

The Hindu Important News Articles For UPSC CSE

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Page 01 :GS II :Governance / Preliminary Examination

In response to widespread public outrage and administrative fallouts over high-stakes national paper leaks—such as the NEET-UG examination—the Union Government has constituted a high-powered, technology-driven task force led by former UIDAI chairman Nandan Nilekani. This initiative, paired with leadership transitions in the Ministry of Education, aims to restore institutional trust, overhaul the operational framework of the National Testing Agency (NTA), and integrate robust technological safeguards into the national examination infrastructure.

Nilekani to lead task force on exams: Modi

Will recommend steps to secure exam system; former ISRO Chairman is among the members

Pralhad Joshi takes charge as Education Minister, chairs meeting to review the Ministry's initiatives

This is only an attempt to fix the Pradhan Mantri's compromised image, says Cong.'s Jairam Ramesh

Nistula Hebbar
Maitri Porecha
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday announced the constitution of a high-powered task force, to be headed by former UIDAI Chairman Nandan Nilekani, to recommend steps to make the country's examination system leak-proof and technology-driven.

The announcement came a day after former Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan resigned following widespread protests over the NEET paper leak and subsequent re-examination.

Meanwhile, Union Minister Pralhad Joshi on Sunday officially took charge of the Ministry of Education at Kartavya Bhavan.

Mr. Joshi, who also holds the portfolios of Consumer Affairs, Food and

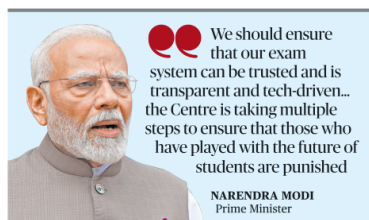
Public Distribution, and New and Renewable Energy, chaired a meeting of the Ministry to review the implementation of various schemes and other initiatives.

"We should ensure that our exam system can be trusted, and is transparent, and tech-driven. Under the leadership of renowned technology expert Nandan Nilekani, a high-powered task force will be formed, which will focus on exam reforms," the Prime Minister said in a video posted on Instagram.

'Compromised image'

"The Centre is taking multiple steps to ensure that those who have played with the future of students are punished. We have already announced the formation of fast-track courts. We are bringing a stringent law in Parliament on Monday," he said.

Responding to the an-



Nandan Nilekani has worked with Union govt. in the past to set up the Aadhaar ecosystem and UPI

ouncement, Congress general secretary (communications) Jairam Ramesh said the Centre was yet to implement the K. Radhakrishnan Committee's 101 recommendations after the 2024 examination leaks.

"This is ultimately only

a high-powered attempt to fix the Pradhan Mantri's irretrievably compromised image," he said on X.

The multidisciplinary panel of domain experts will help revamp the National Testing Agency's examination system, especially from a technology perspective, sources said, adding the committee under Mr. Nilekani will consist of former ISRO Chairman S. Somanath; former IB Director Tapan Deka; IIT-Madras Director V. Kamakoti; former Education

Rahul questions Shah over 'barbaric assault' in Delhi

Sandeep Phukan
NEW DELHI

Seeking accountability for the "barbaric assault" on students during the march in Delhi on July 20, Rahul

Gandhi has asked the Home Minister whether he had authorised the use of "lethal force".

FULL REPORT ON
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Secretary Anita Karwal, and logistics expert Amrit Lal Meena.

Mr. Nilekani has worked with the Union Government in the past to set up the Aadhaar ecosystem and Unified Payments Interface (UPI).

Joshi takes charge

He is also the chairperson of the governing body of the economic policy research think tank the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) and a co-founder

of Infosys.

After assuming charge of the Education Ministry, Mr. Joshi told media persons, "The Prime Minister has entrusted me with this responsibility with full confidence. I was in Karnataka yesterday. I reached here last night and came this morning to take charge. I have assumed charge."

"I am reviewing all the details here and the decisions that need to be taken. I have been gathering information and trying to un-

derstand the functioning of the Ministry. We had continuous meetings today. This is a new subject for me. I have taken charge today and held detailed discussions with the senior officers. It is a very big Department, so I will speak to you in detail after I have understood it completely," Mr. Joshi stated.

Union Minister of State for Education Jayant Chaudhary attended the meeting. Officials said Mr. Joshi reviewed key schemes, including Samagra Shiksha, PM-SHRI Schools and PM POSHAN, and discussed school infrastructure.

Higher Education Department secretary, School Education and Literacy Department secretary and other senior officials of the Ministry were present at the meeting.

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Key Mandate of the High-Powered Task Force

The multidisciplinary task force brings together leadership from technology, space science, intelligence, academia, and civil service (including former ISRO Chairman S. Somanath, former IB Director Tapan Deka, and IIT-Madras Director V. Kamakoti).

- **Tech-Driven Integrity:** Leverage digital security, end-to-end encryption, and automated tracking to insulate question paper delivery systems from manual intervention.
- **Systemic Restructuring of NTA:** Evaluate structural vulnerabilities in how national-level competitive tests are designed, stored, distributed, and evaluated.
- **Inter-Agency Synergies:** Integrate intelligence inputs and logistical security models to prevent organized cheating syndicates from compromising physical or digital test centers.

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- **Legislative Framework:** Complement the reform process with fast-track courts and strict anti-cheating legislation to ensure deterrence.

Critical Analysis & Governance Challenges

A. Systemic Issues in High-Stakes Examinations

- **Centralization Risks:** Over-reliance on a single agency (NTA) creates single-point operational vulnerabilities. When a system managing millions of candidates fails, the systemic impact is nationwide.
- **Private Vendor Dependency:** Outsourcing logistics, exam centers, and invigilation to third-party private vendors often creates weak security links.
- **Commercialization & Exam Pressure:** The multi-billion-dollar coaching industry increases the financial incentive for paper leaks and organized malpractice.

B. Political & Policy Concerns

- **Implementation Gap:** Opposition leadership has pointed to non-implementation of previous committee reports (such as the K. Radhakrishnan Committee's 101 recommendations), highlighting that forming new committees without enforcing existing recommendations risks being perceived as symbolic policy-making.
- **Administrative Continuity:** Leadership turnover in the Education Ministry during crisis management can lead to institutional delays if strategic clarity is not maintained.

Strategic Roadmap for Exam Reforms

- **End-to-End Encrypted Digital Paper Delivery:** Transition from physical printing and transit of paper sets to encrypted digital delivery direct to test centers moments before commencement.
- **Biometric & AI-Based Invigilation:** Deploy AI-assisted monitoring to eliminate proxy candidates, impersonation, and localized center collusion.
- **Tiered Testing Architecture:** Decentralize or stagger massive single-day examinations to minimize single-day operational bottlenecks.
- **Strict Legal Deterrence:** Enforce the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act strictly, backed by dedicated fast-track courts to ensure swift prosecution.
- **Strengthening Institutional Capacity:** Upgrade NTA's internal technical expertise to reduce complete reliance on third-party vendors for critical operational legs.

Related Static Dimensions

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- **Administrative Reforms Commission (2nd ARC):** Recommendations on transparency, accountability, and citizen trust in public service institutions.
- **Fundamental Rights (Article 14 & 21):** Ensuring equality of opportunity in public education and safeguarding the fundamental right to life and livelihood of millions of students affected by compromised exams.
- **Digital India & Governance:** Utilization of technology frameworks (building on lessons from Aadhaar, UPI, and Digilocker) to create unalterable digital audit trails for public administration.

Conclusion

Restoring public trust in national competitive examinations requires moving beyond temporary political crisis management to long-term structural reform. While technology-driven solutions spearheaded by experts can effectively minimize human vulnerabilities, technology alone is not a panacea. A robust legal framework, strict oversight of private partners, and timely implementation of expert panel recommendations are essential to safeguard the integrity of India's education system and protect the aspirations of its youth.

UPSC Mains Practice Questions

Question: "The integrity of public examinations is fundamental to ensuring equality of opportunity in a democracy." Critically examine the statement in the context of recent paper leak incidents in India. **(10 Marks, 150 Words)**

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The Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO) recently granted market authorization to **Qdenga (TAK-003)**, a live-attenuated tetravalent vaccine manufactured by Takeda, making it India's first approved dengue vaccine. While the vaccine promises protection against all four dengue virus serotypes (DENV-1 to DENV-4) for individuals aged 4–60 years, phase-3 clinical trial data highlights a significant safety caveat. For dengue-naïve (seronegative) recipients—particularly young children—the vaccine may act as a primary infection, paradoxically increasing the risk of severe dengue via **Antibody-Dependent Enhancement (ADE)** upon subsequent exposure to specific serotypes like DENV-3.

Immunological Mechanism: Serotypes & ADE

- **Prevalence of Four Serotypes:** Dengue is caused by four distinct viral serotypes (DENV-1, DENV-2, DENV-3, DENV-4), all of which circulate in India. Exposure to one serotype imparts lifelong immunity against that specific serotype only, but offers short-lived cross-protection against others.
- **Seropositive vs. Seronegative Status:**
 - **Seropositive:** An individual who has experienced a natural dengue infection and carries specific anti-DENV antibodies.
 - **Seronegative:** An individual who has never been exposed to a dengue infection and lacks pre-existing antibodies.
- **Antibody-Dependent Enhancement (ADE):**
 - When a seronegative individual experiences a second natural infection from a different serotype, sub-neutralizing antibodies from the primary infection bind to the new virus without inactivating it.

India's first dengue vaccine arrives with a crucial safety caveat

Qdenga could be responsible for enhancing dengue in children who have not had an infection yet in their lives; in such cases, the vaccine could simulate a primary dengue infection in the body, resulting in protection against DENV-1 and DENV-2 infections but not against a DENV-3 infection

Swaminathan S

India's drug regulator just approved the country's first dengue vaccine, Qdenga. It is designed and claimed to protect against the four serotypes of the dengue-causing virus, called DENV-1 to DENV-4. Young children as well as adults (aged 4-60 years), irrespective of whether they have had dengue before, may be vaccinated with Qdenga.

More than 40 countries have already approved Qdenga, which is manufactured by the Japanese pharmaceutical company Takeda. That said, data from clinical trials that Takeda published in 2019, 2020, and 2024 on the vaccine's effect raise a specific concern about its abilities.

Nationwide dengue vaccines
All the four DENV serotypes are prevalent in India. Each serotype is different from the other such that an immune response to one may not necessarily protect against another. A person who has experienced a natural dengue infection will carry antibodies to the specific DENV serotype in their serum, and the person will be said to be seropositive. A person who has not been exposed to a natural DENV infection will not carry dengue antibodies and is said to be seronegative.

When a seronegative person contracts a first DENV infection for the first time, they will develop antibodies to that particular DENV serotype. When this person, seropositive for that particular DENV serotype, suffers a second infection by another DENV serotype, there is a non-zero chance that they may experience severe dengue. This is because the antibodies produced against the first DENV serotype may actually enhance infection by the second DENV serotype. This is called antibody-dependent enhancement (ADE).

The holy grail of dengue vaccines is to avoid ADE. Any safe and effective vaccine for dengue must be 'tetravalent'—meaning it must target all four DENV serotypes simultaneously and equally. If a dengue vaccine fails to protect against even one serotype, it will keep the door open to ADE in future.

It is quite clear that the efficacy and safety of a dengue vaccine are linked to each other as two sides of the same coin. And Qdenga's phase-3 trial efficacy data need to be understood through this lens.

Phase-3 trial
Takeda set up a large phase-3 trial involving around 20,000 healthy children (4-16 years old) across eight Latin American and Asian countries where dengue is endemic to assess Qdenga's safety and efficacy. The results from this trial were first published in 2019, with additional data published in 2020 and



The efficacy and safety of a dengue vaccine are linked to each other as two sides of the same coin, and Qdenga's phase-3 trial data need to be understood through this lens. GETTY IMAGES

2024. Around two-thirds of the children in the trial received Qdenga while the remaining third received a saline solution. Then the researchers compared the vaccine efficacy between the two groups. The efficacy was defined to mean the ability of Qdenga to prevent dengue infections and resultant hospitalisation.

If the vaccine worked as intended, one would expect fewer cases of dengue in the vaccinated group versus in the unvaccinated group. And this was true. In the vaccinated group, five children out of 1,000 contracted a DENV infection while in the unvaccinated group, 24 children per 1,000 contracted a DENV infection. This translates to an overall efficacy of about 80%.

Overall, Takeda's investigators stratified their participants into seropositive and seronegative groups before administering the vaccine. The efficacy was about 82% and 75% in these two groups, respectively. These seem like solid numbers—but the devil is in the details.

'Variable VI'
If you look at the results stratified by DENV serotype as well, a particularly granular detail, which could actually be a potential safety signal, emerges. In children who were seronegative prior to vaccination, those susceptible to DENV-3 infection were noticeably more numerous in the vaccine group than in the unvaccinated group. In other words, seronegative children vaccinated with

The consequences of contracting a secondary DENV-1 infection by seronegative children cannot be predicted since we do not know of Qdenga's efficacy against DENV-4. In India, the number of such children facing this risk could be very large

Qdenga were 28% more likely to be infected by DENV-1 relative to unvaccinated children.

The number of DENV-4 cases during the trial were so low (in the seropositive group) or totally absent (in the seronegative group) that the efficacy of Qdenga for DENV-4 is essentially unknown. The efficacy was high against DENV-1 and -2, irrespective of the serostatus at baseline.

The investigators had consistently noted these observations in Takeda's 2020 and 2024 papers as well. They also persistently referred to this feature of their vaccine as 'variable VI' against the different serotype' and described it as a 'numerical imbalance' in the number of dengue infections.

The data clearly demonstrate that Qdenga does not offer protection against DENV-3 and could in fact actually be responsible for enhancing dengue in children who have not had a dengue infection yet in their lives. In such cases, Qdenga—being a live dengue vaccine—could simulate a primary dengue

infection in the body, resulting in protection against DENV-1 and DENV-2 infections—but not against a DENV-3 infection.

And if such children were to contract a natural DENV-1 infection, they will have a 28% higher likelihood of falling sick, as this will be a secondary dengue infection linked to potential ADE.

Need for screening
The consequences of contracting a secondary DENV-1 infection by such children cannot be predicted since we do not know of Qdenga's efficacy against DENV-4. At a conservative estimate of 40 million children in India, with only under 30% of them estimated to be seropositive for dengue, the number of seronegative children facing this heightened risk could be very large.

In a paper in *Nature Medicine* on July 25, researchers from Imperial College London modelled the health impact of Qdenga in a population and concluded that it would be safer for seronegative recipients—especially children—to be screened for prior dengue exposure before receiving the shot.

In sum, ignoring the DENV-3 safety signal in seronegative children could be a costly and avoidable mistake, and should be avoided through screening. S. Swaminathan is retired professor of biology from BITS Pilani Hyderabad and a former scientist in the area of dengue vaccination at ICGER, New Delhi. (swm225@gmail.com)

THE GIST

Qdenga is designed and claimed to protect against the four serotypes of the dengue-causing virus, called DENV-1 to DENV-4.

Data from clinical trials that Takeda published in 2019, 2020, and 2024 on the vaccine's efficacy raise a specific concern about its abilities.

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- Instead, these antibody-virus complexes facilitate greater viral entry into immune cells (macrophages), exacerbating viral replication and leading to severe clinical outcomes like Dengue Hemorrhagic Fever (DHF) or Dengue Shock Syndrome (DSS).
- **The "Tetravalent Requirement":** An ideal dengue vaccine must generate simultaneous, equal, and robust protective immunity against all four serotypes. If protection against any single serotype lags, the vaccine acts like a primary natural infection, exposing seronegative recipients to ADE risk upon future exposure.

Phase-3 Clinical Data & Critical Safety Caveats

- **Overall High Efficacy:** Takeda's Phase-3 TIDES trial (~20,000 children aged 4–16 across 8 endemic countries) showed an overall efficacy of ~80% against virologically confirmed dengue, with 82% efficacy in seropositive and 75% in seronegative groups.
- **The DENV-3 Safety Signal (Variable Efficacy):**
 - Stratified trial data revealed that seronegative children vaccinated with Qdenga had a **25% higher likelihood of DENV-3 infection** compared to the unvaccinated control group.
 - Because Qdenga uses a live-attenuated DENV-2 genetic backbone, it effectively protects against DENV-1 and DENV-2, but simulates a primary infection for DENV-3 in dengue-naïve children.
- **DENV-4 Uncertainty:** Trial data regarding DENV-4 efficacy remains inconclusive due to extremely low case numbers among participants, leaving protection levels against this serotype essentially unknown in seronegative populations.
- **Numerical Imbalance & Risk:** Researchers noted this "variable vaccine efficacy" as a potential safety signal that could lead to enhanced disease severity if seronegative recipients encounter natural DENV-3 infections post-vaccination.

Strategic Challenges for Public Health Policy in India

- **Massive Seronegative Child Population:** India has an estimated 40 million children under 16, of whom over 70% are estimated to be seronegative (dengue-naïve). Administering the vaccine without pre-screening places a vast population at risk of secondary-like infection dynamics.
- **Shifting Serotype Dominance:** DENV-2 has historically dominated in India, but DENV-3 cases have been steadily rising. Rollout during a DENV-3-heavy season could lead to poor real-world protection or heightened hospitalizations.

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- **Two-Dose Compliance Risks:** Qdenga requires a 2-dose regimen administered 3 months apart. Incomplete dosing—common among mobile or migrant populations—leaves individuals partially immunized and vulnerable during peak monsoon transmission months.
- **Economic & Accessibility Barriers:** Under Takeda's tiered pricing, private market costs may be prohibitive for vulnerable urban slum populations, where vector breeding and transmission risks are highest.

Key Recommendations & Policy Roadmap

- **Mandatory Pre-Vaccination Screening:** Implement rapid diagnostic antibody testing prior to immunization to restrict Qdenga administration primarily to seropositive individuals, avoiding ADE risks in seronegative children.
- **Comprehensive Post-Marketing Surveillance:** Establish rigorous Phase-IV observational studies and pharmacovigilance tracking across Indian states to monitor real-world serotype-specific breakthrough infections.
- **Price Negotiations & Public Procurement:** Negotiate bulk purchasing agreements to lower per-dose costs, ensuring equitable access under the Universal Immunization Programme (UIP) or targeted state health schemes for high-burden urban zones.
- **Integrated Vector Control Integration:** Frame vaccination as a complementary tool alongside traditional vector management (Aedes mosquito breeding eradication, urban drainage clearing, and public awareness campaigns) rather than a standalone solution.

Related Static Dimensions

- **Biotechnology & Live-Attenuated Vaccines:**
 - Recombinant DNA technology and viral vector backbones (Qdenga utilizes a genetically modified DENV-2 backbone expressing surface proteins of DENV 1–4).
 - Comparative understanding of earlier vaccines like Dengvaxia (Sanofi Pasteur), which faced similar ADE issues in seronegative cohorts in the Philippines.
- **Regulatory Governance & Drug Standards:**
 - Role of the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO) and Drug Controller General of India (DCGI) under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940 and Drugs Rules, 1945.

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- Alignment with World Health Organization (WHO) prequalification standards for global health procurement.

• Constitutional & Legal Mandates:

- **Article 21 (Right to Life & Health):** State obligation to provide safe, effective public healthcare interventions without exposing citizens to avoidable medical risks.
- **Article 47 (Directive Principles of State Policy):** Duty of the State to raise the level of nutrition and the standard of living and to improve public health.

Conclusion

The approval of Qdenga represents a historic technological milestone in India's fight against dengue, a vector-borne disease accounting for nearly one-third of the global burden. However, the lessons of vaccinology—particularly regarding complex multi-serotype pathogens—dictate that efficacy and safety cannot be separated. To prevent a public health misstep, Indian health authorities must adopt a nuanced rollout strategy emphasizing pre-vaccination screening, strict monitoring of circulating viral strains, and sustained vector control. Balancing technological innovation with cautious regulatory oversight remains paramount to safeguarding the health of millions of children across the country.

UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Question: Consider the following statements regarding Dengue virus:

1. Dengue virus has four antigenically distinct serotypes (DENV-1, DENV-2, DENV-3, and DENV-4).
2. Infection with one serotype provides lifelong immunity against all four serotypes.
3. Secondary infection with a different serotype may increase the risk of severe dengue.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Ans: b)

UPSC Mains Practice Questions

Question: Explain the concept of Antibody-Dependent Enhancement (ADE). Why is it significant in the development and deployment of dengue vaccines?(10 Marks, 150 Words)

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In this op-ed, Sam Pitroda conceptualizes the current socio-political juncture in India as the "Indian Monsoon"—a metaphorical democratic season of renewal following periods of accumulated public frustration, student protests over exam integrity, civic agitation (such as Sonam Wangchuk's fast in Ladakh), and parliamentary debates. The article argues that true national progress requires balancing economic and technological advances with constitutional values, ethical governance, and radical institutional responsiveness.

Indian Monsoon: a democratic tipping point

India stands at an important moment in its democratic journey. Large student demonstrations which were demanding fairness in examinations and Sonam Wangchuk's prolonged fast and hospitalisation along with the start of the Monsoon session of Parliament have together captured the nation's attention. These events viewed together tell a larger story. They signal a growing desire and demand among citizens to be heard, to participate, and shape India's democratic future.

This moment can be described as the Indian Monsoon.

Just as the annual monsoon follows months of intense heat, societies too experience seasons when accumulated aspirations, frustrations, and exclusion seek peaceful democratic expression. Such moments should not be feared. They should be welcomed as opportunities for reflection, dialogue, reform and redesign.

On imagining a future

India has much to celebrate. The country has expanded digital public infrastructure, modernised transportation, strengthened financial inclusion, and demonstrated achievements in science, technology, and space. These accomplishments have brought recognition for India.

At the same time, many young Indians worry about the credibility of competitive examinations, access to quality education, and the availability of meaningful employment. Farmers continue to face economic uncertainty and income inequality remains a major concern. Public discourse has become increasingly polarised, with many citizens questioning institutional autonomy, the role of the media, the undermining of civil society, and the quality of democratic debate. These concerns should not be viewed through a partisan lens. They should be understood as democratic signals.

The strength of a democracy is measured not by the absence of



Sam Pitroda

Telecom inventor, entrepreneur, development thinker, and policy maker

Our future depends upon combining technological excellence with constitutional values, scientific temper, ethical leadership, and respect for humanity

criticism but by its willingness to listen and reform.

India's greatest asset has always been its extraordinary diversity – of languages, religions, castes, cultures, traditions, trade, ideas, and aspirations. The Indian Constitution transformed that diversity into the foundation of national unity. It affirmed that justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity are not just abstract ideals but practical principles for governing a vibrant society.

As India moves toward the centenary of its Independence in 2047, there is an opportunity to renew that constitutional promise. The real question is: what kind of India do we want to build for the next generation? Do we aspire merely to become a larger economy, or do we seek to become a more inclusive, more equitable, more scientific, more innovative, more peaceful and compassionate society?

This Monsoon moment calls for a new national agenda.

The government must restore complete confidence in our education and examination systems. It must create millions of meaningful jobs by encouraging decentralisation, district-level development, entrepreneurship, innovation, and local manufacturing. It must also strengthen public healthcare, improve nutrition, low-cost housing, safety, security, schools, vocational training, invest in scientific research, reduce bureaucracy, and expand technology and opportunities for every young Indian, regardless of their background.

Above all, India must prepare for the age of Artificial Intelligence (AI). AI is not simply another technological revolution. It will reshape and redefine work, education, healthcare, agriculture, manufacturing, communities, villages, cities, governance and employment.

India possesses the raw young talent, entrepreneurial spirit, and digital foundation to become a global leader in AI for public good.

Its challenge is to ensure that technology serves every citizen sustainably. No algorithm can replace trust and no AI system can replace human wisdom.

Our future therefore depends upon combining technological excellence with constitutional values, scientific temper, ethical leadership, and respect for humanity.

The idea of India

Perhaps, the greatest challenge before India today is not economic or technological. It is philosophical – the idea of India rooted in our Constitution. That ideology needs to be the core of our development, and the prerequisite for a path to prosperity. For far too long has the world measured success primarily through the pursuit of power and profit. The time has come to rebalance our priorities: to place people and the planet at the centre of development. If we empower every young person, reduce inequality, strengthen democratic institutions, focus on humanity and not religion, and use technology to expand opportunity rather than privilege, India can offer the world a new developmental model – one that combines economic progress with human dignity.

The Indian Monsoon is therefore not a political movement. It is a democratic season of renewal. It reminds us that governments derive strength by listening to their citizens, and that India's greatest achievements have always come when we have chosen dialogue over division.

History will judge us by whether we had the wisdom to listen, the courage to reform, and the imagination to build an India worthy of its civilisational heritage and its democratic promise.

If we seize this moment with humility, confidence and vision, the Indian Monsoon will not merely mark another season of public debate. It will mark the beginning of India's next democratic renaissance.

Core Themes & Structural Pillars

A. "The Indian Monsoon": A Democratic Signal

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- **Peaceful Public Expression:** Public unrest, student demonstrations, and civil society protests should not be viewed as threats or partisan opposition, but as essential democratic feedback mechanisms signaling systemic friction.
- **Paradox of Modern Growth:** While India celebrates achievements in Space, UPI, digital public infrastructure (DPI), and modern transportation, grassroots vulnerabilities persist in education, youth employment, and agrarian stability.

B. Re-defining National Ambition: Growth vs. Development

- **Beyond GDP Metrics:** The piece challenges the paradigm of measuring national success solely by GDP size or economic ranking.
- **People & Planet-Centric Development:** Advocates shifting global and national metrics toward human dignity, environmental sustainability, social harmony, and the reduction of economic inequality.

C. Technology & the Frontier of Artificial Intelligence (AI)

- **Public-Good AI Architecture:** AI must be leveraged not merely for corporate efficiency, but for public welfare—transforming education, healthcare delivery, local manufacturing, and governance.
- **Ethical Guardrails:** Technology must remain subservient to constitutional ideals, human wisdom, and social trust ("No algorithm can replace trust").

Key Challenges Highlighted

- **Institutional Trust & Credibility:** Erosion of faith in high-stakes public examinations, institutional autonomy, civil society space, and parliamentary debate.
- **Socio-Economic Polarization:** Rising income inequality, jobless growth, and hyper-partisan public discourse threatening social cohesion.
- **Centralization vs. Decentralization:** Over-centralized policy models that fail to address hyper-local economic needs at the district or village level.

Strategic Roadmap for Democratic & Economic Renaissance

- **Restoring Exam & Educational Integrity:** Immediate institutional overhaul of testing agencies and educational boards to guarantee fairness and transparency for the youth.
- **Decentralized Economic Engine:** Focus on district-level development, local manufacturing, vocational training, and MSME innovation to generate scalable, meaningful employment.
- **Institutional & Constitutional Renewal:** Re-anchor public administration in the core constitutional principles of Justice, Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity.
- **Fostering Scientific Temper:** Combine technical excellence with critical thinking, ethical leadership, and human-centric governance.

Related Static Dimensions

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- **Preamble & Fundamental Duties:**

- **Article 51A(h):** Duty to develop scientific temper, humanism, and the spirit of inquiry and reform.
- **Preamble Values:** Promoting Fraternity to assure the dignity of the individual and the unity/integrity of the Nation.

- **Democratic Theory & Governance:**

- **Participatory Democracy:** Moving beyond electoral democracy toward continuous citizen engagement, civil society inclusion, and consultative lawmaking.
- **2nd ARC Recommendations:** Emphasizing citizen-centric administration, public trust, and decentralized governance (73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts).

- **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):**

- **SDG 8:** Decent Work and Economic Growth.
- **SDG 10:** Reduced Inequalities.
- **SDG 16:** Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions.

Conclusion

The idea of the "Indian Monsoon" serves as a reminder that democracy thrives on dialogue, dissent, and continuous institutional self-correction. As India marches toward 2047 (the centenary of its Independence), true national strength will be determined not just by economic scale or technological power, but by its capacity to uphold constitutional morality, reduce inequality, and build a compassionate, inclusive society centered on human dignity.

UPSC Prelims Exam Study Questions

Question: Which of the following Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are directly related to inclusive growth and institutional development?

1. SDG 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth
2. SDG 10 – Reduced Inequalities
3. SDG 16 – Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions

Select the correct answer using the code below:

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

Ans:d)

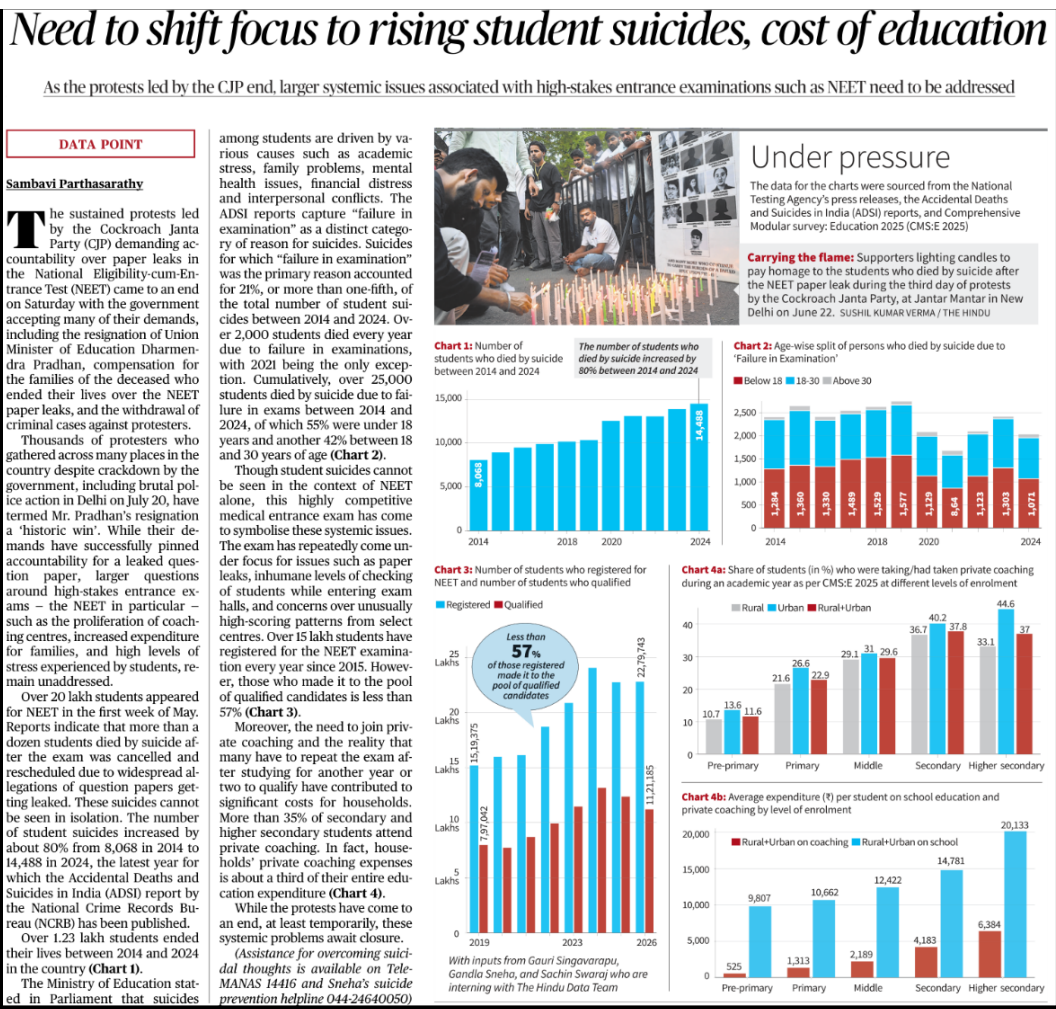
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Con.- 09820971345, 9619071345, 9223209699
G-mail-lakshyaacademymumbai@gmail.com

UPSC Mains Exam Study Questions

Question: Discuss the significance of participatory democracy in strengthening constitutional governance in India. (10 Marks, 150 Words)

Page 09 :GS II :Social Justice

While public protests over paper leaks in competitive examinations like NEET highlight immediate administrative lapses, they reveal a much larger crisis within India's education ecosystem. Beyond the political accountability of paper leaks lies a pervasive structural distress: rising student suicides, exorbitant household expenditure on private coaching, and immense socio-psychological pressure on young aspirants. Addressing these systemic challenges requires moving beyond reactive administrative fixes toward comprehensive reforms in evaluation, mental health support, and education economics.



Key Data Insights & Trends

- **Surge in Student Suicides:**

Add- 21/B, Om Swati Manor Chs, J.K. Sawant Marg, Opp. Shivaji Natyamandir, Behind Cambridge Showroom, Dadar (West) Mumbai - 400028
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G-mail-lakshyaacademymumbai@gmail.com

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- According to National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) Accidental Deaths and Suicides in India (ADSI) reports, student suicides rose by roughly 80% between 2014 and 2024 (increasing from 8,068 to 14,488).
- Cumulative losses exceeded 1.23 lakh students during this ten-year window.

- **Impact of Examination Failures:**

- Direct "failure in examination" accounted for over 21% (more than 25,000 cases) of total student suicides over the decade.
- Over 55% of those who died by suicide due to exam failure were under 18 years of age, and another 42% belonged to the 18–30 age bracket.

- **Low Qualification Ratios in NEET:**

- Over 15 to 20 lakh candidates register for NEET annually, but fewer than 57% qualify, creating hyper-competitive bottlenecks for limited seats.

- **Household Financial Burden:**

- More than 35% of secondary and higher secondary students attend private coaching institutes.
- Coaching expenses account for approximately one-third of a household's total education budget, disproportionately impacting lower- and middle-income families.

Major Systemic Issues Highlighted

- **Hyper-Centralized Single-Window Evaluation:**

- Over-dependence on a single high-stakes exam (like NEET or JEE) creates an "all-or-nothing" scenario for young aspirants, drastically amplifying exam anxiety.

- **Commercialization & Proliferation of Coaching Culture:**

- The mushrooming of coaching hubs (e.g., Kota) has turned education into an industry, promoting rote learning over conceptual understanding while charging exorbitant fees.

- **Repeat Attempts & Economic Strain:**

- The necessity of multi-year drop periods ("repeater batches") increases financial pressure on families and heightens guilt among students if they fail to secure a seat.

- **Inhumane Testing Conditions & Lack of Trust:**

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- Excessive security checks, frequent paper leaks, and scoring anomalies erode institutional trust and demoralize genuine aspirants.
- **Inadequate Institutional Mental Health Support:**
 - Academic institutions often lack dedicated, non-stigmatized psychological counseling services and early-warning systems for vulnerable students.

Strategic Roadmap & Policy Measures

- **Diversifying Entry Pathways:**
 - Transition from single high-stakes exams to multi-stage or continuous assessment frameworks, reducing single-day pressure on students.
- **Strengthening Public Medical & Higher Education:**
 - Substantially increase government investment in public medical seats and higher education infrastructure to narrow the demand-supply gap.
- **Implementing Mental Health Frameworks:**
 - Operationalize the National Suicide Prevention Strategy (NSPS) and scale up initiatives like Tele-MANAS (14416) and Manodarpan in educational institutions.
- **Regulating Coaching Frameworks:**
 - Enforce strict guidelines on private coaching centers regarding batch sizes, mandatory weekly off-days, fee transparency, and mental health checks.
- **Curricular & Pedagogical Reforms (In line with NEP 2020):**
 - Shift focus from rote memorization toward skill-based, formative assessments to diminish reliance on shadow education (coaching).

Related Static Dimensions

- **Constitutional Dimensions:**
 - **Article 21 (Right to Life & Mental Health):** Includes the right to live with human dignity and access to psychological well-being.
 - **Article 41 (Directive Principles):** Mandates the State to make effective provision for securing the right to education within its economic capacity.

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- **Policy & Legal Mechanisms:**

- **Mental Healthcare Act, 2017:** Decriminalized suicide attempts under Section 115 and mandated the government to provide mental health services to affected individuals.
- **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020:** Emphasizes continuous and comprehensive evaluation (CCE) and stress-free assessment paradigms.
- **Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024:** Institutionalized deterrent laws to penalize organized cheating syndicates and paper leak rackets.

- **Institutional & Administrative Frameworks:**

- **National Task Force (NTF) on Student Mental Health:** Formed to recommend measures for preventing suicides in Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs).
- **NCRB - ADSI Report:** Provides annual data analysis on suicide causes and socio-economic demographics.

Conclusion

Securing the future of India's youth requires moving beyond short-term political resolutions and addressing the underlying socio-economic and structural drivers of student distress. By regulating private coaching industries, expanding affordable public higher education, introducing multi-dimensional evaluation systems, and embedding mental health support into schools and colleges, India can transform its high-stakes examination culture into a humane, equitable, and constructive educational landscape.

UPSC Mains Exam Study Questions

Ques: Discuss the role of the National Education Policy (NEP), 2020 in reducing examination-related stress among students..(10 Marks, 150 Words)

Page 10 :GS II :Internal Security / Preliminary Examination

The Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C) under the Ministry of Home Affairs directed GitHub to remove repositories hosting **BitChat**. BitChat is an open-source, Bluetooth-based peer-to-peer messaging application developed by Twitter co-founder Jack Dorsey.

The takedown notice highlights a growing friction between national security imperatives and technology designed to operate independently of central control. It raises critical legal and governance questions regarding intermediary safe harbor provisions, the doctrine of proportionality, and whether a communication tool can be pre-emptively banned based solely on its potential for misuse.

Why has India moved to take down BitChat repositories?

What is BitChat? Can communication tools be blocked for their potential misuse?

Rizmi Lia M.

The story so far:

The Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C), under the Ministry of Home Affairs, directed GitHub on July 23 to remove repositories hosting BitChat, the Bluetooth mesh messaging application developed by X co-founder Jack Dorsey, stating that the app could be exploited to coordinate unlawful assemblies and circumvent lawful restrictions imposed by competent authorities during situations involving public order. The order comes at a time when repeated internet shutdowns near protest sites have led protesters to increasingly rely on Bluetooth-enabled messaging platforms such as BitChat for communication.

What is BitChat?

BitChat is a decentralised peer-to-peer messaging application that operates over Bluetooth mesh networks. It requires no

internet connection, no servers and no phone numbers.

Traditional messaging apps depend on centralised infrastructure that can be monitored, censored or disabled. BitChat creates ad hoc communication networks using only devices in physical proximity, with each device acting as both a client and a server, automatically discovering peers and relaying messages across multiple hops to extend the network's reach.

According to the platform, this approach provides censorship resistance, surveillance resistance and infrastructure independence. The network remains functional during internet outages, natural disasters, protests, or in regions with limited connectivity.

What does the order say?

The order directs GitHub to disable access to three repositories, including the Android application and its release files, within three hours.

It also warns that failure to comply

could invite criminal prosecution.

According to the order, the application enables anonymous communication without mandatory user registration, phone number verification or centralised logging of communications. It states that the application's technical architecture significantly impedes lawful interception, attribution and investigation by law enforcement agencies.

It further states that since communications occur directly between nearby devices through a decentralised mesh network, the platform can be misused to evade lawful surveillance, facilitate anonymous coordination and circumvent lawful restrictions imposed by competent authorities during situations involving public order, riots, terrorism, organised crime or internet shutdowns.

The order also states that "such decentralised communication platforms are capable of being exploited for coordinating unlawful assemblies, violent protests, dissemination of misinformation, radicalisation, criminal

conspiracies, and other activities prejudicial to the sovereignty and integrity of India, defence of India, security of the State, public order, and for facilitating the commission of cognizable offences."

What does the law say?

The order, Notice No. 11072601011432, was issued at 11.16 p.m. on July 23 under Section 79(3)(b) of the Information Technology Act, 2000, read with Rule 3(1)(d) of the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021.

Section 79(3)(b) provides that an intermediary may lose its safe harbour protection if, upon receiving actual knowledge or being notified by the appropriate government or its agency that any information, data or communication link residing in or connected to a computer resource controlled by the intermediary is being used to commit an unlawful act, it fails to expeditiously remove or disable access to that material without vitiating the evidence in any manner.

However, Section 79 itself does not confer a blocking power. Blocking directions are ordinarily issued under Section 69A of the IT Act and the Blocking Rules, 2009, which require a hearing and reasons recorded in writing, subject to review.

It empowers the Union government to direct the blocking of public access to information on grounds such as national

security, public order and the prevention of incitement to the commission of cognisable offences. Such orders are required to follow the procedure prescribed under the law.

Why is the order being criticised?

The Internet Freedom Foundation (IFF) criticised the order, arguing that it relies on the application's potential for misuse rather than identifying any unlawful content hosted in the repositories.

"Anticipated misuse of a communications tool is not a lawful basis to prohibit the tool," the organisation said.

The order directs GitHub to "remove and disable access to the concerned URLs within three hours of the issue of this communication without vitiating evidence in any manner."

According to IFF, the notice, issued close to midnight, fails the proportionality standard laid down by the Supreme Court in *Anuradha Bhasin v. Union of India* (2020).

In *Anuradha Bhasin*, the Supreme Court held that "the degree of restriction and the scope of the same, both territorially and temporally, must stand in relation to what is actually necessary to combat an emergent situation." The court observed that the principle of proportionality requires restrictions to be tailored to the territorial extent of the restriction, the stage of the emergency, the nature of the urgency, the duration of the restrictive measure and the nature of the restriction.



Technical Architecture: What is BitChat?

- **Bluetooth Mesh Networking:** BitChat operates by forming ad-hoc, decentralized peer-to-peer networks using Bluetooth Low Energy (BLE). Each device acts as both a client and a relay node, passing encrypted messages across multiple physical "hops" to reach intended recipients.
- **Infrastructure Independence:** The tool requires no internet connection, mobile cellular networks, or central routing servers.
- **Zero-Knowledge Anonymity:** Unlike traditional platforms (such as WhatsApp or Signal), BitChat does not require user registration, phone number verification, or central identity logging.
- **Resilience During Shutdowns:** The platform is naturally immune to conventional internet shutdowns, network throttling, or server-level censorship, allowing local communication within physical proximity (typically 30 to 100 meters per hop).

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G-mail-lakshyaacademymumbai@gmail.com

Key Arguments Cited in the Government Order

The directive issued by I4C to Microsoft-owned GitHub requested the removal of BitChat's Android code repositories and release files based on several security concerns:

- **Impeditivity to Lawful Interception:** Because the app operates directly between nearby devices without central servers or subscriber logs, law enforcement agencies cannot execute traditional surveillance, attribution, or legal data requests.
- **Bypassing Public Order Restrictions:** The architecture allows individuals to coordinate during localized internet suspensions, potentially subverting measures implemented during civil unrest, riots, or unlawful assemblies.
- **Potential for Illegal Activities:** The government flagged intelligence inputs indicating that offline, non-attributable communication channels can be exploited for radicalization, criminal conspiracies, hate speech dissemination, and organized violence prejudicial to national sovereignty and state security.

Statutory Framework & Procedural Concerns

A. Invocation of Section 79(3)(b) vs. Section 69A of the IT Act, 2000

- **Section 79(3)(b) & Safe Harbor:** The order was issued under Section 79(3)(b) read with Rule 3(1)(d) of the IT Intermediary Rules, 2021. Section 79 provides "safe harbor" legal immunity to intermediaries (like GitHub) provided they expeditiously remove or disable access to unlawful material upon receiving actual knowledge from government authorities.
- **Absence of Direct Blocking Power in Section 79:** Legal scholars and rights groups note that Section 79 is an immunity-exemption provision rather than an explicit statutory blocking tool.
- **Procedural Safeguards of Section 69A:** Directives to block public access to information are intended to be governed by **Section 69A of the IT Act** and the **Blocking Rules, 2009**. Section 69A mandates specific procedural checks, including a designated committee, written justification, and an opportunity for a hearing before a review panel.

Critical Analysis & Civil Liberties Arguments

A. "Tool Misuse" vs. "Unlawful Content"

- **Absence of Specific Infringing Content:** Digital rights organizations like the Internet Freedom Foundation (IFF) emphasize that the order does not identify specific illegal messages or code vulnerabilities. Instead, it bans the software entirely due to its structural resistance to surveillance.
- **Precedent of Dual-Use Technologies:** Restricting a general-purpose technology because it *could* be used for unlawful coordination sets a broad precedent. By the same logic, standard peer-to-peer technologies (such as Wi-Fi Direct, mesh radios, or basic encryption protocols) could face similar prohibitions.

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G-mail-lakshyaacademymumbai@gmail.com

B. Test of Proportionality (*Anuradha Bhasin v. Union of India, 2020*)

- **Doctrine of Proportionality:** The Supreme Court in *Anuradha Bhasin (2020)* held that any state restriction on communication tools must be strictly necessary, temporally and territorially bounded, and the least restrictive measure available to achieve the legitimate goal.
- **Procedural Ambiguity:** Issuing a short-deadline (3-hour) takedown order for underlying source code on open platforms raises concerns regarding arbitrariness and procedural fairness, particularly when open-source code can continue to circulate through alternative mirrors and forks.

6. Related Static Dimensions

Constitutional Rights:

- **Article 19(1)(a) & 19(1)(b):** Freedom of speech and expression, and the right to assemble peacefully without arms.
- **Article 19(2):** Reasonable restrictions on grounds of sovereignty, security of the State, public order, and incitement to an offence.
- **Puttaswamy Judgment (2017):** Established privacy and informational self-determination as fundamental rights under Article 21, subject to the test of legality, necessity, and proportionality.

Statutory Rules & Case Laws:

- **Information Technology Act, 2000:** Sections 69A (Power to issue directions for blocking), 79 (Safe harbor immunity), and 84B/84C (Abetment and attempts).
- **Shreya Singhal v. Union of India (2015):** Struck down Section 66A and clarified that intermediary liability under Section 79(3)(b) requires direct court orders or notification by the appropriate government agency regarding unlawful acts.
- **Administrative Frameworks:**
 - **Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C):** Operational arm under the Ministry of Home Affairs tasked with tackling cybercrime, monitoring illicit digital channels, and strengthening law enforcement coordination.

The Road Ahead

The action against BitChat highlights the delicate balance democracies must strike between law enforcement capabilities and digital civil liberties. As decentralized, off-grid technologies expand, relying solely on broad code takedowns can prove technically challenging while creating friction around procedural due process. Sustainable resolution requires establishing clear statutory guidelines for off-grid applications, updating law enforcement investigative techniques for decentralized networks, and ensuring that any restrictions strictly adhere to procedural safeguards and the doctrine of proportionality.

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Con.- 09820971345, 9619071345, 9223209699
G-mail-lakshyaacademymumbai@gmail.com

UPSC Prelims Exam Study Questions

Ques: The Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C) functions under which of the following Ministries?

- (a) Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology
- (b) Ministry of Home Affairs
- (c) Ministry of Communications
- (d) Ministry of Defence

Ans:b)

UPSC Mains Exam Study Questions

Ques: Explain the doctrine of proportionality in the context of restrictions on digital communication platforms. **(10 Marks, 150 Words)**

Page :08 : Editorial Analysis

Do not surrender to China, do not depend on the U.S.

A volatile political climate in Washington has triggered a wave of strategic anxiety in New Delhi. Buffeted by the transactional, often erratic policy shifts of the Donald Trump administration – which hit India last year with punitive tariffs on steel and aluminium, stripped its preferential trade status, and aggressively renewed ties with Islamabad while imposing irritants such as tightening H-1B visa rules – a growing chorus of domestic voices is calling for a fundamental reset of India's China policy.

Economic actors, their flawed line

The argument, championed largely by an influential business lobby, suggests that India's confrontational approach toward Beijing was overly synchronised with Washington's strategic agenda of "containment" rather than India's national interests. The lobby contends that because India remains deeply reliant on Chinese technology, supply chains, industrial inputs, and capital, a dogmatic anti-China stance ultimately stymies domestic economic growth while barely denting Beijing's economy. The core risk, critics warn, is Washington's historical pattern of tactical flip-flops – escalating tensions one day and striking bilateral deals the next – which risks leaving an overextended India strategically vulnerable to Chinese retaliation.

While the warning against subordinating Indian interests to an unpredictable Washington is entirely valid, it is not clear that this is what is occurring. In any case, the proposed alternative – a hasty, unreciprocated economic embrace of China – is a dangerous prescription. It mistakes tactical business convenience for long-term national security. A premature capitulation to Beijing ignores a decade of unprovoked hostility, deepens an asymmetric dependency, and strips India of its leverage just as the global order enters its most volatile phase since the Cold War.

Let us face it: the primary domestic driver for a China reset is an influential business lobby obsessed with short-term balance sheets. For years, parts of corporate India have argued that access to cheap Chinese capital, machinery, and active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs) is indispensable for India's growth. However, this view suffers from severe strategic myopia. It treats international trade as an apolitical transaction, completely divorced from the realities of comprehensive national power.

By advocating a return to the pre-2020 status quo, these economic actors choose to selectively forget a dozen years of relentless, unprovoked aggression by the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). The list of Beijing's hostile acts against Indian sovereignty is not a series of isolated border skirmishes; it is a coherent strategy of containment and



Shashi Tharoor

Fourth-term Member of Parliament (Lok Sabha) for Thiruvananthapuram (Congress party), the Chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs and the Sahitya Akademi Award-winning author of 29 books, including 'Pax Indica' (2012) and 'The New World Disorder' (2020)

humiliation. From Depsang (2013) and Chumar (2014) to Doklam (2017) and then the fatal clashes in the Galwan Valley (2020), China has systematically attempted to alter the Line of Actual Control (LAC) through salami-slicing tactics, unilaterally violating decades of border peace protocols. Beijing continues to aggressively assert absurd claims over the entire State of Arunachal Pradesh, renaming geographical features in places it does not control (but plans to), and issuing stapled visas to residents of Jammu and Kashmir and Arunachal to weaponise India's internal geography.

And then there is economic coercion. China has routinely used its manufacturing dominance as a political weapon, abruptly withholding critical machinery and industrial inputs, even weaponising its monopoly over rare earths and tunnel-boring machines during bilateral disputes, simply to inconvenience Indian industries and signal its leverage, knowing fully that India has none to exercise in return. Most alarming has been Beijing's overt, coordinated military support for Pakistan during Operation Sindoor (May 2025). By providing Islamabad with real-time tactical satellite data and intelligence, China transformed itself from a mere military supplier into an active, hostile participant in Pakistan's security architecture against India. To ignore this track record in pursuit of cheaper components is not pragmatism; it is strategic blindness.

The myth of reciprocity

The core flaw in the argument for a quick reset is the naive assumption that if India relaxes its economic guard, China will reciprocate with geopolitical goodwill. The foundational tenet of Chinese foreign policy in Asia is the establishment of a unipolar continent. Beijing does not view New Delhi as a peer, nor does it desire India to become one.

For over a decade, China has weaponised its veto at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to shield Pakistan-based terrorist organisations from international sanctions and condemnation. It has blocked India's legitimate aspirations for permanent membership in the UNSC and membership in the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG). If India opens the floodgates to Chinese capital and market access without any fundamental resolution of the border dispute or a halt to Beijing's hostile behaviour, it effectively subsidises its own encirclement. Pouring billions of dollars into Chinese coffers as a compliant consumer market merely expands the asymmetric trade deficit (China's annual surplus over India now exceeds \$100 billion). More dangerously, it hands Beijing an economic kill-switch over the Indian economy. In a future crisis, the threat of cutting off critical components could paralyse Indian industry,

rendering New Delhi incapable of independent strategic decision-making.

Advocates of a reset argue that easing economic tensions could pave the way for a permanent demarcation of the border. In reality, the opposite is true. China respects power and exploits vulnerability. If India surrenders its economic leverage and signals that it cannot sustain a prolonged stand-off, Beijing will conclude that its strategy of multi-domain pressure is working. China will simply bide its time, allowing India to grow comfortably dependent once again. When Beijing eventually decides it is ready to discuss a permanent border settlement, it will dictate terms from a position of absolute dominance. An India structurally dependent on Chinese technology and cowed by the threat of economic disruption will have no choice but to accept a deeply disadvantageous territorial status quo.

Leverage, once surrendered, cannot be easily reclaimed. The restrictions India placed on Chinese apps, investments, and telecom infrastructure post-Galwan were not just emotional reactions; they were crucial diplomatic leverage. Dismantling them for minor economic relief would be an act of unilateral disarmament.

India is undeniably in a complex position. The Trump administration's unpredictable shifts mean that relying entirely on Washington as a security guarantor is unwise, despite the enthusiasm of his emissary to India, Sergio Gora. The United States will always prioritise its own domestic and global calculations, and New Delhi must remain clear-eyed that it stands alone on the heights of Ladakh. However, realising that Washington is an unreliable partner does not mean India must run into the arms of an actively hostile neighbour. There is an immense strategic space between subordinating India's national interests to the U.S. and conceding an unconditional economic and political surrender to China.

The path India must tread

The correct path for New Delhi is one of strategic patience and internal fortifying. India must accelerate its supply chain resilience, diversify its trade partnerships across Europe, East Asia, and the Global South, and aggressively build up its domestic manufacturing capabilities – even if it comes with short-term inflationary costs. The last decade has proven that China presents a structural, generational challenge to India's rise. A hasty rethink driven by panic over Washington or the complaints of a short-term-profit-driven business lobby will only ensure that India remains permanently exposed, economically vulnerable, and strategically diminished.

We do not have to "tilt" either way. We must, instead, develop the strength to walk straight.

Realising that Washington is an unreliable partner does not mean India must run into the arms of an actively hostile neighbour

International Relations

"Strategic autonomy does not imply strategic isolation." Discuss this statement in the context of India's evolving relations with the United States and China. **10Marks, 150 Words)**

Context :

In this op-ed, Dr. Shashi Tharoor addresses the strategic anxiety in New Delhi caused by an unpredictable US administration (punitive tariffs, H-1B visa tightening, diplomatic volatility). He critiques a growing push from domestic business lobbies advocating a "reset" or reconciliation with Beijing. Tharoor warns that abandoning India's post-2020 economic and security posture towards China in pursuit of short-term business convenience is a dangerous mistake—and asserts that India must maintain **Strategic Autonomy** by depending neither on an erratic US nor surrendering to an actively hostile China.

Critique of the Domestic Business Lobby ("Strategic Myopia")

- **Short-Term Profit vs. Comprehensive National Power:** Corporate arguments for opening Indian markets to cheap Chinese capital, machinery, and Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients (APIs) treat trade as an apolitical transaction.
- **Ignoring a Decade of Hostility:** Advocating a pre-2020 status quo selectively forgets persistent territorial aggression along the LAC—including Depsang (2013), Chumar (2014), Doklam (2017), and Galwan (2020).
- **Weaponization of Non-Military Tools:** China regularly uses "salami-slicing" on the border, renames geography in Arunachal Pradesh, issues stapled visas, and imposes economic coercion (e.g., withholding tunnel-boring machines and critical industrial inputs).
- **China-Pakistan Axis:** China's military and intelligence collusion with Pakistan (e.g., real-time satellite intelligence during border escalations) makes Beijing an active participant in India's regional security threats.

The "Myth of Reciprocity" & Economic Vulnerability

- **Unipolar Asia Ambition:** China does not view India as an equal peer and seeks an asymmetric, unipolar Asian order.
- **Multilateral Blocking:** Beijing continuously uses its UNSC veto to shield Pakistan-based terror networks and blocks India's entry into the UNSC and Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG).
- **Economic "Kill-Switch":** An annual trade deficit exceeding \$100 billion in China's favor hands Beijing structural leverage over India's economy. If India surrenders post-Galwan leverage (bans on apps, investment restrictions, telecom limits), it unilaterally disarms.
- **Flawed Border Logic:** Surrendering economic leverage will not lead to a fair border settlement; rather, China respects power and will dictate terms from a position of absolute dominance if India signals weakness.

Strategic Trilemma: Navigating Washington & Beijing

- **The Unreliability of the US:** Relying unconditionally on Washington as a security guarantor is risky due to shifting domestic US priorities and transactional policy pivots. India stands alone on the heights of Ladakh.

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G-mail-lakshyaacademymumbai@gmail.com

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- **The False Binary:** Recognizing that the US is transactional does not mean India should capitulate to an aggressive neighbor.
- **The Middle Path:** Ample strategic space exists between being a junior partner to Washington and an economic dependency of Beijing.

Strategic Roadmap & Policy Recommendations

- **Internal Fortification & Strategic Patience:** Focus on long-term capacity building rather than seeking quick, unreciprocated geopolitical fixes.
- **Supply Chain Resilience:** Accelerate domestic manufacturing (via PLI schemes, deep-tech research) to reduce dependence on Chinese intermediates and APIs, accepting short-term inflationary costs where necessary.
- **Diversification of Global Partnerships:** Expand trade and security alignments across Europe, East Asia (Japan, South Korea), and the Global South rather than relying single-mindedly on any single power bloc.
- **Preserving Leverage:** Maintain defensive trade barriers, screening mechanisms for investments, and border readiness until there is a genuine, reciprocal resolution.

Related Static Dimensions

- **Constitutional & Legal Mandates:**
 - **Article 51 (Directive Principles of State Policy):** Promotion of international peace and security, maintaining just and honorable relations between nations.
- **Core Foreign Policy Concepts:**
 - **Strategic Autonomy:** Maintaining independence in decision-making without bandwagoning with any single superpower.
 - **Asymmetric Interdependence:** Understanding how trade imbalances can be weaponized into geopolitical coercion.
- **Key Geopolitical Flashpoints:** Depsang, Chumar, Doklam, Galwan, and the wider Line of Actual Control (LAC).

Conclusion

The core takeaway of Tharoor's analysis is that India's foreign policy must avoid the false choice between US dependency and Chinese capitulation. China presents a structural, multi-generational challenge that cannot be solved by short-term corporate fixes. By building domestic economic resilience, fortifying border infrastructure, and diversifying international alliances, India can maintain its strategic posture and "walk straight" on its own terms.

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