hazards. Repeated episodes of climate hazards weaken their ability to recover and build resilience."

Caring for elderly

There are a number of environmental stressors that will impact the life of the elderly, says Soumya Swaminathan, chairperson, M.S.Swaminathan Research Foundation, Chennai. The institution has launched a two-State study to evaluate the impact of increase in temperature on the health of the residents.

What can be urgently done here, she says, is to establish special care facilities for the elderly, such as those in Thailand, where a community space is created for elders, in both rural and urban areas, where they can come together, engage in activities and receive comprehensive primary health care as well. Handling the loneliness and bringing the community around the senior citizens will have an impact on mitigating their vulnerabilities. "We must first think of establishing this basic level of care for the elders and then address issues like heat with particular reference to the elderly," she says, adding that a fresh vulnerability that is emerging through studies indicates that heat could also be a stressor to accelerate ageing itself.

The HelpAge report points to a layered

response to grow resilience: at the household level, storing food and water, improving shelter, saving money, planning ahead for disasters, and diversifying livelihoods. However useful they are, they may not be enough for persons with multiple disadvantages. At the community level, family support, neighbour check-ins, volunteer networks, and community shelter or relocation support are recommended coping strategies. It also recommends age-inclusive early warning systems, community monitoring, and stronger local care networks, especially for those living alone or with impairments.

In terms of policy recommendations, it calls for climate-resilient healthcare for elders, expanded social protection and livelihood support, and targeted support for the groups at highest risk of being affected.

The strongest policy priorities in the document are: climate-resilient healthcare for older persons, expanded social protection and livelihood support, better disaster preparedness and early warning systems, climate-resilient housing, environmental health interventions, and stronger community-based care networks. It also calls for targeted support for the highest-risk groups: those living alone, widows, persons with impairments, the oldest-old, and financially insecure households.

Ms. Datta explains that while government schemes serve as lifeline for older persons, and provide a critical safety net, they follow general rules. The schemes are not currently designed keeping in mind the vulnerabilities of the

older persons, especially those who are uneducated, physically weak or impaired, oldest old, living alone. She explains that "access is particularly challenging for older persons with poor health (30%), those severely affected by climate-related shocks (30%), with no formal education (22%), and from lower socio-economic groups (22%). Additional challenges include, long waiting times and delays (25%), digital access difficulties (15%), and lack of support during the application process (10%), highlighting the need for more age-friendly service delivery."

Examples of interventions

The report also highlights certain examples of interventions that worked, in order that they might be scaled up or adapted for implementation in other contexts. In Odisha, it says, older persons received early warnings for storms and cyclones from the village panchayat and were evacuated to safe community shelters in time. It also points to organised grass roots volunteerism where organisations or a band of individuals co-ordinate with the official systems to organise relief, evacuations and post-facto care during disasters.

For India, the report's conclusions are very clear: shift from 'hazard-centred' responses to 'people-centred' systems to connect climate adaptation, healthy ageing, social protection, and disaster risk reduction. That involves harnessing One Health, generating and using better data, establishing stronger institutional coordination, and services that are designed by factoring in older persons' actual barriers to access.

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THE GIST

A recent study by HelpAge India further highlights the fact that senior citizens form a vulnerable group and are right in the pathway of harm left in the trail of climate change. This is particularly relevant to India, where the portion of senior citizens as a part of the overall population is constantly growing.

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2. Socio-Economic & Demographic Factors

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Daily News Analysis

- **Intersectional Disadvantages:** The HelpAge India report uses an Intersectional Place Perspective, demonstrating that risk escalates when age intersects with gender, widowhood, lack of education, and poverty (e.g., an uneducated, living-alone older widow faces higher risks than an able-bodied, financially secure senior).
- **Social Isolation & Migration:** Nuclear family trends and rural-to-urban youth migration leave many elderly individuals living alone, increasing loneliness, anxiety, and mental health risks during emergencies.
- **Administrative & Digital Barriers:** Government welfare schemes often feature rigid administrative processes. Around 15% of elderly face digital access hurdles, while others face long wait times, mobility constraints, and lack of application support.

Multi-Level Framework for Action

A. Household & Individual Level

- Diversification of income sources and emergency savings pools.
- Climate-resilient housing adaptation (adequate ventilation, cool roofs, damp-proofing).
- Stockpiling essential chronic disease medications, clean drinking water, and dry rations prior to disaster seasons.

B. Community & Grassroots Level

- **Local Care Networks:** Establishing neighbor check-in systems and organized youth volunteer networks for disaster warnings and relief delivery.
- **Community Spaces:** Replicating models like Thailand's community elder centers, providing safe, climate-controlled social spaces offering integrated primary healthcare and socialization to tackle isolation.
- **Targeted Evacuations:** Utilizing Gram Panchayats and local bodies to maintain live registries of vulnerable, living-alone seniors for priority evacuation (demonstrated successfully during cyclones in Odisha).

C. Policy & Institutional Level

- **Age-Inclusive Early Warning Systems (EWS):** Designing disaster alerts that do not rely solely on digital apps or smartphones, ensuring last-mile delivery via audio announcements and door-to-door check-ins.
- **Mainstreaming "One Health":** Connecting human healthcare, climate adaptation, and disaster governance framework into unified policy delivery.

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- **Inclusive Social Welfare:** Simplifying scheme access by replacing complex digital-only verification with doorstep service delivery for high-risk elderly cohorts.

Strategic Points & Analytical Overview

- **Demographic Transition vs. Climate Realities:** By 2050, over 20% of India's population will be elderly. Climate adaptation policies that fail to explicitly integrate elder-care risk leaving a fifth of the nation severely exposed to climate-induced poverty and mortality.
- **Shift from Hazard-Centred to People-Centred DRR:** Traditional disaster responses focus primarily on physical infrastructure (dams, embankments). A people-centred approach shifts focus toward social infrastructure—addressing systemic inequality, health access, and local support systems.
- **Economic Costs of Inaction:** Neglecting elderly health during heatwaves increases public health expenditure, strains tertiary hospitals, and places excessive burden on unpaid family caregivers.

Static Dimensions & UPSC Relevance (GS Papers II & III)

1. GS Paper II: Social Justice & Governance

- **Mechanisms for Protection of Vulnerable Sections:** Implementation and gaps in the National Policy on Older Persons (NPOP) and the Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007.
- **Issues Relating to Development & Management of Social Sector/Services:** Health, education, human resources, and social safety nets for an ageing society.

2. GS Paper III: Environment, Disaster Management & Public Health

- **Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015–2030):** Priority 4 focuses on enhancing disaster preparedness for effective response and "Building Back Better", explicitly requiring inclusive, non-discriminatory DRR policies.
- **Climate Change Adaptation (CCA):** Integrating National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC) strategies with local heat action plans (HAPs) tailored for vulnerable demographics.

Conclusion

Protecting India's growing senior population from climate stressors requires moving beyond generic disaster response toward an age-inclusive adaptation strategy. Integrating geriatric healthcare into climate action plans, removing administrative barriers to social protection schemes, and leveraging community-based care networks will ensure that India's climate resilience framework protects every citizen—leaving no age group behind.

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UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Question: What does the 'One Health' approach relate to?

- (a) Human health only
- (b) Animal health only
- (c) Integrated management of human, animal, and environmental health
- (d) Climate change only

Ans: c)

UPSC Mains Practice Questions

Question: Why does climate change affect India's elderly population more than other segments of society? Explain. **(10 Marks, 150 Words)**

Page 09 : GS II : Governance / Preliminary Examination

Corruption in India is not merely a transactional issue of bribery; it represents a systemic governance deficit that undermines economic equity, administrative efficiency, and public trust in democratic institutions. While administrative reforms, technological solutions like digitalisation, and landmark legislations such as the Right to Information (RTI) Act, 2005 were envisaged to eliminate opacity, ground realities reveal new challenges. Recent incidents, such as high-profile competitive exam paper leaks (e.g., NEET), highlight that corruption directly impairs human capital, youth aspirations, and national security, making it one of the single largest threats to India's developmental trajectory.

Is corruption the biggest threat to India's future?



Shailesh Gandhi

Former Central Information Commissioner



Anjali Bhardwaj

A transparency activist associated with Satark Nagrik Sangathan

PARLEY

Corruption has shaped elections, toppled governments, and sparked some of the biggest public protests in independent India. With digitalisation and the Right to Information (RTI) Act, citizens were promised greater transparency. Yet has India actually become less corrupt?

This question has become pertinent as thousands of students hold protests seeking accountability after the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET) paper was leaked earlier this year. Their campaign has revived memories of the India Against Corruption movement that galvanised the country more than a decade ago. Is corruption the biggest threat to India's future? Shailesh Gandhi and Anjali Bhardwaj discuss the question in a conversation moderated by Nivedita Varadarajan.

For many, corruption is paying a bribe to get a service delivered. Has digitalisation helped reduce such petty corruption?

Anjali Bhardwaj: Corruption in India goes from the highest to the very lowest offices in the country and people find it difficult to access even their basic rights and entitlements. Unfortunately, digitalisation is being pushed as a magic wand, as if it would make everything alright. But experience on the ground shows that digitalisation by itself is not going to prevent corruption. If you just go into any government office today, it's an open secret that there will be somebody who will expect to be bribed.

In fact, with digitalisation, another layer has been added for the poor and the marginalised who find it very difficult to access services because they are often unlettered and do not have access to the Internet. They can't easily fill up forms on their own. Another middleman has been added. They have to go to these private cafes where they are charged obnoxious amounts [to get government services].

A proper grievance redressal mechanism needs to be put in place, where if somebody is facing corruption, they can file a complaint and it will be redressed in a time bound manner. A grievance redressal law is required, and it has not been brought through although Parliament had discussed it in great detail in 2014.

The Right to Information Act was intended to make the government accountable. Has the Act lived up to its promise?

Shailesh Gandhi: The Act was one of the best transparency Acts in the world. However, it has been murdered by Supreme Court judgments and bureaucracy. The law has now been



Going strong: Students shout slogans during a protest in solidarity with the ongoing protest at New Delhi's Jantra Mantar, in Amritsar on July 23. AFP

modified to such an extent by the Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023, that all information relating to corruption can be denied. A lot of countries do not have vigilance departments in most government departments. We have them in almost every government department, but they don't work. Now we also have a Lokpal burning ₹50-60 crore a year delivering nothing. Lokayukta has been there for years and yet we are not getting accountability.

Section 19 of the so-called Prevention of Corruption Act used to say that sanction for prosecution was required if a public servant was accused of corruption. In 2018, Section 17A was introduced, requiring government permission to investigate corruption charges. Our judicial system is creaking. Unless we enforce the rule, corruption cannot reduce.

How is DPDP undermining the RTI Act?

SG: The original Act had an 87-word definition for personal information. It said personal information which was not part of public activity or was intrusion of privacy could be denied, but with a caveat that information shall not be denied to Parliament or State legislatures; only that information could be denied to citizens. It was misinterpreted in the *Girish Ramchandra Deshpande* judgment which said that all personal information could be exempt. The *Puttaswamy* judgment also created such a theory without ensuring that there was a balance between right to information and right to privacy. In fact, right to privacy has been called a fundamental right without a balance act; it has made it easy for the government to refuse sharing all kinds of personal information. Your name is personal, your age is personal, everything is personal. Information is being denied and will slowly finish the RTI Act.

Does that make uncovering corruption so



In a democracy, it is important to ensure that institutions of accountability, which are the Executive, the Judiciary, and the Legislature, remain accountable and function properly. Unfortunately, these institutions have been systematically weakened

ANJALI BHARDWAJ

much harder now than before?

AB: The RTI Act came because of a very strong demand for an information access law. It has been used to access information to hold governments accountable.

We see that every year about six million RTI requests are filed in our country. Its the highest anywhere in the world. The law is used very vibrantly, not just to ensure accountability in the delivery of basic rights, but also to expose big ticket corruption. I can hardly remember any big scam that has got exposed in the country in the last 20 years where the RTI has not played a seminal role. Whether it is the Vyapam scam, the Adarsh Housing Society scam or the electoral bond scheme, the Act has been used. The Act has been very effective in exposing corruption and wrongdoing.

Unfortunately, we are also seeing how the CBI, the ED and the Lokpal have been completely compromised. Big-ticket corruption cases are just not being tackled.

Do weak institutions enable corruption, or does corruption weaken institutions?

SG: My submission is that we make great laws, but do not implement them. Unless there is punishment, corruption cannot be contained. Let me give you a bit of information. This was a study done by the Indian police general in 2008. A study observed the performance of the CBI's entire anti-corruption branch from 1980 to 1984. What was the outcome of that? About 280 people were accused of corruption in courts. 144 got convicted. The average time for investigation was 13.4 months, whereas the average time for the first trial was 88 months. In 2008, it was found that only four people had been in prison for more than 20 days – just four people.

Today, corruption is an 'all-profit, negligible-risk' activity. So long as this continues, there will be people who will take advantage of this. We make laws and we break laws. We should demand a road map for judicial delays to be less than one year. In less than one year over 90% cases should be decided; this is being done in various countries in the world.

Second, all Information Commissioners are

appointed without any transparency. We expect people who are selected in a non-transparent manner to deliver transparency. How does this work? Lakhs of people were there on the roads of Delhi for the Lokpal. After the Lokpal was created, everybody lost interest. Nobody bothers whether they are delivering or not.

Thirdly, the RTI Act should be strengthened. The amendment by the DPDP Act should be taken back. Finally, the media should take it on itself to track 10-15 celebrity corruption cases, track them and see how they have progressed.

AB: In a democracy, it is important to ensure that institutions of accountability, which are the Executive, the Judiciary, and the Legislature, remain accountable to the people of India and function properly. Unfortunately, these institutions have been systematically weakened.

The government has understood that the best way to not be transparent is to continue to work behind a veil of secrecy. To do this, they need to subvert the Information Commissioners' functioning. A way to do this is to not make appointments to the Information Commissioners. Since May 2014, when the BJP came to power, not a single Information Commissioner has been appointed to the central information commission till people approached the Supreme Court or the judiciary.

When the courts order an appointment, they are made in a completely non-transparent manner. We are also seeing that institutions like the ED, the CBI or the Lokpal, simply don't do the investigations that are required of them to hold those in power accountable. It's almost as if corruption is only being done by the Opposition.

Is corruption the biggest threat to the future?

AB: Well, yes, because corruption has a very real human cost. How can a country expect to be developed if corruption is not addressed? If there is massive corruption in the delivery of basic rights, like rations or healthcare or education, how can we hope to become a developed country? When there is corruption and crony capitalism, there is every incentive for those in power to subvert institutions.

SG: If India is at the 79th position in the rule of law index, we have no hope of being among the top nations of the world. We need to change that. We need to ensure that corruption cases are disposed of in less than a year.



To listen to the full interview
Scan the code or go to the link
www.thehindu.com

Key Dimensions & Core Analysis

1. Limits of Digitalisation in Curbing Petty Corruption

- **Added Intermediary Layer:** Digital processes without structural administrative reform do not automatically eliminate corruption. Marginalized citizens lacking digital literacy are often forced to rely on private cyber centers and middlemen, adding a cost barrier to accessing basic entitlements.

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Daily News Analysis

- **Absence of Statutory Grievance Redressal:** Digital platforms streamline filing, but without a time-bound, legally enforceable Grievance Redressal Mechanism, public officials face minimal consequences for ignoring service delivery standards.

2. Systematic Weakening of the Right to Information (RTI) Act

- **Impact of DPDP Act, 2023:** Amendments introduced via the Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023 have expanded personal information exemptions. By eliminating previous balances (such as section exemptions tied to public activity or legislative access), public authorities can routinely deny requests citing "personal data."
- **Executive Delays in Appointments:** Non-filling and delayed appointments of Central and State Information Commissioners have created massive backlogs, significantly diluting the operational utility of Information Commissions.
- **Judicial Over-interpretation:** Inconsistent judicial interpretations have broadened privacy protections at the expense of citizen access to public information.

3. Institutional Compromise and Accountability Deficits

- **Inertia in Anti-Corruption Bodies:** Statutory anti-corruption oversight institutions like the Lokpal and State Lokayuktas suffer from high operational costs with low investigation and conviction outputs.
- **Procedural Barriers to Investigation:** Amendments such as Section 17A of the Prevention of Corruption Act (introduced in 2018) mandate prior governmental sanction before investigating public servants, creating a procedural shield against early-stage inquiry.
- **Low Conviction Rates & Judicial Delays:** Criminal justice timelines remain protracted. Protracted trial periods (averaging several years) lower the perceived risk of punishment, rendering corruption a high-profit, low-risk activity.

4. Human and Economic Cost of Corruption

- **Subversion of Basic Rights:** Corruption in social safety nets (ration distribution, healthcare, education) directly affects the poor, worsening income inequality.
- **Threat to Meritocracy:** Malpractices in public recruitment and standardized examinations undermine meritocracy and demotivate youth.
- **Impact on Rule of Law & Investment:** Poor performance on international metrics like the Rule of Law Index harms investor confidence, crony capitalism incentives, and long-term economic growth.

Related Static Dimensions & UPSC Relevance

1. GS Paper II: Governance, Transparency, and Accountability

- **Right to Information (RTI) Act, 2005:** Institutional setup, exemptions under Section 8, and the impact of the DPDP Act, 2023.

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- **Role of Citizen Charters & Grievance Redressal:** Mechanics of transparent public service delivery and mandatory timelines.
- **E-Governance:** E-governance applications, models, successes, limitations, and the digital divide.
- **Statutory Bodies:** Structure, mandates, and performance of the Lokpal, Lokayuktas, Central Vigilance Commission (CVC), and Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI).

2. GS Paper IV: Ethics, Integrity, and Aptitude

- **Probity in Governance:** Concept of public service, philosophical basis of governance, and information sharing.
- **Challenges of Corruption:** Causes, types (petty vs. grand/political corruption), and socio-economic consequences.
- **Work Culture & Accountability:** Institutionalizing ethical standards, code of conduct, and protection for whistleblowers (Whistle Blowers Protection Act, 2014).

Strategic Way Forward

- **Revitalize Transparency Mechanisms:** Review recent amendments to the RTI framework to ensure personal data protection laws do not override public interest transparency.
- **Statutory Grievance Redressal:** Enact a comprehensive Citizens' Right to Time-Bound Delivery of Public Services and Redressal of Grievances Bill.
- **Judicial Reforms for Timely Trials:** Establish dedicated fast-track courts for corruption inquiries, targeting a maximum trial completion window of 12 months to restore deterrent value.
- **Transparent Institutional Appointments:** Implement open, merit-based, and non-partisan selection processes for key integrity institutions (Information Commissioners, CVC, Lokpal).
- **Protecting Whistleblowers & Investigatory Autonomy:** Streamline investigative sanctions under anti-corruption legislation so that legitimate inquiries against public officials are not blocked at preliminary stages.

Conclusion

Corruption acts as a systemic tax on India's growth, directly undermining democratic governance, meritocracy, and public welfare. Addressing it effectively requires moving beyond technological solutions to reinforce institutional autonomy, ensure judicial swiftness, and safeguard citizens' access to public information. Strengthening these core pillars is essential to establishing the rule of law and ensuring sustainable, inclusive development for India's future.

UPSC Prelims Exam Study Questions

Question: 'A 'whistleblower' refers to—

- (a) A beneficiary of government schemes
- (b) A person who exposes irregularities, corruption, or illegal activity within an organization
- (c) A government spokesperson
- (d) A member of the Public Service Commission

Ans:b)

UPSC Mains Exam Study Questions

Question:Evaluate the role of the Right to Information (RTI) Act in controlling corruption in India.(10 Marks, 150 Words)

Page 10 : GS I & II : Indian Society & Polity/ Preliminary Examination

Urban spaces across India face a persistent challenge: balancing public pedestrian access with informal street commerce. The recent 'Safe Footpath' drive in Bengaluru—initiated following judicial recognition of the right to walk as part of the Right to Life (Article 21)—has highlighted critical gaps in administrative execution. Municipal drives often resort to immediate eviction of street vendors without implementing statutory processes prescribed under the **Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act, 2014**. Reclaiming urban footpaths requires an integrated planning model that treats informal commerce as a vital component of urban ecosystems rather than an illegal encroachment.

How should cities reclaim footpaths?

Why was the Street Vendors Act enacted? What does the Act require before vendors can be removed? What is the role of the Town Vending Committee? Can street vendors be evicted before a survey is completed? Why has Bengaluru's footpath drive come under scrutiny?

EXPLAINER

Rishita Khanna

The story so far: Following the Supreme Court's recognition of the right to walk on safe, obstruction-free footpaths as a fundamental right, Bengaluru Development Minister Krishna Byre Gowda directed the five city corporations under the Greater Bengaluru Authority to launch a 10-day 'Safe Footpath' drive. The drive removed thousands of street vendors from pavements and cleared encroachments. While many welcomed the initiative, it also raised questions over whether the removals complied with the Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act, 2014, which seeks to balance pedestrians' right to walk with street vendors' right to livelihood.

Why was the Street Vendors Act enacted?

The Supreme Court's recognition of the right to walk does not mean street vending has no place on public streets. Long before the latest ruling, the court had repeatedly held that street vending is a 'legitimate' occupation protected under Article 19 of the Constitution, while making it clear that it can be regulated in the public interest.

Those judgments were born out of a recurring pattern – municipal bodies and police evicting vendors, mostly without notice, reducing years of livelihoods to rubble overnight.

The Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act, 2014, was enacted to end such arbitrary removals by laying down the process for regulating street vending.

Contrary to popular perception, the Act is neither an anti-encroachment law nor one that gives vendors an unrestricted right over public spaces.



In Bengaluru, corporations started removing vendors before putting in place the mechanism through which the Act is meant to work. K. MURALI KUMAR

Instead, it seeks to balance two competing rights – the public's right to safe, obstruction-free footpaths and a street vendor's right to earn a livelihood. It lays down a step-by-step process that every city is expected to follow before deciding who can vend, where they can vend and when they can be removed or relocated.

What process does the Act prescribe before vendors can be removed?

The first step is the constitution of a Town Vending Committee (TVC), the backbone of the law.

The committee includes officials, police, planning authorities, resident representatives and street vendors themselves, who must make up at least 40% of its members, with representation for women and other marginalised communities. The idea is that decisions affecting vendors should not be taken without vendors having a seat at the table. Every subsequent step is expected to flow

through this committee.

Once the committee is constituted, the Act requires it to survey all street vendors. The survey is meant to identify existing vendors before the authorities decide who can continue vending and under what conditions.

Moreover, the Act protects existing vendors during this process. It states that no street vendor should be evicted or relocated until the survey has been completed and Certificates of Vending have been issued. The protection was built into the law to prevent exactly the kind of arbitrary removals that had prompted its enactment.

Once the survey is completed, eligible vendors are issued a Certificate of Vending. It is official permission to vend at a specified location and under specified conditions. The certificate does not give a vendor ownership over public land. It only recognises the right to vend in accordance with the Act.

The Act does not prohibit the removal

of street vendors. It only requires that such action follow the process laid down under the law.

Why has Bengaluru's footpath drive come under scrutiny?

In Bengaluru, corporations started removing vendors before putting in place the mechanism through which the Act is meant to work.

Although Karnataka Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar later promised relocation, the Act requires a TVC to identify vending and no-vending zones. Bengaluru does not have one.

While the Karnataka government acted on the Supreme Court's recognition of pedestrians' right to safe footpaths, the Street Vendors Act makes it equally clear that reclaiming those footpaths cannot become a justification for bypassing the safeguards enacted to protect street vendors' livelihoods. That balance, not the primacy of one right over the other, is the very foundation of the law.

THE GIST

▼ The Street Vendors Act, 2014, was enacted to regulate street vending by balancing pedestrians' right to safe, obstruction-free footpaths with street vendors' right to livelihood, while preventing arbitrary evictions.

▼ The Act requires authorities to constitute a Town Vending Committee, conduct surveys, issue Certificates of Vending and identify vending and no-vending zones before vendors are removed or relocated.

Key Questions & Strategic Insights

1. Why was the Street Vendors Act, 2014 Enacted?

- **Constitutional Basis:** The Supreme Court has repeatedly affirmed that street vending is a legitimate business activity protected under **Article 19(1)(g)** of the Constitution, subject to reasonable restrictions under Article 19(6).

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Daily News Analysis

- **Ending Arbitrary Evictions:** Historically, municipal authorities and police used anti-encroachment drives to forcibly clear vendors without prior notice. The 2014 Act was enacted to create a structured framework that regulates street vending without destroying livelihoods.
- **Dual Objective:** The law balances two competing interests: the pedestrian's right to walk safely and the vendor's right to earn a living.

2. What Process Does the Act Prescribe Before Vendors Can Be Removed?

- **Establishment of Town Vending Committees (TVC):** The TVC acts as the primary decision-making body. The Act mandates that **at least 40% of TVC members must be elected representatives of street vendors**, along with municipal officials, police, urban planners, and local resident welfare associations (RWAs).
- **Comprehensive Vending Survey:** The TVC must conduct a spatial survey of all existing street vendors across the urban local body (ULB).
- **Issuance of Certificate of Vending (CoV):** Eligible vendors identified in the survey receive a CoV specifying designated vending zones, timings, and operational conditions.
- **Prohibition on Pre-Survey Eviction:** Section 3(3) of the Act explicitly prohibits the eviction or relocation of any street vendor until the survey is completed and certificates of vending are issued.

3. Why Has Bengaluru's Footpath Drive Come Under Scrutiny?

- **Procedural Violations:** The drive initiated by the local corporations executed large-scale vendor removals prior to constituting functional, representative TVCs or completing comprehensive surveys.
- **Bypassing Statutory Protections:** Relocation promises offered post-eviction contradict the statutory sequence, which mandates identifying vending and non-vending zones before any eviction or clearing takes place.
- **Misinterpreting Judicial Directives:** Using judicial emphasis on pedestrian rights to justify bypassing statutory safeguards undermines the legislative balance established by Parliament in 2014.

Related Static Dimensions & UPSC Relevance

1. GS Paper II: Polity, Governance, and Social Justice

- **Fundamental Rights (Articles 19 & 21):** Harmonizing the right to carry on any occupation (19(1)(g)) with the right to life, safe environment, and mobility (Article 21).
- **Urban Local Bodies (74th Constitutional Amendment Act):** Role of ULBs in urban management, spatial planning, and social welfare delivery.

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- **Statutory Compliance & Administrative Law:** Accountability of municipal authorities to adhere to statutory procedures rather than relying on executive summaries or arbitrary drives.

2. GS Paper III: Urbanization, Inclusive Growth, and Economic Security

- **Informal Economy Integration:** Informal vending supports urban supply chains and low-cost retail access. Arbitrary evictions deepen urban poverty and informal economic instability.
- **Urban Infrastructure Planning:** Integrating non-motorized transport (NMT) corridors, pedestrian pathways, and designated vending zones directly into master plans.

Analytical Overview & Policy Takeaways

Core Principles for Sustainable Urban Footpaths

- **Process-Driven Relocation:** Evictions must remain the absolute last resort, permitted only after a completed TVC survey, public notification, and designated alternative space allocation.
- **Inclusive Urban Design:** Footpath design must accommodate complete street standards (clear walking zones, street furniture zones, and designated micro-vending bays) rather than treating footpaths purely as transit channels.
- **Strengthening Local Institutions:** Municipalities must operationalize TVCs with proper funding, digital mapping (GIS-based vendor tagging), and regular elections to prevent ad-hoc administrative measures.

Conclusion

Reclaiming urban footpaths does not require the exclusion of street vendors, nor does protecting livelihoods justify chaotic pedestrian spaces. The Street Vendors Act, 2014 provides a balanced mechanism to resolve this friction through participatory governance, surveys, and spatial planning. Cities like Bengaluru must align their urban clearance drives with statutory frameworks to build urban environments that are both pedestrian-friendly and socio-economically inclusive.

UPSC Mains Exam Study Questions

Ques: Explain the significance of the informal economy in India's urban economy. (10 Marks, 150 Words)

Page 10 : GS II : Indian Polity / Preliminary Examination

The right to peaceful protest is an essential cornerstone of a functional democracy, serving as a vital channel for citizens to express dissent, demand institutional accountability, and engage in public discourse. However, maintaining public order requires balancing this fundamental right against the state's duty to protect public safety and prevent disruption. Recent events—where demonstrations at designated protest sites faced police crackdowns, tear gas, lathi charges, and internet shutdowns—highlight the delicate constitutional balance between citizen rights under **Article 19** and the operational limits of state police powers under the **BNS**.

The right to protest and the limits of police power

What the Constitution, the BNS and court rulings say about regulating demonstrations and the use of force

Devvanshi Bihani

The story so far:

People from across the country gathered at Jantar Mantar in central Delhi on July 20 for the Cockroach Janta Party's (CJP) "Chalo Sansad" march, carrying placards demanding reforms in the National Testing Agency (NTA) and the resignation of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan. Within hours, the demonstration descended into clashes. Police used tear gas and lathi charges to disperse protesters attempting to march towards Parliament. Tear gas enveloped parts of the protest route as demonstrators ran to escape the crackdown. Several nearby Metro stations were temporarily closed, and many demonstrators reported losing mobile connectivity during the march, making communication and coordination difficult.

The incident has again brought an old question into focus: how should a democracy police public protest?

Is the right to protest absolute?

The Constitution guarantees citizens the right to assemble peacefully under Article 19(1)(b). But that right is subject to "reasonable restrictions" under Article 19(3) in the interests of public order, the sovereignty and integrity of India, and other constitutionally recognised grounds. In practice, these restrictions are implemented through laws governing public order and policing.

The legal authority to regulate protests, however, comes from a range of statutes.

Was the CJP march unlawful?

Whether a protest is "unlawful" is a legal question that depends on the facts and circumstances of each case. Under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), an assembly of five or more persons becomes an unlawful assembly only if its common object falls within specific categories, such as using criminal force, resisting the execution of law, committing an offence, or compelling another person by force or threat. A gathering that begins lawfully may also become unlawful if its

conduct changes over the course of the event.

Ahead of the march, Delhi Police said the CJP had not sought permission for a procession to Parliament. It also pointed to prohibitory orders issued under Section 163 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNS), which barred protests, marches and demonstrations in the New Delhi district, except at the designated Jantar Mantar protest site with prior permission. As demonstrators attempted to march towards Parliament, officers stopped the procession and eventually used tear gas and lathi charges to disperse the crowd. The authorities' response has since come under judicial scrutiny, with the Delhi High Court seeking responses from the Centre and the Delhi Police on petitions alleging police brutality and excessive use of force.

What standards govern police action?

The National Human Rights Commission's Manual on Human Rights for Police Officers emphasises that effective policing and respect for human rights are

complementary rather than conflicting objectives.

It states that "A democratic country like India needs democratic policing, which is based on the idea of the police as protectors of the rights of citizens and the rule of law, while ensuring the safety and security of all equally." The manual also notes that human rights violations by police can have "a multi-dimensional impact" by eroding public confidence, bringing institutions into disrepute and "even escalating civil unrest at times."

The principles are consistent with the UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms, which require force to be lawful, necessary and proportionate.

When can police use force?

Under the BNS, an Executive Magistrate or an authorised police officer may order an unlawful assembly, or an assembly likely to disturb public peace, to disperse. If the assembly does not comply, the law permits it to be dispersed by force.

The Code of Conduct for the Police in India states that police should, as far as practicable, "use the methods of persuasion, advice and warning. When the application of force becomes inevitable, only the irreducible minimum force required in the circumstances should be used." Beyond the use of force itself, the protests also raised questions about police accountability after videos appeared to show some police personnel without visible name tags or with their faces covered. While the BNS requires every police officer arresting to bear an

accurate, visible and clear identification of his or her name, it contains no corresponding requirement for police personnel engaged in crowd-control or the dispersal of assemblies.

How has the Supreme Court viewed protests?

A day after the clashes, a lawyer urged the Supreme Court to take *suo motu* cognisance of the alleged police excesses, citing videos circulating online. Chief Justice of India Surya Kant orally declined the request, saying, "We are not interested in videos... Don't waste our [court's] time, and don't waste your time."

Over the years, however, the Supreme Court has repeatedly laid down principles governing both the right to protest and the limits of police action.

In *Anita Thakur v. State of Jammu & Kashmir* (2016), the court held that the use of excessive force violates fundamental rights and awarded compensation to the injured protesters, emphasising that police action must remain reasonable and accountable.

More recently, in *Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan v. Union of India* (2018), the court reiterated that while authorities may regulate demonstrations to maintain public order, they cannot extinguish the right to protest altogether. In *Amit Sahni v. Commissioner of Police* (2020), arising from the Shaheen Bagh protests, it affirmed that dissent is a constitutional right but cannot result in the indefinite occupation of public spaces.

Key Questions & Strategic Insights

1. Is the Right to Protest Absolute Under the Constitution?

- **Constitutional Guarantee:** Article 19(1)(b) guarantees all citizens the right to assemble peaceably and without arms.
- **Reasonable Restrictions:** Under Article 19(3), this right is not absolute and is subject to reasonable restrictions imposed by law in the interests of:
 - The sovereignty and integrity of India.
 - Public order.

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- **Judicial Synthesis:** The Supreme Court in *Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan v. Union of India* (2018) ruled that while demonstration rights can be regulated to prevent public disorder, regulatory measures cannot be used to extinguish the right to protest altogether.

2. When Does an Assembly Become "Unlawful"?

- **BNS Provisions:** Under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), an assembly of five or more persons becomes an unlawful assembly only if its shared objective involves specific unlawful acts, such as:
 - Overawing the government or public servants by criminal force.
 - Resisting the execution of any law or legal process.
 - Committing criminal trespass or other offences.
 - Using force or threats to compel any person to do or abstain from doing any act.
- **Dynamic Status:** A gathering that begins as a peaceful and lawful assembly can legally transition into an "unlawful assembly" if its collective conduct changes during the demonstration.

3. Statutory Authority and Restrictions Under BNSS

- **Prohibitory Orders:** Section 163 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS) allows Executive Magistrates or designated police authorities to issue orders barring assemblies in specific districts to prevent imminent public nuisance or danger.
- **Use of Force:** Under the BNSS, an Executive Magistrate or authorized police officer may command an unlawful assembly to disperse. If the assembly refuses to comply, police are authorized to disperse it using necessary force.
- **Principle of Minimum Force:** Police regulations and the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) manual mandate that police must prioritize methods of persuasion, advice, and warning. When force is unavoidable, officers must use only the **irreducible minimum force** required.

4. Police Identification and Accountability Gaps

- **Arrest vs. Crowd Control:** While the BNSS explicitly requires police officers making arrests to wear clear, accurate, and visible identification, there is an administrative and legal gap regarding explicit statutory mandates for visible name tags or exposed faces for personnel deployed exclusively for crowd control during demonstrations.

Related Static Dimensions & UPSC Relevance

1. GS Paper II: Indian Constitution, Polity, and Governance

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- **Fundamental Rights (Articles 19 & 21):** Interpretation of reasonable restrictions under Article 19(3) and procedural due process under Article 21 during police actions.
- **Key Supreme Court Precedents:**
 - **Anita Thakur v. State of J&K (2016):** Excessive or unprovoked police force violates fundamental rights; courts can award monetary compensation to victims of police excesses.
 - **Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan v. UOI (2018):** Mandated a balanced approach between civic rights to demonstrate and local residents' right to a hassle-free life.
 - **Amit Sahni v. Commissioner of Police (2020 - Shaheen Bagh Case):** Upheld that while dissent is a constitutional right, protests cannot lead to the indefinite occupation of public roads and commons.
- **Role of Human Rights Commissions:** Mandate of the NHRC and State Human Rights Commissions (SHRCs) in monitoring democratic policing standards and investigating custodial or police excesses.

2. GS Paper III: Internal Security and Police Reforms

- **Crowd Control & Public Order Management:** Modernizing police equipment, adopting non-lethal technologies, and implementing training focused on de-escalation tactics.
- **Padmanabhaiah Committee & Prakash Singh Judgement:** Principles of democratic policing, separating investigation from law & order maintenance, and enforcing police accountability mechanisms.

Analytical Synthesis & Way Forward

- **Adherence to International & National Standards:** Police actions during public assemblies should align with the UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms, ensuring that any force used remains **lawful, necessary, and strictly proportionate**.
- **Clear Protocol on Police Identification:** Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) should mandate visible identification tags for all law enforcement personnel managing public protests to ensure accountability and prevent impunity.
- **Proportionate Administrative Actions:** Disruption of communication networks (internet shutdowns) or widespread closure of transit infrastructure (e.g., Metro stations) during peaceful protests must pass the **proportionality test** laid down by the Supreme Court in Anuradha Bhasin v. Union of India (2020).

Conclusion

Democratic policing requires viewing law enforcement as protectors of constitutional rights rather than merely agents of state control. While municipal and police authorities possess valid powers under the BNSS to prevent public disorder and keep essential transportation open, these powers must be exercised within strict constitutional parameters. Upholding democratic

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governance requires preserving space for peaceful dissent while ensuring that any police intervention strictly adheres to necessity, proportionality, and legal accountability.

UPSC Prelims Exam Study Questions

Ques: Consider the following statements regarding peaceful protest—

1. Article 19(1)(b) grants citizens the right to assemble peaceably and without arms.
2. Under Article 19(3), reasonable restrictions can be imposed on this right in the interest of public order.
3. This right is absolute and cannot be restricted under any circumstances.

Select the correct answer—

- (a) Only 1 and 2
- (b) Only 2 and 3
- (c) Only 1 and 3
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Ans:a)

UPSC Mains Exam Study Questions

Ques: Explain the constitutional basis for the right to peaceful protest in the Constitution of India.(10 Marks, 150 Words)

Warning signals for India from NATO's Ankara summit

The heads of state or government of the 32 countries that are politico-military allies under the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) met in Ankara, Türkiye, on July 7-8, 2026 for what is called the Ankara Summit. Their stated objective was to review progress made since the 2025 Summit in The Hague and to set out a roadmap for continuing delivery on NATO's key objectives.

The gathering in Ankara is being regarded as one of NATO's more successful summits, despite the abrasive presence of United States President Donald Trump, who devoted most of his speaking time to extolling the putative success of U.S. strategy and talking up the superiority of American weapons systems.

A strategic road map

Four substantive commitments came out of Ankara. First, the 32 NATO allies – too often divided by divergent objectives and capacities – agreed on their “ironclad commitment to (their) collective defence under Article 5 of the Washington Treaty, and to the transatlantic bond”; second, the unanimous endorsement of “The Hague defence commitment”, in which all NATO members undertook last year to allocate at least five per cent of their respective Gross Domestic Products (GDPs) on defence by 2035 – an unprecedented hike over the two per cent spending pledge that existed earlier. Third, NATO declared its “unwavering support for Ukraine in defending its freedom, sovereignty and territorial integrity”, and fourth, the alliance partners vowed to build a high technology, high capacity, Europe-wide defence industrial base (DIB) – the term for the network of firms, factories, laboratories and skilled workers needed to build and sustain a country's military power.

The focus in Ankara was overwhelmingly on implementation – turning political commitments into military capability through investment, industrial capacity and innovation.



Ajai Shukla

Former Indian Army officer (colonel), who now analyses issues and events relating to defence

Europe's defence revival and commitments may create new challenges for India's defence needs

Russia accuses the U.S. and European democracies of unbridled expansionism, through NATO's progressive incorporation of East and Central European countries. These include Poland, Romania, the Baltic states, and former Soviet republics that Moscow has historically regarded as lying within its sphere of influence. Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 was driven in part by the fear that Kyiv was inching towards joining the Atlantic alliance, a step that would have increased NATO's numbers from just 12 countries at its founding in 1949 to 31 now. The Russian invasion effectively blocked Ukraine, but spooked historically neutral Finland and Sweden into abandoning nonalignment and becoming NATO's 31st and 32nd members.

NATO's transformations

NATO, however, sees itself not as expansionist, but as merely adapting to Europe's changing strategic landscape. In 1990-91, with the relatively peaceful ending of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, NATO shifted its focus to out of area operations in theatres such as the Balkans. After the 9/11 strikes in 2001 on the World Trade Center towers, NATO made another strategic shift, joining the Global War on Terror. Now, with Russia and China joining hands in a new era of superpower confrontation, NATO is adapting once again.

It was evident from the discussions at the Ankara Summit that Europe has prioritised the revitalisation of its DIB. The European defence industry was struggling to scale up production even before the five per cent defence spending pledge at The Hague. European defence industry giants, MBDA and Rheinmetall, have warned of shortages in ammunition production.

Operation Epic Fury, the U.S.-Israel bombing campaign against Iran, illustrates the inevitability of weapons and ammunition shortages when Asian allies' demands for U.S. weaponry compete with ongoing European needs. The U.S. has fired

more than 850 Tomahawk cruise missiles at Iran during this campaign. At the current production rate of 85 per year, replacing these would take a decade.

Many NATO members have capable defence industrial bases, but there is little coordination of alliance-wide priorities. The resulting strategic mismatch has been found during the Ukraine war to cluster in the critical categories of air defence missiles and interceptors, precision guided munitions, and artillery rockets. While the U.S. decision to allow Ukraine to produce Patriot air defence systems under licence is a strong signal of support to Ukraine, more needs to be done.

Without a major revitalisation of Europe's defence industry, NATO's five per cent pledge will only deepen its dependency on the U.S. Half of Europe's defence spending between 2022-2024, came from the U.S., up from 28% in 2019-2021. Foreign Military Sales notifications to the U.S. Congress for European customers have quadrupled since 2008 to \$76 billion in 2024.

Need for self-reliance

For the world's big arms buyers and especially for India, this spike in European demand is bad news. As NATO spends more, the international arms bazaar is shifting inexorably from a buyers' market to a sellers' market. The first sign of this was the delay by U.S. firm General Electric Aerospace in supplying India with F-404 fighter jet engines, which are critically needed for the Indian Air Force's Tejas light combat aircraft programme.

Looking ahead, as India's defence increasingly relies on new-age defence technologies and weaponry, such as drones, artificial intelligence, cyber and electronic warfare and resilient networks, it will become critical for its defence industry to achieve self-reliance in these technology realms, rather than relying on overstretched suppliers who have their own battles to fight.

GS Paper II: International Relations

UPSC Mains Exam Practice Questions: Provide a brief analysis of NATO's evolving nature and its impact on the global security architecture. (10Marks, 150 Words)

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Context :

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) summit in Ankara represents a major turning point in global security architecture. As the politico-military alliance adapts to an era of multi-theater confrontation—marked by the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict, tensions in West Asia, and growing Sino-Russian strategic alignment—NATO members are transitioning from peace-dividend budgeting to war-footing preparedness. For India, which remains one of the world's largest importers of defense equipment, this shift in Western defense industrial priorities poses critical challenges. It threatens to squeeze global arms supply chains, delay key defense modernization programs, and heighten the urgency of achieving genuine indigenous defense capacity.

Key Highlights & Core Analysis

1. Four Pillar Commitments at Ankara

- **Ironclad Collective Defense:** Reaffirmation of Article 5 of the Washington Treaty, anchoring the transatlantic security bond amidst global volatility.
- **The Hague Defense Commitment Scaling:** Unanimous commitment to raise national defense allocations to **at least 5% of GDP by 2035**, moving far beyond the legacy 2% benchmark.
- **Long-Term Support for Ukraine:** Strategic backing for Kyiv's sovereignty, including industrial licensing agreements (e.g., local manufacturing of Patriot air defense interceptors).
- **Consolidation of a Transatlantic Defense Industrial Base (DIB):** Building a high-technology, interconnected European defense manufacturing network to sustain high-intensity, prolonged conflicts.

2. The Global Defense Industrial Crunch

- **Sellers' Market Transition:** The explosion in European defense orders (Foreign Military Sales from the U.S. to Europe quadrupled to \$76 billion) has shifted the global arms bazaar from a buyers' market to a sellers' market.
- **Ammunition & Munitions Bottlenecks:** Major European defense primes (such as MBDA and Rheinmetall) face severe capacity constraints in scaling up production of artillery shells, precision-guided munitions (PGMs), and air defense interceptors.
- **Resource Diversion Across Theaters:** Simultaneous demand surges—including U.S.-led operations in West Asia using hundreds of standoff weapons like Tomahawk cruise missiles—are rapidly exhausting Western precision weapon stockpiles.

Strategic Takeaways & Warning Signals for India

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- **Import Delays and Squeezed Delivery Timelines:** As Western defense firms prioritize NATO allies and active conflict zones, Indian defense procurement faces severe timeline slippages. A prominent early indicator is the supply delay of General Electric GE-F404 engines critical for the Tejas Light Combat Aircraft (LCA Mk-1A) program.
- **Risk of Technological Isolation:** With NATO members tightening control over dual-use technologies, critical components, and advanced metallurgy to satisfy domestic DIB needs, tech-transfer options for non-aligned nations may shrink.
- **Vulnerability in Emerging Tech Arenas:** Modern warfare increasingly relies on software-defined networks, AI integration, electronic warfare (EW), autonomous drones, and counter-UAS systems. Dependence on foreign original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) for these volatile, high-attribution technologies introduces significant strategic operational risks.
- **Urgency for Genuine Aatmanirbhar Bharat:** Incremental assembly under license is insufficient. India must establish end-to-end design, development, and manufacturing ecosystems within domestic private and public defense sectors.

Related Static Dimensions & UPSC Relevance

1. GS Paper II: International Relations & Global Geopolitics

- **Evolution & Expansion of NATO:** Transition of NATO from a Cold War containment tool to out-of-area operations (Balkans, Global War on Terror) and now back to major-power containment (Russia-China axis).
- **Strategic Autonomy & Multi-Alignment:** India's balancing act between Western security partnerships (Quad, iCET) and legacy defense linkages with Russia in a friction-filled global environment.
- **Global Commons & Multilateral Alliances:** Impact of European militarization on the security architecture of the Indo-Pacific.

2. GS Paper III: Security, Defense Technology & Indigenization

- **Indigenization of Technology & Aatmanirbhar Bharat in Defense:** Performance of Defense Public Sector Undertakings (DPSUs), positive indigenization lists, and the role of the Innovations for Defence Excellence (iDEX) framework.
- **Supply Chain Vulnerabilities in National Security:** Risks associated with foreign critical component dependencies (e.g., jet engines, semiconductor chips for guidance systems, specialized sensors).
- **Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA):** The rise of attrition warfare, autonomous systems, AI, cyber warfare, and high-volume precision munitions in contemporary conflict zones.

Analytical Synthesis & Strategic Way Forward

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- **Accelerate Domestic Jet Engine & Critical Component Development:** Prioritize national mission-mode projects for indigenous jet propulsion (e.g., Gas Turbine Research Establishment initiatives and joint development partnerships with domestic intellectual property retention).
- **Expand Civil-Military Industrial Synergy:** Leverage India's commercial tech, automotive, and software capabilities to scale up the domestic production of drones, electronic warfare suites, and cyber-defense systems.
- **Stockpile & Build Strategic Munitions Reserves:** Develop long-term, high-volume domestic manufacturing pipelines for precision ammunition, artillery shells, and air defense missiles to withstand supply chain disruptions during crises.
- **Focus on Co-Development Over Off-the-Shelf Buying:** Shift foreign defense acquisitions strictly toward joint R&D and complete technology transfers rather than plain off-the-shelf imports or simple knock-down assembly models.

Conclusion

NATO's Ankara Summit serves as a clear warning signal that global defense supply lines are being reoriented toward Western allies and active conflict theaters. For India, relying on external OEMs for frontline military hardware is no longer just expensive—it presents a direct vulnerability to national security. To maintain its strategic autonomy and operational readiness, New Delhi must double down on true defense indigenization, turning technological self-reliance from a policy goal into an urgent national security imperative.

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