

The Hindu Important News Articles For UPSC CSE

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Edition : International Table of Contents

Page 04 Syllabus: GS II :International Relations / Preliminary Examination	Jaishankar gearing up to lead India's campaign for non-permanent UNSC seat
Page 08 Syllabus : GS III : Science and Tech/ Preliminary Examination	AI governance and a voice for the Global South
Page08 Syllabus: GS I & III: Social Issues and Environment / Preliminary Examination	Falling behind : Urbanisation in Mumbai is evolving faster than its infrastructure upgrades
Page 09 Syllabus: GS II :International Relations / Preliminary Examination	Questions surrounding the Quad's future
Page 10 Syllabus: GS III : Indian Economy - Agriculture	Will El Niño weaken India's economy?
Page 08: Editorial Analysis Syllabus : GS II : Indian Constitution & Polity	In India, voting cannot remain merely a statutory right

Page 04: GS II : International Relations / Preliminary Examination

External Affairs Minister of India, S. Jaishankar's launch of the official campaign for a non-permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) for the 2028-29 term reflects India's growing diplomatic ambition on the global stage. This initiative comes at a time when India is striving to establish itself as a resonant voice and a global leader of the 'Global South' (developing and underdeveloped nations).

Core Analytical Points

1. Bilateral Competition for the Asia-Pacific Seat

- **Tajikistan's Challenge:** India faces a direct contest against Tajikistan for the seat reserved for the Asia-Pacific region, making it a tough electoral battle.
- **Vote Bank Mathematics:** While India enjoys the support of major powers and strategic partners such as the US, Austria, Fiji, and Sri Lanka, Tajikistan has secured the strong block-support of the 57 member states of the OIC (Organisation of Islamic Cooperation), presenting a major diplomatic challenge for India.

2. Strategic Importance of Multilateral Forums

- **Role of SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organisation):** Both India and Tajikistan are full members of the SCO. The upcoming SCO Summit to be held in Kyrgyzstan will prove to be a crucial platform for both nations to deploy their diplomatic maneuvering and win over other Central Asian countries to their respective sides.

- **Regional Dynamics:** Kyrgyzstan's defeat of the Philippines in the recent June 2026 UN elections demonstrates that Central Asian countries are now becoming highly active and effective in UN politics.

3. Leadership of the 'Global South' and India's Recent Diplomatic Hurdles

- **Shift in Global Politics:** India has consistently advocated for comprehensive reforms in the UNSC, but recent global events have not always aligned with India's expectations.
- **Disruption in Engagement with Africa:** Due to the outbreak of the Ebola epidemic in Africa, India had to postpone the 'India-Africa Forum Summit'. Africa is the largest voting block (54 countries) in the United Nations; therefore, the postponement of this summit can be seen as a setback to India's immediate diplomatic outreach campaign.

Jaishankar gearing up to lead India's campaign for non-permanent UNSC seat

Kallol Bhattacharjee
NEW DELHI

India on July 13 will launch the official campaign for a non-permanent seat at the UN Security Council during 2028-29. According to a press note by the Ministry of External Affairs, the launch will be made by External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar who is currently travelling in the Gulf region and will reach New York city on July 10 for the official ceremony that will be crucial from the point of view of India's leadership position in the Global South.

The bid will also require substantial diplomatic mobilisation by India as Tajikistan will be the other candidate for the seat meant for the Asia-Pacific region. While India has received support from coun-



S. Jaishankar

tritions of India and Tajikistan.

Evolving equation

Mr. Jaishankar has been to various countries over the past months with an eye to the evolving equation at the United Nations because of India's plans for the 2028-29 UNSC non-permanent membership.

He will reach New York city for extensive consultations with India's partners at the UN. While India has been advocating a reform at the UNSC and also has been championing the needs of the Global South, recent trends however have not gone according to the plans. Earlier in May, India postponed the India-Africa Forum Summit that was to be held during May 28-31 citing the Ebola outbreak in Africa.

- **Intense Diplomatic Outreach:** To overcome these hurdles, the External Affairs Minister is undertaking continuous visits to Gulf countries (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar) and Caribbean nations to consolidate the vote base.

4. Current Global Geopolitical Context

- **Impact of Global Crises:** This campaign is underway at a time when tensions in West Asia (US-Israel vs. Iran) and the Ukraine crisis are at their peak. These conflicts have threatened energy and fertilizer security for developing nations.
- **India's Relevance:** Amid these global crises, India's presence in the UNSC is considered imperative to safeguard the economic and security interests of the Global South and to play the role of a peacemaker.

Conclusion

Although India's ultimate goal is to achieve a permanent seat in the United Nations Security Council, this election for a non-permanent seat for 2028-29 will be a major litmus test of India's actual diplomatic capacity and global acceptance. Given Tajikistan's strong OIC support, India will have to fully leverage its 'soft power' and diplomatic ties through 'diplomatic heavy lifting' with Africa, Latin America, and Small Island Developing States (SIDS). This victory will not only reinforce India's faith in multilateralism but will also give a sharper edge to its demand for the democratization of the global order.

UPSC Prelims Exam Study Questions

Question: Which of the following forms the primary basis for the election of non-permanent members of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC)?

- (a) Consensus among the permanent members of the Security Council
- (b) A two-thirds majority in the United Nations General Assembly
- (c) Recommendation of the Secretary-General
- (d) Approval of the International Court of Justice

Ans: b)

UPSC Mains Practice Questions

Question: "India's candidature for non-permanent membership in the United Nations Security Council is a crucial phase in its long-term strategy for permanent membership." Analyze India's diplomatic strategy and the associated challenges in light of this statement. (10 Marks, 150 Words)

Page 08:GS III : Science & Technology/ Preliminary Examination

Artificial Intelligence (AI) today is not merely a technological innovation, but has become a new medium for global geopolitics and economic sovereignty. In the 'India AI Impact Summit' held in February 2026, India attempted to pivot the global discourse toward the needs, real-world harms, and inclusion of the 'Global South' (developing and underdeveloped nations).

- However, in recent times, India's entry into the US-dominated semiconductor supply chain group 'Pax Silica' and its self-positioning as a 'Middle Power' have raised questions over the solidarity of the Global South and India's 'Strategic Autonomy'.
- The ongoing 'UN Global Dialogue on AI' in Geneva (July 6-7, 2026) presents an excellent opportunity for India to re-prove its leadership capacity on the global stage.

AI governance and a voice for the Global South

In February 2026, India hosted the India AI Impact Summit 2026, that sought to put the needs and challenges of the Global South at the centre of the Artificial Intelligence (AI) discourse. The summit's themes framed by India were rooted in the contextual realities of the Global South with a focus on real-world harms. This was a departure from the previous summits (at Bletchley Park, 2023, U.K.; Seoul 2024, and Paris 2025) that prioritised both catastrophic and existential risks over questions of present harms, equity and inclusion.

As the Summit evolved, the political and policy momentum shifted toward raising capital for AI development in India and accelerating adoption through domestic use cases. In this process, India increasingly began to position itself within the newly framed "middle power" discourse, at the cost of Global South solidarity which underpinned the Summit's original vision. India clarified this stance by joining Pax Silica, signalling strategic alignment with the United States-dominated semiconductor supply chain. As part of the agreement, India agreed to adopt a pro-innovation regulatory approach, thereby compromising its pursuit of strategic autonomy.

Middle power dilemma

This repositioning of India's geopolitical character, as a middle power, has left it in a lonely corner. The middle power narrative is diplomatically attractive but strategically uneasy. India's aspirations to be positioned alongside European and Asian countries such as Japan, which do not consider India a peer in technological capability or economic development, is also in dissonance with its colonial past and low per capita – realities that firmly anchor India within the Global South.

Accompanying the friction between India's ambition and its realities is the U.S.'s foreign policy push for global AI adoption of U.S. tech, bringing into question whether it will be a reliable



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India faces a choice between dependency and leadership in AI governance

partner in the AI adventure to India. The U.S. has declared its disinterest in AI governance, especially global multilateral or multistakeholder governance. This raises fundamental questions for India and the Global South on concentration of infrastructure, and economic power in the U.S. Will this be a repeat of the social media story – when U.S. foreign policy pushed back against regulating for user harms to safeguard the interests of social media platforms concentrated in the U.S.? Furthermore, economic value primarily accrues to American industry despite significant business and users outside its borders, while disproportionate externalities and harms also persist in domestic markets.

Pertinent issues

In the AI story, numerous questions arise. Will India mainly be a consumer of U.S. tech with Indian users bearing disproportionate harm? Will India be a site for extraction of data, labour for data labelling, minerals for manufacturing, and land, water, electricity and resources for data centres, primarily enabling the growth of American Big Tech?

Since the summit in February, India has sanctioned land for data centres displacing communities, triggering protests. There are no meaningful guardrails to protect local communities as American companies scrape public content to build language and indigenous knowledge datasets. The non-profit ecosystem is signing memoranda of understanding to diffuse AI and adopt use cases. However, fundamental AI innovation has been slow – India remains unable to compete with global foundational models, its semiconductor development is focused on low-value assembly and there is a question of adequate capital to invest and grow the national AI ecosystem.

But perhaps all is not lost for India. The first of a two-part UN Global Dialogue on AI is underway in Geneva (July 6-7, 2026). Stakeholders will

convene to discuss how the multilateral and multistakeholder ecosystem can come together to collectively define the rules for the governance of AI.

A window for leadership

India can use the opportunity to stitch together a fractured AI policy agenda that currently lacks a leader. It remains one of the few countries with the political heft, the technical capacity, and a diverse market to play this role. Rather than positioning itself merely as a destination for investment or a market for AI, India could reassert a vision of technological development rooted in public purpose, user safety, strategic autonomy, and international cooperation.

India should reiterate the need for international norms that empower Global South countries to focus on building local AI ecosystems and fostering innovation, safeguarding users, enhancing regulatory capacity, enabling skilling and developing domestic infrastructure. It should also advance critical debates on competition and consumer protection and ensure economic value accrues within national markets.

Concurrently, India must create pathways for international cooperation on AI within the Global South. The Geneva dialogue is a critical moment for Global South countries to come together to enable enhanced agency and strategic autonomy.

This requires developing innovative approaches to pool capacity and resources including cooperation on data, compute, interoperable standards and shared protocols and governance, and strengthening institutional capacity both regulatory and technical across the Global South.

As heterogeneous as the Global South is, it can be a counterweight to the hegemony of Big Tech. India can lead this march to ensure that shared governance norms are created and benefits are shared with the people in the Global South, appropriately protecting them from harm.

India's 'Middle Power' Dilemma

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- **Geopolitical Shift:** India seeks to establish itself as a 'middle power' on par with developed countries like those in Europe and Japan, which is diplomatically attractive but strategically complex.
- **Dissonance from Reality:** In terms of technological capability, economic development, and per capita income, India still lags behind the developed 'middle powers'. India's colonial past and ground realities firmly anchor it as a part of the 'Global South' even today.
- **Dependence on the US and Credibility Crisis:** The United States is not showing much interest in the global or multilateral regulation (Global Governance) of AI. In such a scenario, skepticism remains over whether the US will prove to be a reliable partner for India.

Pax Silica and the Challenge of Strategic Autonomy

- **Impact of the Alliance:** By joining Pax Silica, India has aligned with the US-dominated semiconductor supply chain, in exchange for which it has to adopt a 'pro-innovation'—meaning a lenient—regulatory stance.
- **Fear of Repeating the Social Media Mistake:** In the past, US foreign policy opposed user safety regulations in other countries to protect the interests of its domestic social media companies. It is feared that a similar pattern will emerge in the case of AI—where the economic benefits will accrue to American companies while local markets bear the harms.

Key Concerns for the Global South and India (Pertinent Issues)

- **Digital Colonialism (Data Extraction):** The risk is that India and the countries of the Global South will merely remain sources of data extraction (Data Scraping), cheap labor (for data labeling), and resources like land, water, and electricity for data centers.
- **Displacement of Local Communities:** The allocation of land for data centers has triggered the displacement of local communities in India, leading to protests.
- **Lack of Fundamental Innovation:** Even though the Indian non-profit sector (NGOs) is adopting American AI technologies, India is still unable to build world-class 'foundational models' (large models like ChatGPT). Even in the semiconductor sector, India remains limited only to low-value assembly.

Opportunity for Global Leadership for India (Way Forward / Window for Leadership)

Through the ongoing United Nations dialogue in Geneva (UN Global Dialogue on AI), India can play a leading role by taking the following steps:

- **Emphasis on Public Purpose and Safety:** Moving beyond being just an investment destination or merely a large market, India should advocate for technological development based on user safety, fairness, and strategic autonomy.
- **Cooperation among Global South Nations:** India should collaborate with the countries of the Global South to prepare a framework for data sharing, computing power, interoperable standards, and shared protocols.

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Daily News Analysis

- **Protection of the Local AI Ecosystem:** India should demand the creation of rules at international forums that allow developing countries the flexibility to develop local AI ecosystems, foster skilling, and strengthen domestic infrastructure.
- **Competition and Consumer Protection:** Anti-competitive policies must be tightened to curb the monopoly of Big Tech so that the economic value generated from AI remains within domestic markets.

Conclusion

Although the Global South is a highly diverse group with varying interests, if given the right direction, it can become a strong 'counterweight' against the global monopoly and hegemony of American or Western 'Big Tech' companies. India currently possesses the political will, technical capacity, and a vast, diverse market required to provide leadership to this scattered global landscape of AI policy. While balancing geopolitical arrangements like Pax Silica, India must ensure that it does not remain merely a consumer of AI, but instead becomes a pioneer of inclusive and secure global governance.

UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Question: Which of the following is not an essential element for the development of AI?

- (a) High-quality data
- (b) High-capacity computing power
- (c) Advanced semiconductor chips
- (d) Only 5G networks

Ans: d)

UPSC Mains Practice Questions

Question: "Global AI governance has become not merely a technical issue but also a focal point of geopolitical competition." Explain. (10 Marks, 150 Words)

Page 08 : GS I & III: Social Issues and Environment/ Preliminary Examination

Globally, unprecedented changes are being observed in weather patterns due to climate change, the most direct impact of which is falling on the coastal metropolises of India. Recently, the extremely intense rainfall in Mumbai and its surrounding areas has once again exposed the structural vulnerabilities of the city.

- This crisis is not merely the result of a natural disaster, but it is a complex mixture of rapid and unplanned urbanization (Haphazard Urbanisation), outdated infrastructure, and a lack of administrative coordination (Governance Lapse).
- From the perspective of the Civil Services Examination, this issue is directly linked to 'Urban Flooding', disaster management, and sustainable urban planning.

Key Points Analysis

1. Geographical & Weather Factors

- **Intensity vs Quantity:** For urban areas, the intensity of rainfall matters more than its total quantity. Mumbai can withstand moderate rainfall, but its drainage system does not have the capacity to handle heavy rainfall occurring in just a few hours.
- **Impact of Coastal Geography:** Mumbai is primarily settled on reclaimed land (land created by filling marshy and low-lying coastal areas). When heavy rain and high tide in the sea occur simultaneously, the drainage system's water flows back toward the city, making the flood situation severe.
- **Active Monsoon Systems:** Due to the activation of south-western moist winds on the Konkan coast and Western Ghats, and off-shore weather systems, a situation of continuous moisture and heavy rainfall persists in Mumbai and surrounding areas.

2. Infrastructure & Urbanisation Challenges

- **Linear Infrastructure Vulnerability:** Due to this disaster, Mumbai-Pune rail services were disrupted, landslides occurred in Bor Ghat, and major national highways such as Mumbai-Ahmedabad and Mumbai-Goan were closed. This shows how vulnerable our critical transport routes are to natural disasters.
- **Run-off vs Absorption (Increase in Solid Surfaces):** Due to decades of unplanned urbanization, concrete construction has increased. This has destroyed the soil's capacity to absorb water, and the entire water flows over the surface (Surface Run-off) into the drains, causing their capacity to give away.
- **Cascading Failures:** A failure in one sector (such as electricity or transport shutting down) paralyzes the entire system, which also affects relief and rescue operations.

3. Governance & Policy Gaps

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Falling behind

Urbanisation in Mumbai is evolving faster than its infrastructure upgrades

The southwest monsoon has been highly active over western India, with south-westerly winds loaded with moisture sweeping over the Western Ghats and delivering intense rains along the Konkan coast, while other weather systems offshore are routing more moisture over Mumbai and the surrounding areas. In urban areas in general, rainfall intensity matters more than volume. Mumbai itself can generally absorb moderate rainfall over several hours; however, its drainage – like in many Indian cities – cannot handle several hundred millimetres in short bursts. Heavy rainfall also overwhelmed river catchments in parts of Maharashtra, including around Nashik, while high tides reduced the efficiency of Mumbai's stormwater drainage, worsening flooding in the city. Mumbai-Pune rail services were suspended after landslides in the Bor Ghat and flights were affected. The closures of the Mumbai-Pune expressway and the Mumbai-Goa highway and significant flooding on the Mumbai-Ahmedabad expressway were disruptive, speaking to the increasing erraticity of monsoon rainfall, the vulnerabilities associated with linear infrastructure projects, and the ease with which the effects of natural disasters are compounded by cascading failures. A chawl collapse in Mankhurd took the lives of five children.

Mumbai lies on a peninsula built mostly on reclaimed land, former marshes, tidal flats, and low-lying coastal areas, creating the characteristic risk of higher flooding when rainfall coincides with high tide. It is compounded by decades of haphazard urbanisation that has encouraged water to run-off rather than be absorbed by the ground, forcing drains to handle more water than their design limits. After the July 2005 floods, when it received 944 mm in 24 hours, Mumbai launched the BRIMSTOWAD project and widened drains, installed pumping stations, and undertook premonsoon de-silting. Many of these works remain incomplete while some completed upgrades are based on assumptions about the monsoon that climate change has since undermined. Officials have also argued that pre-monsoon desilting helped reduce flooding in parts of Mumbai, but water on the Mumbai-Ahmedabad expressway, the chawl collapse, deadly tree falls in Kurla and Aarey, lack of redundancies in public transport, and the BMC's belated advisory to builders to halt hazardous construction all suggest a governance lapse. Mumbai's accountability also remains split across the BMC for local drainage and roads, the IMD for forecasting, the NDRF, two Railway zones, the State government, and highway authorities. Overall, the city has improved at shutting down to save lives and minimising the death toll – but as climate change and urbanisation evolve faster than infrastructure upgrades, simply waiting for system capacity to catch up to demand will be a failing strategy.

Daily News Analysis

- **Incomplete and Outdated Projects:** After the devastating floods of 2005, Mumbai started the BRIMSTOWAD (Brihanmumbai Storm Water Disposal System) project. Under this, widening of drains and installing pumping stations were included, but many of its works remain incomplete even today.
- **Outdated Assessment of Climate Change:** Even the works that have been completed are based on old monsoon data and estimates. Due to climate change, the rainfall pattern has completely changed now, making these upgrades also prove to be insufficient.
- **Fragmented Accountability:** The biggest weakness of Mumbai's management is that accountability does not rest with a single institution. It is divided among BMC, Weather Department (IMD), NDRF, Railways, State Government, and Highway Authorities, which shows a lack of quick coordination during times of crisis.
- **Lack of Foresight:** The collapse of a chawl in Mankhurd, the falling of trees in Kurla and Aarey, and the lack of backup (Redundancies) in public transport show that the administration only responds after a crisis occurs, rather than taking protective measures in advance.

Conclusion

Mumbai has certainly improved its capacity to reduce the loss of life and property during disasters and to 'shut down the city on time to save lives' over the past few years. But this is only a short-term relief, not a permanent solution. As the pace of climate change and urbanization outruns the upgradation of our infrastructure, sitting idle thinking that "the system's capacity will fix itself automatically" will prove to be a failed strategy.

Way Forward: Mumbai and other metropolises of India must now adopt the concept of 'Sponge City', in which waterlogged areas and natural drains are preserved. Along with this, the establishment of a Single Unified Authority and the construction of climate-resilient infrastructure (Climate-Resilient Infrastructure) keeping future climate conditions in mind is the need of the hour.

UPSC Prelims Exam Study Questions

Question: Consider the following statements regarding 'Urban Flooding':

1. Surface run-off increases due to highly impervious surfaces.
2. Encroachment on natural drainage channels (natural drains) is a major cause of urban flooding.
3. Only the total volume of rainfall determines urban flooding.

Select the correct answer using the code given below—

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

Ans: a)

UPSC Mains Exam Study Questions

Question: "Climate change and unplanned urbanization have exacerbated the problem of urban flooding in India's metropolitan cities." Discuss with suitable examples. **(10 Marks, 150 Words)**

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Page 08 : GS II : International Relations / Preliminary Examination

Recently, the decision by the U.S. Department of Defense (Pentagon) to rename the 'U.S. Indo-Pacific Command' (USINDOPACOM) back to 'U.S. Pacific Command' (USPACOM) has triggered a new debate in global diplomacy. In the year 2018, adding the word 'Indo' to the name of this command reflected India's central role and the strategic importance of the Indian Ocean.

- However, due to this policy shift in 2026 and the lower priority given to the Quad in the United States' new National Security Strategy (NSS 2025), serious questions are now being raised about the future and relevance of this four-nation grouping (India, USA, Japan, Australia).

Questions surrounding the Quad's future

With the U.S. reversing the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command back to the U.S. Pacific Command, criticisms have been levelled against the relevance of the Quad

DATA POINT

Amit Kumar

Last week, Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi was in New Delhi for the 16th India-Japan Annual Summit, her first visit to India since assuming office. The two sides reaffirmed their commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific. The reaffirmation, however, comes at a moment when the idea of the Indo-Pacific appears to be losing its principal champion. On June 16, the Pentagon renamed the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command back to the U.S. Pacific Command, reversing a change it had made in 2018.

The renaming of the Command in 2018, although symbolic, recognised the region's growing significance and acknowledged India's centrality to the U.S.'s regional strategy. The reversal suggests that the region no longer enjoys the priority it once did in Washington. In fact, the National Security Strategy released by the U.S. in November 2025 prioritises the Western Hemisphere over the Indo-Pacific and mentions the Quad only in passing. It also assuages Beijing, which has long resented the formulation. Washington's approach to managing its relations with Beijing is undergoing a change under the current administration.

All of this has put the future of the Quad under the scanner. If Washington retreats from this idea, the platform built around it inevitably invites questions about its relevance. These anxieties only add to a set of older concerns. How relevant or securitised is the Quad? Is it doing enough? And the criticisms aren't without substance.

The first criticism entails the hesitation to name China. If the objective is indeed to shape the balance of power in the region, the silence over Beijing's military and economic aggression is bad optics. However, this is largely a normative criticism. One can argue that

the Quad's reluctance to name Beijing is strategic, because positioning itself as an anti-China platform could dissuade smaller countries from associating with it.

Critics highlight the Quad's hesitation to project itself as a security-centric grouping as another of its shortcomings. Given that Beijing poses hard security challenges to the region, any balancing effort has to be primarily security-centric. The extent of the grouping's hesitation is evident in the members' active effort to make an implicit distinction between Quad and the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QSD). There is a reluctance to use them interchangeably, even as the members acknowledge the grouping's origins to be rooted in the first QSD in 2004.

The Quad's reluctance to elevate the partnership to a 2+2 format – a bilateral ministerial dialogue comprising Foreign and Defence Ministers – is another pain point. Even as each of the four countries has formalised 2+2 meetings bilaterally with one another, the Quad continues to host meetings only at the leaders' and Foreign Ministers' level.

Domain of cooperation

The alleged overwhelming focus on non-security or soft issues is a related criticism. However, a review of the Quad's agenda tells a different story. Even though the Quad assumed its current form in 2017, there was a lull for the first four years. It only picked up steam in 2021 during the COVID-19 pandemic, when the four countries held their first virtual leaders' summit and announced a first set of initiatives. Within six months, the Quad held its first in-person leaders' summit and expanded its areas of cooperation. The list today has grown to 37, of which 23 fall under security-related domains (Chart 1). Technology sovereignty, maritime capabilities and secure communications will be key in countering China in the years ahead.

Choosing the right areas of cooperation doesn't necessarily reveal much, though. The type of cooperation and capital flows are key determinants in evaluating the seriousness of the grouping. But a review of the 'type' of cooperation in security-related domains suggests that Quad has a heavy focus on interoperability, data sharing, monitoring, and relief (Chart 2). While this is necessary and critically important for any security-focused grouping, Quad's integration efforts are limited to civilian or non-military grade applications. Nonetheless, these integration exercises have dual-use capabilities and can be leveraged for even military-grade purposes.

The Quad's focus on building capacity and resilient supply chains is also significant, especially as these relate to critical and emerging technologies, maritime, and communications – the domains where the bulk of contestation with China is expected.

The Quad's security focus is not matched by its funding pattern. Based on what is available in the public domain, health and climate have been the primary beneficiaries (Chart 3). One can argue that since most security-related initiatives focus on integration and standard-setting, they do not require the same scale of dedicated funding. But building resilient supply chains would require substantial capital commitment, and that is where the gap is most visible.

The Quad's recent commitment to mobilise \$20 billion towards the Critical Minerals Initiative and Framework could change this picture. But it remains only a stated target at this point, with no funding committed or allocated. If security issues make up close to two-thirds of Quad's initiatives, the funding allocation must follow suit.

The questions surrounding the Quad's future will not be settled by nomenclature in Washington. They will be settled by whether the grouping backs its security-heavy agenda with capital.

Uncertain course

Amit Kumar is a Staff Research Analyst with the Geostrategy Programme at The Takshashila Institution. The data for the charts were sourced by the author from his Quad Monitor dashboard

Looking forward: External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar with U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio, Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong and Japanese Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi during the Quad Foreign Ministers' Meeting, in New Delhi on May 26, 2021

CHART 1: This shows the number of initiatives under different domains of cooperation. Some initiatives span multiple domains, and thus may get counted more than once

Domain	Number of Initiatives
Security	23
Climate	8
Infrastructure	5
Health	3
Education and exchange	1

CHART 2: This shows the type of initiatives in security-related domains. Some initiatives can have multiple cooperation 'types'

Cooperation Type	Count
Interoperability	9
Capacity building	7
Supply chain resilience	6
Standard setting	5
Data sharing	4
Monitoring	4
Relief	2

CHART 3: This shows the funding for initiatives under different domains of cooperation. Health receives the highest funding, followed by climate at a distance second

Domain	Aid and grants (\$ billion)	Loan (\$ billion)
Health	9.1	3.55
Security	0.22	0.75
Climate	0.16	0.15
Infrastructure	0.01	0.01
Education and Exchange	0.01	0.01

CHART 4: This shows the funding for various initiatives of the Quad by different countries and the Quad Collective. Absence of values indicate no funding

Country/Entity	Aid and grants (\$ billion)	Loan (\$ billion)
Quad Collective	8.45	0.68
Australia	0.2	0.8
U.S.	0.19	3.5
Japan	0.02	0.02
India	0.02	0.02

Main Challenges and Criticisms Facing the Quad

- Hesitation to Name China:** A major policy contradiction of the Quad is that its joint statements avoid directly naming China's military and economic aggression. Although this may be strategically necessary to bring smaller Southeast Asian nations (ASEAN) on board, on the global stage, it is viewed as a weakness or poor 'optics' of the Quad.

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- **Reluctance to be a Security-Centric Grouping:** Despite the real security challenges posed by China, the Quad member states hesitate to equate 'Quad' with the 'Quadrilateral Security Dialogue' (QSD). The group attempts to project itself as a multifaceted forum rather than a military alliance.
- **Lack of 2+2 Framework at Quad Level:** Although all four member countries engage in bilateral '2+2 Dialogues' (meetings of Foreign and Defense Ministers) with each other, it has not yet been institutionalized at the Quad level. Currently, it remains limited only to the level of Heads of State and Foreign Ministers.
- **Soft Issues vs Hard Security:** Most of the Quad's initiatives (despite 23 out of a total of 37 being related to the strategic/security sector) are practically confined to non-military or civilian applications such as data sharing, disaster relief, and maritime surveillance (IPMDA). They lack direct military integration.

Domain of Cooperation and Their Implications

- **Technology Sovereignty:** Quad countries are working together to break China's monopoly in critical and emerging technologies (such as semiconductors, 5G/6G, and Artificial Intelligence).
- **Dual-Use Capabilities:** Although the Quad's Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) program is civilian in nature, its data sharing and interoperability capabilities can also be utilized at a military level if the need arises.
- **Resilient Supply Chains:** Special focus is being placed on securing the supply chains of critical minerals (Critical Minerals Initiative) and telecommunication equipment to reduce dependence on China.

Funding Gaps: Promises vs Reality

- **Imbalanced Priorities:** According to data available in the public domain, most of the Quad's funding has been diverted toward soft domains like health (COVID-19 relief) and climate change, rather than security initiatives.
- **Lack of Capital Commitment:** Restructuring supply chains or building critical infrastructure requires massive financial investment. For instance, while there was a promise to raise \$20 billion for the Critical Minerals Framework, the actual budgetary allocation remains very low.

Conclusion

Although the change in the name of the U.S. Pacific Command is being described by Washington as an administrative step, it signals that the US is now focusing more on 'strategic utility' and 'burden-sharing' rather than coalition-building. The future of the Quad will not be determined by what nomenclature Washington gives it, but by whether its member countries can back their security-oriented agenda with solid financial capital (Capital Commitments) and real ground-level implementation. For India, the Quad will remain an important vehicle to secure its interests in the Indian Ocean while maintaining its strategic autonomy.

UPSC Prelims Exam Study Questions

Ques: Which of the following is an example of 'hard security' cooperation?

- (a) Vaccine partnership
- (b) Disaster relief cooperation
- (c) Joint military exercises and defense cooperation
- (d) Cooperation on climate change

Ans: c)

UPSC Mains Exam Study Questions

Ques: "The Indo-Pacific region has become the epicenter of 21st-century geopolitical competition." In this context, analyze the significance of the Quad for India. **(10 Marks, 150 Words)**

Page 10 : GS III : Indian Economy - Agriculture

The Indian monsoon is often called the "real maker of the Indian budget" because nearly half of the country's population still depends on agriculture for their livelihood. Recently, the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) and the Ministry of Agriculture have issued warnings of a major slump in the monsoon due to **El Niño**.

- This situation poses a serious challenge to India's economic growth rate, food security, and inflation control.

Will El Niño weaken India's economy?

How could a weak monsoon affect farm output, inflation and economic growth? Why does El Niño remain a major risk for India's economy? How have past El Niño years affected agriculture and inflation? Is India's irrigation and water storage system prepared for another weak monsoon?

ECONOMIC NOTES

V. Nivedita

The story so far:

After the first month of this year's monsoon ended in a massive 40% deficit, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) has forecast that rainfall in July will also be "below normal" or less than 94% of what is usual for the month. "Below-normal rainfall can pose significant challenges for agriculture, water resources, hydropower generation, ecosystem sustainability, and drinking water availability," the agency warned. The outlook for July comes on the back of weak rainfall in June. This comes weeks after Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan sounded the alarm, warning about the impact of a potential 'super' El Niño.

How could a poor monsoon damage India's economy?

A poor monsoon can damage the economy in three ways: it affects agricultural output, reducing the sector's contribution to the economy; it hits rural income, denting aggregate demand; and it threatens to push up food prices, causing inflation.

India came into this kharif season from a position of strength – foodgrain output in 2024-25 jumped to 357.73 million metric tonnes, up 25.43 MMT from the previous year. A weak monsoon now puts that momentum at risk.

In a report, CRISIL notes that while paddy acreage is expected to expand in Punjab, Haryana and Bihar, maize acreage is expected to decline as farmers shift towards more remunerative crops. Farmers might also prefer pulses because of lower cultivation costs and water requirements, and may choose not to plant vegetables at all. Irrigation, MSP, procurement support and market conditions also factor in the decision-making process.

This could trigger food and beverage inflation. In its June bulletin, the Reserve



Several of India's worst droughts fell in El Niño years — 1972, 1982, 2009, and 2015. FILE PHOTO

Bank of India warned: "An adverse south-west monsoon, if materialised, may weigh on the domestic growth-inflation outlook."

The report noted that daily price data up to June 18 showed food inflation continued to rise and the prices of edible oils, potatoes, onions and tomatoes edged up. A weak monsoon will only push them higher.

Agriculture accounts for only one-fifth of India's Gross Value Added (GVA) but employs 46% of the workforce and supports nearly 55% of the population. "It will have a direct impact on the lives of people," said Prof. R. Ramakumar, School of Development Studies, Tata Institute of Social Sciences.

Prof. Bharat Ramaswami, Department of Economics, Ashoka University, believes farm incomes could fall by up to 10%. "The rural non-farm sector consists mostly of non-traded services such as construction. These sectors contract when agriculture is adversely affected. Industries that depend on rural demand will be affected," he said.

This stress moves into the wider economy. Automobile sales are a reliable early signal; two-wheelers and tractors are among the first sectors to feel the squeeze, followed by real estate in smaller towns and cities. Kotak Mutual Fund, in a blog, has noted that a combined El

Niño-plus-drought scenario may shave 20-65 basis points off GDP growth.

Compounding the pressure are pests and fertilizer supply constraints caused by the Iran war.

The Union Cabinet approved a ₹41,533 crore Nutrient-Based Subsidy for Phosphatic and Potassic fertilisers for the kharif season, covering 28 grades. If output still falls short, the government will have to release buffer stocks and import commodities, widening the Current Account Deficit and putting pressure on the rupee.

India's agri-exports face a threat too. "Agriculture exports have clocked a CAGR of 8.2% between fiscals 2020 and 2025, contributing 12% to India's core exports," said Dipti Deshpande, Principal Economist, CRISIL.

How did El Niño impact the economy?

Several of India's worst droughts fell in El Niño years — 1972, 1982, 2009, and 2015. "In the 11 instances of below-normal or deficient monsoon performance at an all-India level since 2000, six were classified as El Niño years by the IMD. Of these, five saw deficient rainfall," Ms. Deshpande said.

The 2009 and 2015 failures illustrate the different impact poor monsoons can have on the economy. "Two subsequent

years of rainfall stress and all-India average irrigation cover less than 45%, caused agriculture output to suffer – crop GVA contracted 2.5% and 3.2% in fiscals 2009 and 2010, respectively. Inflation was in double digits," she said.

El Niño conditions moved from weak to strong in 2014 and 2015, and both years saw monsoon disruptions. Crop GVA contracted, but the impact on inflation was different.

Unlike 2009, when food inflation spiked, inflation was rather muted in 2015 due to proactive food management, restrained MSP hikes, and a global commodity price slump, which kept inflation muted despite the monsoon failure, Ms. Deshpande noted.

Can India 'drought-proof' the economy?

Mr. Chouhan's presser raised an important data point: 315 districts are vulnerable to a poor monsoon, of which 111 across 12 States are of primary concern due to poor irrigation facilities.

On July 2, storage levels across the 166 reservoirs monitored by the Central Water Commission stood at 47,725 BCM, against 78,077 BCM in the corresponding period last year, and below the normal storage of 48,402 BCM for this time of year. While the system can provide water to meet requirements, a poor monsoon could strain it.

"A second successive bad weather will be more damaging," Prof. Ramaswami said, adding that irrigation is crucial in adapting to water stress due to climate change.

India needs to 'drought-proof' its economy, said Prof. Ramakumar. He said the country must move from crop insurance to ex-ante risk reduction. "We need to pay attention to policies and interventions that reduce risk itself. That requires public investment, and that's lacking," he said. He added that India needs enough drought-resistant, high-yielding crops, and that farmers must have access to them. "We have not invested adequately in any of these, and hence our disaster preparedness is very poor," he said.

THE GIST

A weak monsoon and a potential super El Niño could reduce kharif output, depress rural incomes, fuel food inflation, slow GDP growth, and hurt exports.

Experts say India must move beyond crop insurance by investing in irrigation, drought-resistant high-yielding crops, and other risk-reduction measures, as prolonged rainfall stress could strain water storage and disaster preparedness.

1. Impact of a Weak Monsoon on the Indian Economy

A poor monsoon affects the Indian economy primarily at three levels:

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- **Decline in Agricultural Production:** Kharif crops in India are entirely dependent on the monsoon. A deficiency in rainfall will lead to a reduction in the production of major crops (such as paddy, pulses, and oilseeds), thereby decreasing the Agricultural sector's Gross Value Added (GVA) contribution.
- **Decrease in Rural Demand:** Around 46% of the country's workforce is employed in agriculture. A potential decline of up to 10% in agricultural income will reduce the purchasing power in rural areas. This will directly impact sectors like tractors, two-wheelers, FMCG, and real estate in small towns.
- **Inflationary Pressure:** A spike in the prices of tomatoes, onions, potatoes, and edible oils is already being witnessed. A weakening monsoon will further increase **Food Inflation**, forcing the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to keep interest rates high, which will ultimately slow down the pace of economic growth.

2. Why is El Niño a Major Risk for the Indian Economy?

- **Shock to Gross Domestic Product (GDP):** According to economic analysts (such as Kotak Mutual Fund), a severe El Niño and drought situation can reduce India's GDP growth rate by **20 to 65 basis points (0.20% to 0.65%)**.
- **Pressure on Current Account Deficit (CAD):** If domestic production declines, the government will have to import food items and impose restrictions on agricultural exports (which account for 12% of India's total exports). This will increase the country's trade deficit and put pressure on the Rupee.
- **Geopolitical and External Factors:** Currently, supply disruptions in fertilizers due to the ongoing Iran war and increasing pest attacks are making the agricultural crisis even more complex.

3. Historical Context: Experience of Past El Niño Years

History bears witness to the fact that India's most severe droughts have occurred precisely during El Niño years (1972, 1982, 2009, and 2015). However, its impact on the economy depends on the government's management:

- **The Crisis of 2009:** Due to consecutive years of seasonal stress and less than 45% irrigation coverage, agricultural production suffered massive losses. Crop GVA declined by 2.5% and 3.2%, and the country had to face double-digit inflation.
- **The Crisis of 2015:** In this year as well, the monsoon failed due to El Niño, affecting agricultural production. However, due to the government's proactive food management, correct utilization of buffer stocks, limited increase in Minimum Support Price (MSP), and a slowdown in global commodity prices, inflation remained under control.

Conclusion: History shows that while El Niño always reduces production, the shock of inflation can be prevented through correct government policies.

4. Is India's Irrigation and Water Storage System Ready?

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- **Falling Reservoir Levels:** Data from the Central Water Commission (CWC) shows that water storage in major reservoirs is significantly lower compared to the previous year and the normal average. This is a matter of concern for irrigation and hydropower generation.
- **Regional Inequality and Vulnerability:** Around 315 districts in the country are vulnerable to a weak monsoon, out of which 111 districts across 12 states are in an extremely critical condition because irrigation facilities there are virtually non-existent.
- **Consecutive Second Year of Bad Weather:** According to experts, a second consecutive year of bad weather proves to be more disastrous for the economy because stored water resources get completely depleted.

5. Measures to Make the Economy 'Drought-Proof'

Instead of ad-hoc measures, India needs long-term strategies to tackle the agricultural crisis:

- **Ex-ante Risk Reduction:** Instead of relying solely on crop insurance (like PM Fasal Bima Yojana), focus should be placed on risk-mitigating infrastructure before the crisis arrives.
- **Increase in Public Investment:** It is imperative to massively scale up government investment in irrigation projects, modernization of canals, and water harvesting systems.
- **Climate-Smart Agriculture:** Farmers should be easily provided with high-yielding variety seeds that require less water and are drought-resistant.
- **Crop Diversification:** Farmers should be encouraged to shift away from water-intensive crops like paddy toward low-water-consuming crops like millets, pulses, and maize.

Conclusion

El Niño certainly remains a major structural risk for the Indian economy, especially for the rural sector and food inflation. Although India has made great strides in the service and manufacturing sectors over the past few decades, agriculture is still the backbone of our socio-economic stability. To tackle the upcoming challenges, the government must prioritize robust buffer stock management, expansion of an efficient irrigation network, and climate-resilient agricultural policies. Long-term public investment alone can completely liberate India from the "gamble of the monsoon."

UPSC Mains Exam Study Questions

Ques: "The Indian economy's excessive dependence on the monsoon renders the country economically vulnerable during global climate patterns like El Niño." In light of this statement, discuss the policy reforms required to make the agricultural sector 'drought-proof'. (15 Marks, 250 Words)

In India, voting cannot remain merely a statutory right

Recently, a Congress leader revived an old constitutional debate by demanding that voting should be recognised as a fundamental right. At first sight, the demand appears unexceptionable. In a democracy, what could be more fundamental than a citizen's right to choose those who govern? Yet, for more than seven decades, the Supreme Court of India has consistently held that the right to vote is not a fundamental right but merely a statutory right.

This judicial position, though well established, has become increasingly difficult to reconcile with the Court's own evolving jurisprudence. In a series of landmark decisions, the Court has gradually transformed the voter from a passive statutory creature into an active constitutional actor.

The result is a curious paradox: while the act of voting itself continues to be described as statutory, many of its essential facets have already acquired constitutional protection.

The traditional position dates back to *N.P. Ponnuswami vs Returning Officer* (1952), where the Court held that the right to vote and the right to contest elections are not common law rights but rights created by statute. The principle was reaffirmed in *Jyoti Basu & Others vs Debi Ghosal & Others* (1982), where Justice O. Chinnappa Reddy observed that the right to elect, "fundamental though it is to democracy", is neither a fundamental right nor a common law right, but "purely a statutory right". A Constitution Bench reiterated this position in *Kuldip Nayyar vs Union of India* (2006), holding that while democracy forms part of the basic structure of the Constitution, the individual right to vote flows from legislation, principally the Representation of the People Acts.

The logic behind this approach is understandable. The Constitution does not expressly enumerate the right to vote among the fundamental rights contained in Part III. Parliament, therefore, enjoys considerable latitude in prescribing qualifications, disqualifications and procedures governing elections.

However, the story does not end there.

Constitutionalising the poll process

Beginning in the early years of this century, the Court embarked upon a process of constitutionalising the electoral process. In *Union of India vs Association for Democratic Reforms* (2002), the Court held that voters have a right to know the criminal antecedents, educational qualifications and financial assets of candidates. This right was located squarely in Article 19(1)(a), the fundamental right to freedom of speech and expression. The Court reasoned that meaningful participation in democracy is impossible unless voters are adequately informed.



S.Y. Quraishi

Former Chief Election Commissioner of India and author of 'An Undocumented Wonder: The Making of the Great Indian Election'

The right not to vote enjoys constitutional protection; paradoxically, the right to vote does not

A year later, in *People's Union of Civil Liberties vs Union of India* (2003), the Court drew an important distinction. While reiterating that the right to vote is statutory, it held that the freedom of voting – that is, the freedom to make an informed choice – is a fundamental right protected by Article 19(1)(a).

The most intriguing development came in the 2013 *NOTA* judgment. Recognising the option of "None of the Above", the Court held that a voter's decision to reject all candidates is a form of political expression protected by Article 19(1)(a). The Court further held that secrecy of the ballot must extend even to those who choose not to vote for any candidate.

This produces an extraordinary constitutional anomaly. The Court has effectively held that the right to know is fundamental, the freedom to make an informed choice is fundamental, the secrecy of the ballot is fundamental, and even the right to reject all candidates is constitutionally protected. Yet, the act of voting itself continues to be treated as a mere statutory entitlement.

One is tempted to ask: if the Constitution protects the right to reject all candidates, why does it not protect the right to choose one?

Recent constitutional jurisprudence also points in this direction. In *Anoop Baranwal vs Union of India* (2023), Justice Ajay Rastogi, in his separate opinion, expressly favoured recognising voting as a fundamental right. Although this view did not command a majority, the Constitution Bench repeatedly referred to voting as a constitutional right rather than merely a statutory one. This marks an important shift in judicial understanding. The Court may not yet have elevated voting to the status of a fundamental right, but it has undoubtedly moved beyond the narrow statutory conception that dominated earlier decisions.

The anomaly becomes even more striking when viewed through the prism of the basic structure doctrine. Since *Kesavananda Bharati vs State of Kerala* (1973), the Court has repeatedly held that democracy forms part of the Constitution's basic structure. In *Indira Nehru Gandhi vs Shri Raj Narain & Anr.* (1975), the Court underscored that free and fair elections are an essential feature of democracy. Subsequent decisions have consistently reaffirmed this principle.

Democracy begins with votes

But democracy does not exist in the abstract. It operates through elections, and elections derive their legitimacy from the participation of citizens through the ballot. The vote is the very instrument through which popular sovereignty is exercised. It is through the vote that "We, the People" periodically renew the legitimacy of the state and hold governments accountable.

If democracy is a part of the Constitution's

basic structure, and if free and fair elections are indispensable to democracy, it is difficult to explain why the citizen's right to vote should remain outside the constitutional core. To say that democracy is basic to the Constitution while the citizen's vote is merely a statutory right appears incongruous. A democracy without voters is inconceivable.

This does not necessarily mean that every aspect of voting should be elevated into an absolute fundamental right immune from regulation. Parliament must continue to prescribe qualifications, disqualifications and procedures necessary for the conduct of elections. Age requirements, electoral rolls, residency conditions, disqualifications for corrupt practices and other regulatory provisions are indispensable for orderly elections.

What requires constitutional recognition is not every procedural detail but the core right of every eligible citizen to participate in the democratic process.

This becomes particularly evident when one examines Article 326 of the Constitution. The Article mandates that elections to the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies shall be based on universal adult suffrage. Every citizen above the age of 18 is constitutionally entitled to be registered as an elector, subject only to narrowly defined disqualifications. The source of this entitlement is not legislation but the Constitution itself. The Representation of the People Acts merely operationalise that constitutional command.

Thus, while the mechanics of voting may be statutory, the citizen's entitlement to be a voter flows directly from the Constitution. Exclusion from the electoral roll, except in accordance with constitutionally permissible limitations, therefore, strikes at a constitutional guarantee.

A matter for the Court to revisit

The distinction between statutory and constitutional rights may have served a useful purpose in the early years of the Republic, when electoral jurisprudence was still in its infancy. But the Court's own decisions have steadily blurred that distinction by progressively constitutionalising various facets of voting.

Perhaps the time has come for the Court to revisit an old doctrine. In a Constitution where democracy and free and fair elections constitute the basic structure, the citizen's vote cannot remain a constitutional orphan. The ballot is not merely a statutory privilege conferred by Parliament. It is the instrument through which popular sovereignty is expressed and the Republic periodically renews its democratic legitimacy.

After all, if the Constitution protects the right to reject every candidate, it can scarcely deny protection to the right to choose one.

GS Paper II: Indian Constitution and Polity

UPSC Mains Exam Practice Questions: "In Indian democracy, the right to vote is not merely a statutory right but the soul of constitutional democracy." Examine the constitutional status of the right to vote in light of this statement. (10 Marks, 150 Words)

Context : Recently, the demand to make voting a 'Fundamental Right' in political circles has revived a decades-old constitutional debate. For more than seven decades in Indian democracy, the consistent stance of the judiciary has been that the right to vote is not a fundamental right, but a right derived under a law enacted by Parliament (a legal/statutory right).

- However, former Chief Election Commissioner S.Y. Quraishi argues that given the changing judgments of the Supreme Court and the Basic Structure of Indian democracy, the time has come that voting should not be restricted merely to a legal right, but should be given constitutional and fundamental status.

Key Analysis Points

1. Traditional Judicial Approach (Traditional Stance)

- **N.P. Ponnuswami v. Returning Officer (1952):** In this case, the Supreme Court clarified for the first time that voting or contesting an election is not a Common Law right, but depends solely on the law (Statute) created by the legislature.
- **Jyoti Basu v. Debi Ghosal (1982):** Justice O. Chinnappa Reddy remarked that even though voting is extremely important for democracy, it is purely a 'Statutory/Legal Right' and not a fundamental right.
- **Kuldip Nayar v. Union of India (2006):** The Constitution Bench held that while democracy is a part of the 'Basic Structure' of the Constitution, an individual citizen's right to vote primarily flows only from the 'Representation of the People Act'.

2. 'Constitutionalization' of the Electoral Process and the Paradox

Over the past two decades, the Supreme Court has recognized various aspects related to voting as fundamental rights, creating a strange Paradox:

- **Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) Case (2002):** The Court ruled that voters have the right to know the criminal background, education, and assets of the candidates. This was considered a fundamental right under Article 19(1)(a) (Freedom of Speech and Expression).

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- **PUCL v. Union of India (2003):** The Court clarified that while the 'act' of voting may be statutory, the 'Freedom of Voting'—meaning choosing one's preference without any fear or influence—is a fundamental right under Article 19(1)(a).
- **NOTA (None of the Above) Judgment (2013):** The Court stated that the Right to Reject all candidates is also a part of political expression, which is protected under Article 19(1)(a).
- **Central Paradox:** The author raises a question: when the right to know the candidates, the freedom to choose one's preference, the secrecy of the ballot, and the right to reject everyone are fundamental rights, why has the core act of choosing a particular candidate (casting the vote) been given merely a legal status?

3. Modern Shift in Judicial Perspective

- **Anoop Baranwal v. Union of India (2023):** In this historic case related to the appointment of Election Commissioners, the Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court repeatedly referred to voting as a 'Constitutional Right' rather than considering it merely a 'Statutory Right'.
- **Personal Opinion of Justice Ajay Rastogi:** In this case, Justice Rastogi, in his separate opinion, explicitly supported the recognition of voting as a 'Fundamental Right'.

4. Basic Structure Doctrine and Voting

- **Kesavananda Bharati (1973) and Indira Nehru Gandhi (1975) Cases:** These landmark judgments established that 'democracy' and 'free and fair elections' are part of the basic structure of our Constitution.
- **Democracy is Impossible Without Voters:** The author argues that democracy is not an abstract concept. It stays alive through the votes of the citizens. If democracy is the 'Basic Structure', then how can the backbone of that democracy—meaning the 'citizen's vote'—remain outside the core part of the Constitution (Fundamental Rights)?

5. Article 326: Constitutional Guarantee

- **Universal Adult Suffrage:** Article 326 of the Indian Constitution explicitly mandates that elections to the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies shall be on the basis of adult suffrage.
- **The Constitution itself is the Primary Source:** Every citizen above the age of 18 is entitled to be registered in the electoral roll. This right does not come from any law of Parliament, but directly from the Constitution; the Representation of the People Act is merely an operational tool to implement this right.

6. Regulation vs. Protection of Right

- Making voting a fundamental right does not mean that Parliament cannot make laws regarding it.
- Parliament will retain full regulatory powers to determine qualifications, disqualifications, age limits, and procedures for the successful conduct of elections.

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- The only change will be that no citizen can be deprived of this core democratic right without a solid and constitutionally valid reason.

Conclusion

In conclusion, treating voting as a legal right in the initial phase of India might have been practical from an administrative and judicial perspective, but today's mature democracy has moved past this outdated concept. The Supreme Court itself, through its various judgments, has provided the shield of fundamental rights to all the rights surrounding voting. When the Constitution grants a citizen the fundamental right to 'reject all candidates' (NOTA), they must also get the fundamental right to 'choose someone'. It is now time for the nation's judiciary to reconsider its old interpretation and strengthen Popular Sovereignty by including the right to vote in the constitutional core (Part III - Fundamental Rights) of India.