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Supreme Court questions ED's rule of law breach claim in West Bengal

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Thursday asked whether the Directorate of Enforcement (ED) was making a case of "breakdown of constitutional machinery" in West Bengal, momentarily pausing the Central agency's rejoinder against Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, senior State police officers, and bureaucrats for allegedly violating the rule of law to "barge" into I-PAC premises in Kolkata during a raid and leaving with material said to be incriminating in coal smuggling case.

"We hope you are not arguing 'breakdown of constitutional machinery' in the context of the controversy you are raising," Justice N.V. Anjaria, a member of the Division Bench headed by Justice Prashant Kumar Mishra, asked Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the ED.

The query from the Bench followed submissions from the ED about a "well-established pattern" of violations by the Chief



This is a law and order issue... State governments, including the States of West Bengal and Tamil Nadu, have repeatedly approached the Supreme Court under Article 32, and been entertained by this court

TUSHAR MEHTA
Solicitor-General



Minister, the State police, and the ruling Trinamool Congress, and a "non-existent" rule of law over the years in West Bengal.

Incidents recalled

Mr. Mehta referred to the police "siege" of the Central Bureau of Investigation Joint Director's residence in Kolkata and the arrest of CBI officials in 2019, a "mob" of lawyers and party workers crowding into a Calcutta High Court courtroom on January 9 and the Director-General of Police "acting as the PSO (personal security officer) of the Chief Minister".

Mr. Mehta responded that there was "nothing up the sleeve" of the ED in the case. He said the "rule of

law" was a "part and parcel", an essential part of Article 14, of the Constitution. The ED officials, against whom the State police registered criminal cases for conducting what was described as a lawful investigation, have a fundamental right to equality before the law or equal protection of the laws.

"The ED cannot argue 'breakdown of constitutional machinery' [Article 356]," Mr. Mehta said.

He submitted that the rule of law was raised to establish the *locus standi* of the ED, acting in a "representative capacity", to approach the top court in an Article 32 writ petition to enforce the fundamental rights of its officials whose

personal liberty and dignity as citizens were threatened by "engineered or orchestrated" police FIRs.

The ED and its Deputy Director Robin Bansal have filed a plea seeking a CBI probe into the incident.

Senior advocate Kapil Sibal, for the State, argued that the Centre, and not the ED, ought to have approached the Supreme Court against the State by filing an original suit under Article 131. Mr. Mehta said a Centre versus State dispute did not arise here, adding that an Article 131 suit was filed only if the dispute was of a federal nature.

"This is a law and order issue. The president of the ruling party, who is also the highest executive of the State, along with officials who happen to draw their salaries from the Centre are on one side here... Besides, State governments, including West Bengal and Tamil Nadu [in the Governor case], have repeatedly approached the Supreme Court under Article 32, and been entertained by this court," Mr. Mehta said.

- **Key Terms and Explanations**

- **Article 356 (President's Rule):** Provisions for the "breakdown of constitutional machinery" in a state. If a state government cannot function according to the Constitution, the Union can take direct control.

- *Example:* If a state refuses to comply with Union directions or if there is a total collapse of law and order.

- **Article 131 (Original Jurisdiction):** A provision where the Supreme Court hears disputes directly between the Government of India and one or more States. It's the "federal court" role of the SC.

- **Article 32 (Constitutional Remedies):** Known as the "heart and soul" of the Constitution, it allows individuals (and sometimes entities) to move the SC for the enforcement of Fundamental Rights.

- **Locus Standi:** The right or capacity to bring an action or to appear in a court. Here, the ED is arguing it has the "standing" to protect its officers' rights.

- **Rule of Law:** The principle that all people and institutions are subject to and accountable to law that is fairly applied and enforced.

- **Directorate of Enforcement (ED):** A specialized financial investigation agency under the Department of Revenue, Ministry of Finance, enforcing the PMLA (Prevention of Money Laundering Act).

- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**

- **The ED's Stance (The Petitioner)**

- **Pattern of Obstruction:** The ED alleges a systematic attempt by the state machinery to hinder federal investigations, citing past instances like the 2019 CBI siege.

- **Protection of Officials:** The agency argues that state-registered FIRs against federal officers are "orchestrated" to intimidate them, violating their fundamental rights under Article 14 (Equality before law).

- **Non-Federal Dispute:** The Solicitor General argued this is a "law and order" issue involving individual rights, not a structural "State vs. Union" dispute that would require Article 131.

- **The State's Stance (The Respondent)**

- **Procedural Impropriety:** The State argues the ED is an arm of the Centre. Therefore, any dispute should be a formal suit under Article 131, not a writ petition under Article 32.

- **Federal Autonomy:** The state maintains that "Law and Order" is a State List subject (Entry 2, List II), and central agencies cannot "barge" into premises without following due process or state cooperation.

- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**

- **Pre-Independence:** The Government of India Act, 1935, established a federal structure but kept heavy "discretionary powers" with the Governor, a precursor to Article 356.
- **The S.R. Bommai Landmark (1994):** The SC curtailed the arbitrary use of Article 356, stating that "breakdown of constitutional machinery" is subject to judicial review.
- **Post-2014 Shift:** There has been an increased frequency of friction between the Centre and states (West Bengal, Kerala, Tamil Nadu) regarding the jurisdiction of the CBI and ED. Several states have withdrawn "General Consent" for CBI investigations, leading to legal standoffs.

- **Way Forward**

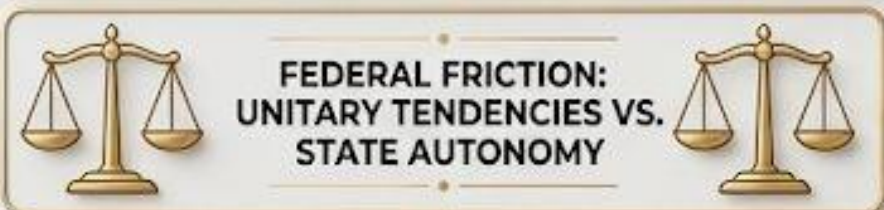
- **Statutory Status for CBI/ED:** Moving beyond the DSPE Act to a modern, constitutionally backed act that defines jurisdiction clearly.
- **Inter-State Council:** Reviving the council under Article 263 to discuss these jurisdictional overlaps before they reach the courts.
- **Judicial Guidelines:** The SC should lay down a "SOP for Federal Investigation" in non-consenting states to prevent physical face-offs between agencies.

- **Previous Years' Questions (PYQs)**

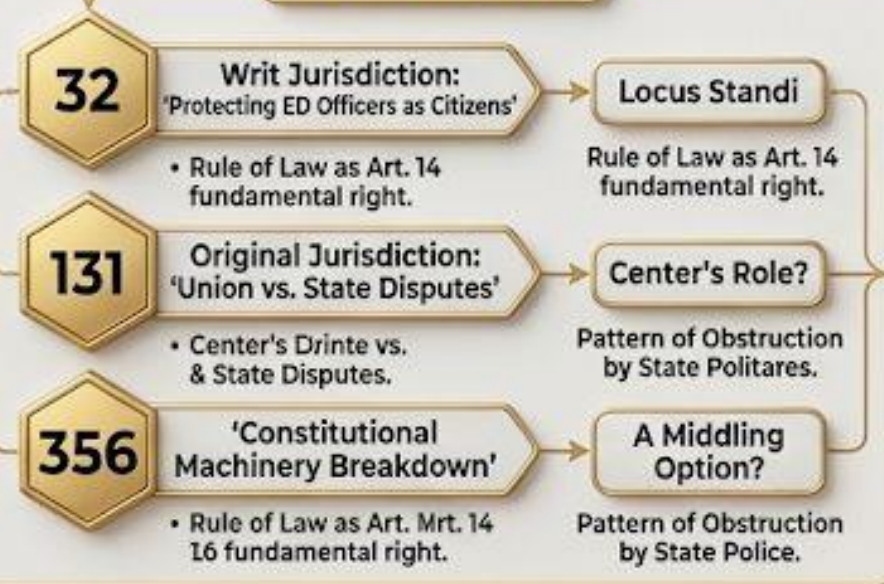
- **Mains (2017, GS2):** "The local self-government system in India has not proved to be an effective instrument of governance." (Theme: Federalism levels).
- **Mains (2013, GS2):** Discuss the powers of the Supreme Court under Article 131.
- **Prelims (2022):** Question on the jurisdiction of the ED and the PMLA.

UNPACKING THE ED VS. STATE (WEST BENGAL) LEGAL BATTLE: A UPSC PREPARATION GUIDE

CORE CONCEPTUAL ARGUMENTS & LEGAL FRAMEWORKS



CRUCIAL ARTICLES



MULTIDIMENSIONAL ANALYSIS & WAY FORWARD



NEW FEATURES & LOGICAL BASES

- ED in 'Representative Capacity'
- Philosophical bases like:
 - Institutional Epistemology and Poers
 - Montesquieu's Separation of Powers



AXIA'S WAY FORWARD & NCERT/UPSC LINKAGES

- Statutory Status for ED/CBI
- Reviving Inter-State Council
- Judicial Guidelines for Federal Investigations
- Judicial Guideline for Federal Investigations



'Indian ties with Africa signal stability in a turbulent world'

Jaishankar highlights that India-Africa partnership is rooted in shared anti-colonial history and strengthened through capacity building, development cooperation, and strategic engagement

Kallol Bhattacharjee
NEW DELHI

India's relationship with Africa delivers a message of "stability in a turbulent world", External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar said on Thursday. Speaking at the launch of the theme, website and logo of the upcoming fourth India-Africa Forum Summit (IAFS-IV), Mr. Jaishankar said India's ties with Africa were rooted in the common struggle for freedom from colonial rule. He highlighted development partnership and capacity building as key areas of collaboration between the two sides.

"As the world navigates through complex geopolitical and geoeconomic challenges, our partnership assumes particular significance. It will be a message of stability in a turbulent world, of reliability in an uncertain one and of solidarity in difficult times," Mr. Jaishankar said, presenting the India-Africa partnership as a process that will strengthen institutions and empower peo-



External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar with African Ambassadors and delegates at the India-Africa Forum Summit in New Delhi. ANI

ple. The Minister made the remarks while launching the theme, logo and website of IAFS-IV, to be held from May 28 to 31. The event was attended by New Delhi-based heads of missions and Ambassadors of African countries. The third edition of the India-Africa Forum Summit was held in October 2015. The theme of the upcoming summit is "Enduring partnership – shared vision".

Mr. Jaishankar's remarks obliquely referred to the situation in the Gulf region, which has come into focus over the past two

months due to the U.S.-Israel war on Iran that has triggered a global energy crisis. In view of disruptions in the supply of essential items such as petroleum, natural gas, and fertilizers, India is looking for stable alternative suppliers, with several African countries seen as potential partners. With disruptions in fertilizer supplies from Gulf countries such as Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Bahrain, India is expected to focus on Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, and Morocco to meet demand ahead of the next monsoon season.

Mr. Jaishankar highlighted India's long-term commitment, noting that the opening of 17 new diplomatic missions in Africa has taken the total to 46. With this, India's diplomatic footprint is now visible in "every region of the continent", he said.

'Living bridge'

He also referred to the three million-strong Indian diaspora in Africa as a "living bridge" connecting the two regions. He cited institutions such as the IIT, Zanzibar, the National Forensic Science University in Uganda, the Entrepreneurship Development Centre in Rwanda, and Centres of Information Technology in several African countries as examples of "people-centric cooperation".

Mr. Jaishankar said that outside the South Asian neighbourhood, Africa is the largest recipient of Indian overseas development support. "India has placed development cooperation and capacity-building programmes at the core of its partnership with Africa," he said.

- **Key Terms and Explanations**
- **IAFS (India-Africa Forum Summit):** The primary official platform for African-Indian relations, held every few years. It operates on a multi-tiered engagement level: regional, pan-African, and bilateral.
- **Viksit Bharat 2047 & Agenda 2063:** * **Viksit Bharat:** India's vision to become a developed nation by the 100th year of its independence.
 - **Agenda 2063:** The African Union's (AU) strategic framework for the socio-economic transformation of the continent over 50 years.
- **Living Bridge:** A term used to describe the 3-million-strong Indian diaspora in Africa that facilitates cultural, economic, and social exchange.
- **South-South Cooperation:** A technical term for the exchange of resources, technology, and knowledge between developing countries in the "Global South."
- **Force Majeure:** A legal clause in contracts that frees both parties from liability or obligation when an extraordinary event or circumstance beyond their control (like a war) occurs.

- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**

- **A. The "Stability" Thesis**

- The core argument is that the India-Africa partnership acts as a counterweight to global volatility. In a world of shifting alliances and regional wars (e.g., the 2026 Iran conflict), this relationship offers **reliability** and **solidarity**.

- **B. Shift in Resource Diplomacy**

- India is strategically decoupling its energy and fertilizer security from the volatile Gulf region.
- **Energy:** Seeking alternative suppliers due to the closure of the Strait of Hormuz.
- **Fertilizers:** Shifting focus to the **Maghreb region** (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia) to ensure agricultural productivity ahead of the monsoon, reducing reliance on Qatar and Saudi Arabia.

- **C. Capacity Building & Institutional Presence**

- The relationship is moving beyond mere trade to **institutional integration**.
- **Diplomatic Expansion:** Increasing missions from 29 to 46 shows a commitment to "every region" of the continent.
- **Education as Soft Power:** Institutions like **IIT Zanzibar** and **NFSU Uganda** create a "people-centric" model of development.

- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**
- **Pre-Independence:** Shared experience of colonialism; Mahatma Gandhi's formative years in South Africa; India's support for decolonization.
- **Nehruvian Era (1950s-60s):** NAM (Non-Aligned Movement) and the Bandung Conference (1955) solidified political solidarity.
- **Post-Liberalization (1990s):** Shift toward economic engagement; launch of the **ITEC** (Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation) program.
- **IAFS Era (2008–Present):**
 - **IAFS-I (2008):** Formalized the summit structure.
 - **IAFS-III (2015):** Attended by all 54 African nations.
 - **2023:** India successfully championed the **African Union's entry into the G20**.
 - **2026:** Focus on IAFS-IV under the theme "Enduring Partnership — Shared Vision."
- **Way Forward**
- **Financial Innovation:** Establish an "India-Africa Development Bank" or enhance Exim Bank lines of credit to compete with global financing.
- **Deepen Security Ties:** Expand maritime cooperation in the Western Indian Ocean (SAGAR vision).
- **Supply Chain Resilience:** Finalize long-term fertilizer and LNG contracts with North and West African nations immediately to mitigate the 2026 Gulf crisis.
- **Soft Power 2.0:** Use the "living bridge" (diaspora) more effectively in Track-II diplomacy.

- **Previous Years' Questions (PYQs)**
- **UPSC 2023 (GS-2):** "The expansion of the G20 to include the African Union is a significant step towards global inclusivity. Discuss."
- **UPSC 2016 (GS-2):** "How does the India-Africa Forum Summit (IAFS) strengthen India's position in the Global South?"
- **UPSC 2021 (Prelims):** Questions on the International Solar Alliance (where many African nations are members).

INDIA-AFRICA RELATIONS: A COMPREHENSIVE UPS-READY ANALYSIS

1. Key Terms & Concepts



IAFS-IV

- Conceptual logo analysis and mac IAFS-IV
- Conceptual Cooperation



South-South Cooperation

- Global regional regions between anmiotism and
- Convesit oononic partners and global regions



Capacity Building

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- University building in development building



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6. Multidimensional Analysis

Political
G20/UNSC

Economic
\$100B Trade, Investments



Social

- Healthcare
- Diaspora "Living Bridge"

Ethical

Shared Progress

7. Challenges



Dostand of internal Instability (Sahel)



Competing geopolitical energy and flags

3. Historical Evolution



4. Logical & Philosophical Foundation



Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam
Develops the Indian, lamzea and Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam

Non-Prescriptive Partnership
Partnership Relations and Non-prescriptive Partnership

5. New Features & Innovations



IIT Zanzibar campus



NFSU Uganda

8. Linkages



NCERT

NCERT
Relevant class and (Ilishera Cronoances)



Relevant Class Book
Book: of International Fertilizers

UPSC CSE Syllabus

- GS Papers 1-4 and 1-3
- Essay
- International Relations
- Energy Security, and Carmtoty
- Soft Power

Mains Answer structure

Mains Answer structure

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Cecopational Relations & Energy Security

Note-making Tip



2. Strategic Shift in Resource Diplomacy



Pivot to Africa for Fertilizers and Energy



Previous Reliance on a volatile Gulf on a volatile Gulf



India, Egypt discuss plan to boost bilateral defence cooperation in Cairo meet

Saurabh Trivedi

NEW DELHI

India and Egypt advanced their defence cooperation at the 11th Joint Defence Committee meeting held in Cairo from April 20 to 22, outlining a road map to deepen bilateral engagement.

According to the Ministry of Defence, the Indian delegation, led by Joint Secretary (International Cooperation) Amitabh Prasad, engaged with senior Egyptian defence officials to review progress since the previous meeting and identify new avenues of collaboration. Both sides agreed on a bilateral defence cooperation plan for 2026-27, focusing on expanding military engagements, intensifying joint training exchanges, boosting maritime security cooperation, and increasing the scope of military exercises.

Defence industry collaboration emerged as a key pillar during the discussions. The Indian side India highlighted the rapid growth of its defence manufacturing sector, noting that production had sur-



Both sides agreed on a defence cooperation plan focused on expanding structured military engagements. @SPOKESPERSON100

passed \$20 billion, with exports worth approximately \$4 billion to over 100 countries. The two nations agreed to work towards a defence industry cooperation plan, exploring opportunities for co-development and co-production, it added. The inaugural Navy-to-Navy staff talks were held, underlining the importance of maritime cooperation. India showcased the role of its Navy in ensuring freedom of navigation in the Indian Ocean Region and highlighted the contribution of the Information Fusion Centre in enhancing maritime security.

The delegation also met

Lieutenant General Amr Abdel Rahman Saqr, Commander of the Egyptian Air Force, expressing appreciation for the growing cooperation between the two air forces.

Paying tribute to shared history, the Indian delegation laid a wreath at the Heliopolis War Memorial, honouring Indian soldiers who sacrificed their lives during the World Wars.

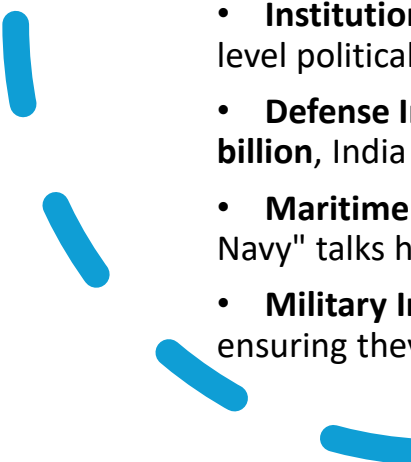
The meeting builds upon the momentum generated by the 2022 MoU on defence cooperation and the elevation of bilateral ties to a Strategic Partnership in 2023, reinforcing a shared commitment to regional peace and stability.



- **Key Terms and Explanations**

- **Strategic Partnership:** A high-level bilateral agreement where two nations commit to long-term cooperation across security, defense, and economic sectors. It signifies that the relationship is no longer just transactional but based on shared regional goals.
- **Joint Defence Committee (JDC):** An institutional mechanism where senior defense officials from two countries meet regularly to plan military cooperation, review past goals, and sign future "road maps."
- **Co-development and Co-production:** Moving beyond a buyer-seller relationship. Instead of India just selling equipment to Egypt, both nations would design (co-develop) and manufacture (co-produce) military hardware together.
- **Information Fusion Centre – Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR):** An Indian initiative based in Gurugram that acts as a hub for maritime data. It tracks merchant shipping and threats like piracy across the Indian Ocean to enhance "Maritime Domain Awareness."
- **Freedom of Navigation:** The principle of international law that ships (civilian and military) should have the right to navigate international waters without interference, provided they follow international treaties.

- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**

- The core thesis of the current engagement is the **transition of India-Egypt ties from traditional diplomatic friendship to a robust defense-industrial alliance.**
 - **Institutionalization of Ties:** The 11th JDC meeting serves as the operational engine for the 2023 Strategic Partnership, ensuring that high-level political promises translate into ground-level military action.
 - **Defense Industry as the New Pillar:** India is positioning itself as a "provider" rather than just a "partner." With production hitting **\$20 billion**, India is leveraging its manufacturing prowess to offer Egypt alternatives to Western or Russian hardware.
 - **Maritime Security Synergy:** Egypt controls the Suez Canal, and India is the primary security provider in the Indian Ocean. Their "Navy-to-Navy" talks highlight a shared interest in securing the trade route that connects the Mediterranean to the Indo-Pacific.
 - **Military Interoperability:** By increasing joint exercises (like *Ex Cyclone* or *Ex Bright Star*) and training exchanges, the two militaries are ensuring they can work together in crisis scenarios.
- 

- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**
- **Ancient & Medieval Links:** Trade routes connected the Indus Valley and Egyptian civilizations. During the medieval era, the Red Sea trade was a vital link for Indian textiles and spices.
- **The Nehru-Nasser Era (1950s-60s):** The "Golden Age." Prime Minister Nehru and President Gamal Abdel Nasser were founding fathers of the **Non-Aligned Movement (NAM)**. They stood together during the Suez Crisis (1956).
- **The Post-Cold War Drift (1990s-2010s):** Relations became somewhat stagnant as India pivoted toward the West and Israel, while Egypt focused on internal stability and its alliance with the US.
- **The Modern Resurgence (2022-Present):**
 - **2022:** Signing of the MoU on Defence Cooperation.
 - **2023:** Republic Day (President Sisi as Chief Guest) and the elevation to a **Strategic Partnership**.
 - **2024-2026:** Implementation of the defense road map and industry collaboration.
- **Way Forward**
- **Fast-track Tejas and Dhruv Sales:** Egypt has shown interest in the LCA Tejas and Dhruv helicopters. Finalizing these deals would provide the "anchor" for the defense partnership.
- **Suez Canal Economic Zone (SCZONE):** India should link its defense manufacturing to the special economic zones in Egypt to facilitate easier exports to Africa and Europe.
- **Regularize "Cyclone" Exercises:** Make joint special forces exercises an annual, permanent feature to build deep tactical bonds.
- **Space Cooperation:** Since Egypt recently launched its space agency, India's ISRO could be a natural partner, adding a "high-tech" layer to the defense relationship.
- **Previous Years' Questions (UPSC/APSC)**
- **UPSC 2023 (GS 2):** "The expansion and strengthening of NATO and a stronger US-Europe strategic as well as military alliance have been beneficial to India." (Analyze in context of India's push for strategic autonomy with partners like Egypt).
- **UPSC 2017 (GS 2):** "India's maritime security is being challenged by various factors. Discuss the role of international cooperation in this regard."
- **UPSC 2015 (GS 2):** "Discuss the pillars of India's 'Act West' policy."
- **UPSC 2020 (GS 2):** "The critical determinants of India-Africa relations in the 21st century." (Egypt is the gateway to Africa).



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ANCIENT LINKS

Revealed links now seen as part of India-Egypt

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NEHRU-NASSER NAM (1950s-60s)

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2023: STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP ELEVATION

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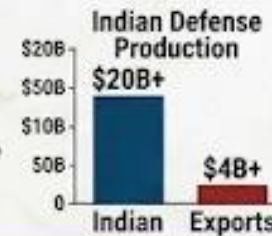
2026-27 DEFENSE COOPERATION PLAN



War Memorial Illustration



Indian Defense Production



UPSC GS Paper 2 & 3 Linkages

"Vasuudhaiva Kutumbakam" philosophy soonore the speca to consinnent philosophy

Joint Training Exchanges,



Boosting Maritime Security (IFC-IOR)

Military Interoperability Exercises

Defence Industry Collaboration (Co-development, Co-production)

Way Forward

- Developing-omand to ecotomizations and development har distribution of to-egypt relations
- Boosting Maritime Security (IFC-IOR)-torien)
- Military Interoperability Exercises aronne-sotis and combentions
- Defence Industry ssvatociooperation and obsvelopment philosophy



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State support key for tribal welfare, says Social Justice Ministry report

Abhinay Lakshman
NEW DELHI

Support from State governments has been lacking in efforts to extend welfare measures to denotified, nomadic, and semi-nomadic tribes (DNTs), the Union government has said, adding that even now only seven States are issuing DNT community certificates. In its annual report for 2025-26, the Union Social Justice and Empowerment Ministry said support from States was awaited despite letters and advisories issued for close to a decade.

In the report, the Ministry said that State and Union Territory governments were yet to share lists of eligible DNT beneficiaries awaiting housing allotments under the Centre's PMAY-G. Further, the Ministry said it had requested the States to share other



DNT communities have raised the issue of not getting community certificates, which affects their ability to claim benefits. FILE PHOTO

details such as population estimates of DNTs and lists of these communities residing in each State, and had urged them to issue DNT certificates and set up grievance redress mechanisms in letters written since as far back as 2015.

Over the past few years, DNT communities across various parts of the country had repeatedly raised the issue of community

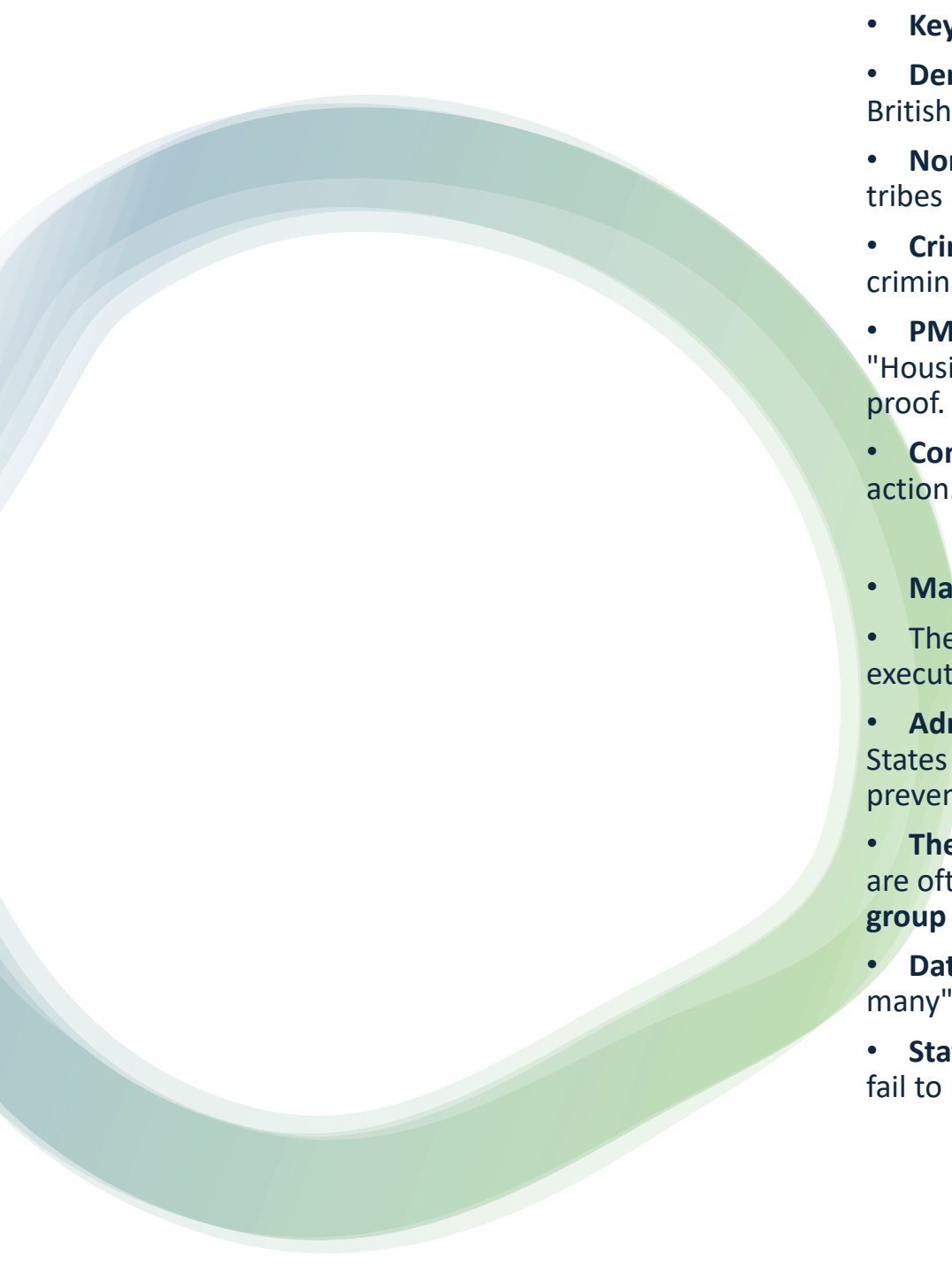
certificates not being provided, which, in turn, affected their ability to claim benefits targeted at them.

Nearly 1,200 such communities, which were tagged as "criminal" by the colonial administration, were denotified in 1952 when the Criminal Tribes Act was repealed. Since then, a majority have been classified under the Scheduled Castes, the Sche-

duled Tribes or the Other Backward Classes lists, though nearly 300 communities are yet to be classified.

Community leaders have argued that the lack of community certificates and their "misclassification" into SC, ST and OBC lists has further marginalised them within these respective groupings. Sections of DNT communities have taken this argument further to mobilise for a separate classification for DNTs on a par with SC, ST, and OBC classifications.

However, even as the Ministry has maintained that there are no proposals under consideration for creating a new classification for DNTs, government officials have said that the ongoing Census 2027 exercise will count the population of these communities during the enumeration phase.

- 
- **Key Terms and Explanations**
 - **Denotified Tribes (DNTs):** These are communities that were notified as "born criminals" under the British-era **Criminal Tribes Act, 1871**. Post-independence, they were "denotified" in 1952.
 - **Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Tribes:** Communities that do not have a fixed habitation. Nomadic tribes move year-round, while semi-nomadic ones return to a fixed base for a part of the year.
 - **Criminal Tribes Act (CTA), 1871:** A colonial law that labeled entire communities as "habitual criminals," requiring them to register with local police and restricting their movement.
 - **PMAY-G (Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana-Gramin):** A flagship central scheme aimed at providing "Housing for All" in rural areas. For DNTs, access is often blocked by a lack of land titles or identity proof.
 - **Community Certificates:** Official documents (SC/ST/OBC) that act as a "passport" to affirmative action. Without these, the constitutional promise of reservation and welfare remains inaccessible.
 - **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**
 - The core discourse revolves around the **implementation gap** between Central intent and State execution.
 - **Administrative Inertia:** Despite a decade of advisories from the Union Government, only seven States are actively issuing DNT certificates. This creates a "documentation trap" where the lack of an ID prevents the acquisition of welfare.
 - **The Inclusion Dilemma:** Most DNTs are subsumed under SC, ST, or OBC categories. However, they are often crowded out by more dominant or settled groups within those categories, leading to **intra-group inequality**.
 - **Data Deficiency:** There is a lack of accurate, scientific population data. Without knowing "how many" and "where," resource allocation remains guesswork.
 - **State vs. Centre Friction:** The Union Ministry provides the framework (like PMAY-G), but the States fail to provide the beneficiary lists, resulting in a breakdown of the federal delivery mechanism.

- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**
- **Pre-1871:** These tribes were often traditional traders, entertainers, or pastoralists whose mobile lifestyle was viewed with suspicion by the sedentary colonial administration.
- **1871–1947 (The Stigma Era):** The enactment of the CTA institutionalized social exclusion. Being born into these tribes carried an inherent legal "taint" of criminality.
- **1952 (The Repeal):** Based on the **Ayyangar Committee** recommendations, the CTA was repealed. However, it was often replaced by **Habitual Offenders Acts** in various states, which effectively continued the surveillance under a different name.
- **2006 & 2014 (Commissions):** The **Renke Commission (2008)** and the **Idate Commission (2014)** were established to identify these tribes and suggest welfare measures.
- **2019 (Development and Welfare Board):** The Government of India constituted the **DWBDNCs** (Development and Welfare Board for Denotified, Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Communities) to oversee implementation.
- **Present (2025-27):** The focus has shifted toward enumeration in the 2027 Census and integrating DNTs into the digital welfare ecosystem.

• **Way Forward**

- **Mission-Mode Certification:** A time-bound drive by State District Collectors to issue community certificates.
- **Portable Welfare:** Benefits like PDS (Ration) and healthcare must be made "location-neutral" (One Nation One Ration Card style) to suit nomadic lifestyles.
- **Sensitization of Police:** Mandatory training modules in Police Academies to erase the colonial mindset regarding "criminal tribes."
- **Sub-categorization:** Exploring the **Rohini Commission** style sub-categorization within OBCs to ensure DNTs get a guaranteed share of the quota.

• **All Previous Years' Questions (PYQs)**

• **UPSC Mains**

- **2023 (GS 2):** "The local state in India has not been able to distribute the benefits of development to the most vulnerable sections." (Analyze in context of DNTs).
- **2018 (GS 2):** "Whether the National Commission for Scheduled Castes can settle the problems of the Denotified Tribes?"
- **2016 (GS 1):** "Why are the tribals in India referred to as 'Scheduled Tribes'? Indicate the major provisions enshrined in the Constitution of India for their upliftment."

DENOTIFIED, NOMADIC, & SEMI-NOMADIC TRIBES (DNTs):



PATHWAYS TO EMPOWERMENT

HISTORICAL CONTEXT: FROM STIGMA TO DENOTIFICATION



- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| START | MIDEAL | CURRENT → |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Criminal Tribes Act, 1871 • Institutionalized Stigma • Strict Surveillance | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1952 CTA Repeal • Denotification • Continued Challenges | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Search for Recognition • Complex Classification (SC/ST/OBC) |



DNT COMMUNITY STRUGGLES & ASPIRATIONS



- Key issues**
- Community Certificate as Key
 - Identity & Classification Debate
 - Restorative Justice
 - Social Inclusion vs. Marginalization

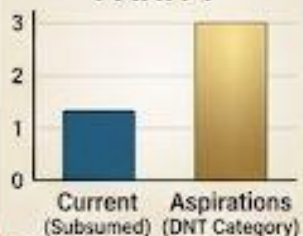
CENSUS 2027 ENUMERATION



MMinistry maintained:
Data to be counted

DNT Proposals:
Not considered

CLASSIFICATION PARITY



POLICY GAPS & CHALLENGES: AXIA'S STRATEGIC ANALYSIS

- Awaiting State Support (Lack of Certificates)
- Housing Denied (PMAY-G Lists Missing)
- Intra-group Inequality (Subsumed by Larger Groups)
- Political Neglect & Lack of Data

AXIA'S WAY FORWARD: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHANGE

- Mission-Mode Certification Drive
- Sub-categorization for Equity
- Portable Welfare Benefits
- Sensitization of Governance (e.g., Police Training)

UPSC CSE INTERSECTION

- GS Paper 1** → Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections
- GS Paper 2** → Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections
- GS Paper 4** → Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections
- Essay** → Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections

Pathogens without payback: when sharing isn't caring

Many nations that share critical pathogen data often benefit little from the health outcomes developed using that data. The long overdue PABS framework is critical to fixing this system, with another round of negotiations beginning on April 27, a lot is riding on how quickly and effectively both parties find common ground

Mark Kates

When countries don't discriminate, why should care? That question encapsulates a future irony of global public health. Countries that contribute the most pathogens to medical research are often the last to benefit from the outcomes.

Low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) in Africa, Southeast Asia and Latin America, where new pathogens often emerge, are expected to proactively share biologic of materials and genomic data with the world through the World Health Organization (WHO). However, countries that develop life-critical vaccines, therapeutics and diagnostics (VTDs) using that material are under no obligation to reciprocate with fast and timely access to these clinical products. Risks are shared, rewards are not.

Despite the proven business case of this tragedy, the historic WHO Pandemic Agreement (WPA), adopted in May 2020, still lacks the much-needed Pathogen Access and Benefit Sharing (PABS) Annex. Without a binding legal framework to enforce fair sharing from samples to solutions, a coordinated global response to cross-border health crises will remain fraught with challenges.

The price of survival

A case in point is the historic vaccine shortage witnessed during the COVID-19 pandemic, which left LMICs grappling with prolonged vaccine shortages even as high-income countries, according to the People's Vaccine Alliance, hoarded more than half of global vaccine supplies despite representing only around 11% of the world's population.

The G20A initiative followed just around 1.8Bn of its promised share by mid-2021 and WHO's COVID-19

Technology Access Fund, meant to facilitate the sharing of intellectual property and manufacturing know-how, drew a blank. Subsequent mutations of the COVID-19 virus resulted in an estimated 1.1 million preventable deaths, delayed vaccines, and a whopping \$28 trillion, as per the IMF, in global economic losses.

COVID-19 isn't the only example: the life-saving Ebola drug, Zimveximab, whose estimated per treatment cost based on government data came to a jaw-dropping \$2,000, was effectively beyond the reach of those in need, in one of the world's poorest regions, who had helped make the treatment a reality through their blood samples and antibodies. When a new outbreak struck in September 2016, killing, as per the WHO, nearly 50% of those infected, all that the WHO could do amid its countries stockpiling the drug for "emergencies" was to wait for limited donations from the manufacturers.

More recently, the shared health compact signed by the U.S. with more than 10 African nations requires them to share pathogens for 25 years in return for just five years of eliminating U.S. funding and nearly no commitments on product return.

PABS seeks to legally lock



Not for change: Low- and middle-income countries often see pathogens often emerge, are expected to proactively share biologic of materials and genomic data with the world. However, countries that develop life-critical vaccines using that material are under no obligation to reciprocate with fast and timely access to these clinical products.

sample sharing to guarantee benefits, making it mandatory for pharmaceutical manufacturers to provide 20% of real-time VTD production to the WHO during declared pandemics, at least half of it for low and the remaining at reasonable prices. Besides making timely secondary contributions, manufacturers would also need to transfer technology, build capacity and enable broader production in developing countries through licenses.

Technical gaps

Recent Intergovernmental Working Group meetings in Geneva, while recognizing certain technical gaps, have not been able to address fundamental disagreements around binding obligations on benefit sharing, intellectual property and data accessibility. With an initial round of negotiations slated to begin on April 27, the window to secure a meaningful agreement is closing fast. Pushing ahead with a partial framework would undermine global health cooperation and international trust, compelling developing countries to wait for assessment of health data.

While PABS is backed by around 100 LMICs, including India, who represent nearly 50% of the world's population and have suffered the brunt of voluntary goodwill arrangements, opposition comes from developed countries, especially the European Union (EU), which are home to some of the world's largest pharmaceutical companies.

Proponents of PABS want tighter, enforceable rules and contractual provisions to govern the sharing of samples and vaccines, whereas opponents favor voluntary mechanisms over binding contracts, arguing that the added bureaucracy and complexity arising from legal mandates could stifle research and

innovation. This, despite existing global systems - from environmental treaties to public health frameworks - already relying on standard legal instruments to balance access with incentives.

The EU's current model of allowing access to pathogens requires data without adequate transparency or traceability is opposed by PABS proponents, who say mandatory use equates to critical for greater accountability. The EU contends that doing so will impede the openness and interoperability of data systems. However, the likes of the European Genome-Phenome Archive, and the Global Initiative on Sharing All Influenza Data (GISAID), often publicly debarred by many EU countries, already use secure access and trackable data-sharing systems.

Advocates of PABS want it to be made mandatory for companies and labs to let WHO and its programs use their samples and technologies developed using shared pathogen data under non-exclusive licenses so that multiple players can produce and distribute these products and technologies. In contrast, the EU wants this arrangement to be left to the discretion of individual companies.

Supporters of PABS want all agreements to be made public and seek national representation for civil society in negotiations and systems oversight. The EU is averse to any such mechanisms. Additionally, PABS supporters want the scope of benefits sharing to be extended beyond pandemics to include WHO's more frequent PHEIC (public health emergency of international concern) declarations.

The middle ground
The EU's position is also being challenged by global health groups including the

WHO Healthcare Foundation, Third World Network and Public Citizen. It is evident, however, that both sides ultimately seek certainty. While developing countries are seeking guaranteed, enforceable benefits, high-income countries, largely at the behest of their pharmaceutical industries, are looking for a highly predictable system that does not weigh down their innovation ecosystems with obligations.

A middle ground for countries to share in the benefits of better pandemic preparedness could be a tiered system with lower obligations during normal times, stronger commitments during pandemics, and a global fund to support poorer countries, springing immediate access a disproportionate burden.

For a start, essential elements of access, utilization, benefit-sharing, IP, standard track, dispute resolution and non-compliance could be written into the Annex now and detailed model contract could be drafted out over a mutually agreeable timeframe. A mechanism could be worked out to reward, not punish, manufacturers who share IP.

Developed countries must reassess the impact of their resistance on their credibility with the Global South, while developing countries must show greater flexibility on timelines and payment terms in return for firm commitments on the essentials.

From zoonotic threats such as avian, to engineered pathogens, dual-use biotech and in-depth cybersecurity risks, the next pandemic may not be far off. When they meet again in Geneva, both sides must approach the resolution of the PABS impasse as a matter of public welfare rather than mere bargaining. For no one is safe until everyone is.

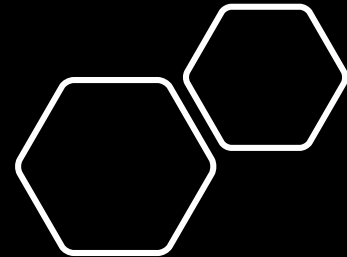
Mark Kates is an independent journalist and commentator. kates@katesjournal.com

THE GIST

Countries that contribute the most pathogens to medical research are often the last to benefit from the outcomes. Despite the proven business case of this tragedy, the historic WHO Pandemic Agreement (WPA), adopted in May 2020, still lacks the much-needed Pathogen Access and Benefit Sharing (PABS) Annex.

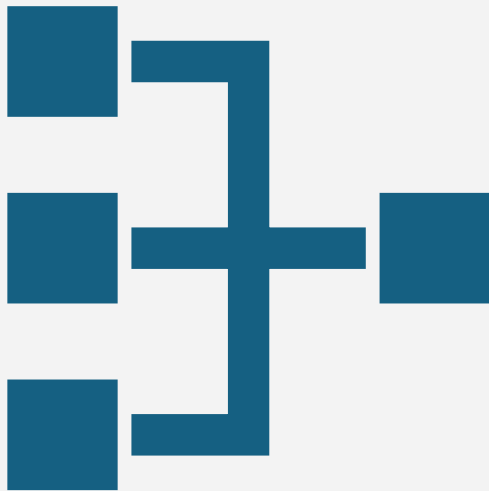
PABS seeks to legally lock sample sharing to guarantee benefits, making it mandatory for pharmaceutical manufacturers to provide 20% of real-time VTD production to the WHO during declared pandemics, at least half of it for low- and the remaining at reasonable prices.

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- **Key Terms and Explanations**
- **Pathogen Access and Benefit-Sharing (PABS):** A proposed framework where countries share biological samples (like virus strains) in exchange for guaranteed benefits (like vaccines). *Example: Country A shares a new flu strain; in return, it gets 10% of the resulting vaccines for free.*
- **VTDs (Vaccines, Therapeutics, and Diagnostics):** The "holy trinity" of medical countermeasures needed to fight an outbreak.
- **Vaccine Apartheid:** A term used to describe the predatory inequality where wealthy nations hoard life-saving doses while poor nations are left with nothing.
- **LMICs (Low- and Middle-Income Countries):** Nations with lower GNI per capita, often located in the Global South, where biodiversity is high but pharmaceutical infrastructure is often developing.
- **PHEIC (Public Health Emergency of International Concern):** A formal declaration by the WHO of an extraordinary event that constitutes a public health risk to other States through international spread.
- **Genomic Data/Sequence Sharing:** Sharing the "genetic blueprint" of a virus digitally so scientists globally can study it without needing the physical sample.
- **TRIPS (Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights):** A WTO agreement that protects pharmaceutical patents. This is often the "bone of contention" in global health equity.

- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**
- **The Core Thesis**
- The central argument is that the current global health system operates on a "parasitic" model: LMICs provide the raw materials (pathogens) and human subjects for clinical trials, but high-income countries (HICs) and private pharma companies monopolize the finished products.
- **Key Points & Supporting Evidence**
- **The Inequity of Risk vs. Reward:** Pathogens emerge largely in the Global South due to biodiversity and land-use changes. These countries share data out of "global duty," but receive no legal guarantee of the cure.
- **Failure of Voluntary Mechanisms:** The article points out that during COVID-19, initiatives like COVAX and C-TAP failed because they relied on "goodwill" rather than binding law.
- **Economic Impact:** Beyond the 1.3 million preventable deaths mentioned, the lack of equity led to a \$28 trillion global economic loss. This suggests that equity is not just a moral choice but an economic necessity.
- **Counterarguments (The Developed World's View)**
- **Innovation Logic:** Developed nations and the EU argue that mandatory technology transfers and IP waiving will "stifle innovation" by removing the profit motive for R&D.
- **Bureaucratic Hurdles:** They argue that "data traceability" (tracking who uses which sequence) adds layers of red tape that could slow down scientific response during a fast-moving pandemic.



- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**
- **Pre-2000s (Ad-hoc Sharing):** Pathogen sharing was largely informal, based on scientific camaraderie, often benefiting Western labs without acknowledgment of the source country.
- **The 2007 H5N1 Crisis:** Indonesia famously refused to share bird flu samples with the WHO, arguing that their samples were being used by Western companies to make vaccines that Indonesia could not afford. This was the "birth" of the equity debate.
- **The 2011 PIP Framework:** The Pandemic Influenza Preparedness Framework was established. It was the first "access and benefit-sharing" tool, but it *only* applied to influenza, not other pathogens like Ebola or Coronaviruses.
- **2020-2023 (COVID-19 Pandemic):** The systemic failure of the TRIPS waiver and the rise of "vaccine nationalism" catalyzed the demand for a permanent, legally binding Pandemic Treaty.
- **May 2025:** Adoption of the World Pandemic Agreement, but notably leaving the "PABS Annex" (the actual enforcement mechanism) empty due to lack of consensus.

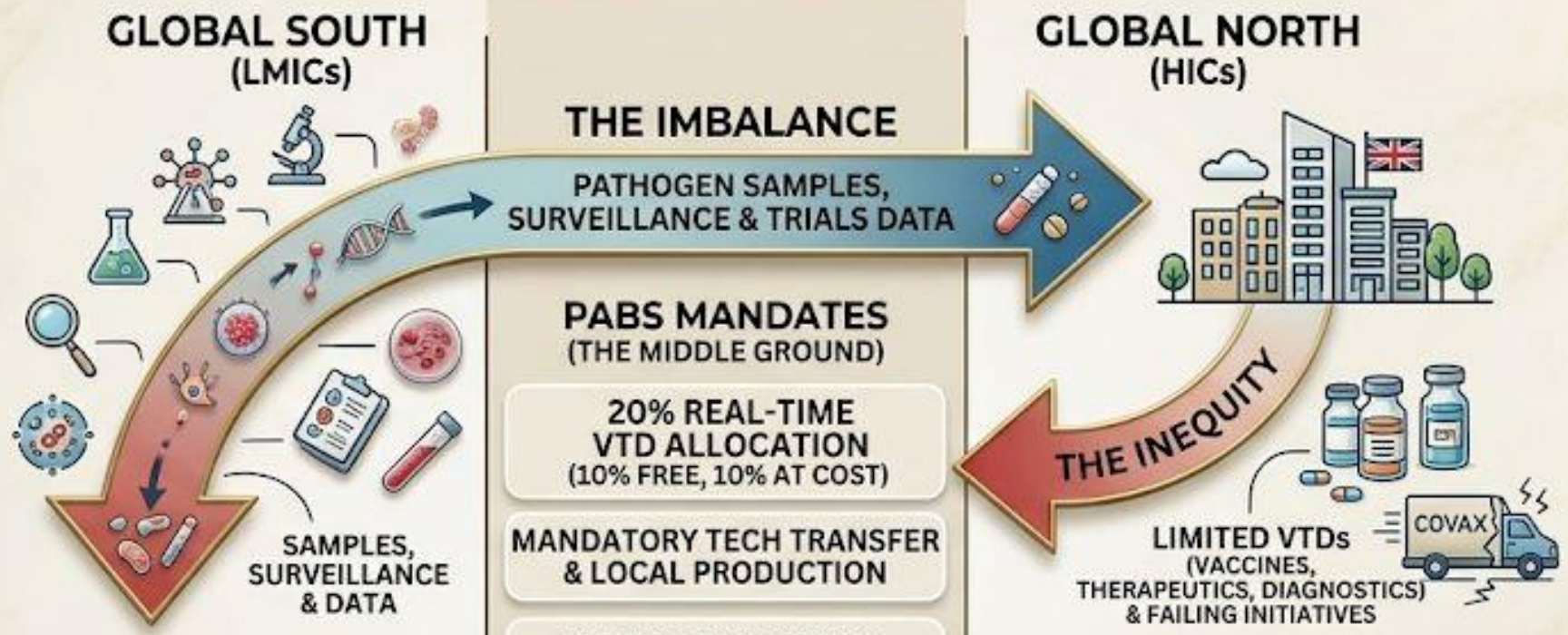
- **Way Forward**
- **Grand Bargain:** LMICs should offer faster, more transparent data sharing in exchange for "legally triggered" access to vaccines.
- **Decentralized Manufacturing:** Instead of just sharing finished doses, HICs should fund mRNA hubs in Africa, Asia, and Latin America to ensure regional self-reliance.
- **Delinking R&D Costs:** Move toward a model where governments fund the "base research" so that the final product doesn't need high patent protections to recoup costs.
- **Dispute Resolution:** Establish an independent tribunal under the WPA to adjudicate cases where countries or companies fail to share benefits.

- **Previous Years' Questions (PYQs)**
- **Mains (GS 2, 2020):** "Critically examine the role of WHO in providing health security during the COVID-19 pandemic."
- **Mains (GS 3, 2014):** "What do you understand by the term 'Biopiracy'? How can it be prevented?"
- **Mains (GS 4, 2021):** "The current pandemic has exposed the cracks in global solidarity. Discuss the ethical issues involved in vaccine distribution."



AXIA
IAS ACADEMY
RIS ABOVE THE REST

GLOBAL HEALTH EQUITY & PATHOGEN ACCESS AND BENEFIT-SHAR (PABS): A DETAILED ANALYSIS BY AXIA IAS ACADEMY



LMIC PERSPECTIVE: GUARANTEED BENEFITS

- Pathogen knared benefits
- Guaranteed benefits
- Compositionnts
- Countrie & benefits

GISAID

EU/PHARMA PERSPECTIVE: VOLUNTARY COMMITMENTS

- Voluntary soepliccancpliga
- Voluntary commitments
- Munitiario swilate corporate
- Voluntary commitments



What are safer fireworks alternatives?

How loud do fireworks at Thrissur Pooram get? What do India's noise rules permit? What risks do fireworks pose to hospitals? What is cold spark technology? Are they safer than traditional fireworks? Why are noiseless alternatives not widely used yet? What transition is being proposed for Thrissur Pooram?

EXPLAINER

Divya Gandhi

The story so far:

As hundreds gathered to experience the grand fireworks display at the Thrissur Pooram festival in Kerala last year, a heavily caparisoned and disoriented elephant, Uttoly Raman, suddenly ran amok, leaving 42 people injured. The previous day, another parading elephant, Chirakkara Sreeraman, had attacked its mahout. "Elephants, like other animals, get disoriented not just by decibel levels, but also by the structure and frequency of noise," said Manjari Jain, Associate Professor, Department of Biological Sciences, IISER Mohali. In response to an RTI request filed by *The Hindu*, the Kerala State Pollution Control Board stated that noise levels during the 2025 festival peaked at as much as 122.4 decibels in one area. This was just under the Central Pollution Control Board's 'Noise Standards for Firecrackers', which prohibit "the manufacture, sale or use of fire-crackers generating noise level exceeding 125 [decibels]... at 4 metres distance from the point of bursting."

What are the risks to hospitals?

As for permissible ambient noise levels, the National Ambient Noise Monitoring Network recommends 45-55 decibels in residential areas and 40-50 decibels in "silence zones" such as hospitals and educational institutions – far lower than the legal cap of 125 decibels for fireworks.

Eminent social scientist Rajan Gurukkal has raised concerns about the proximity of Thrissur's fireworks to hospitals, especially those with neonatal intensive care units, and their impact on infant brain development. "The way the



Firefighters douse a blaze at a fireworks unit in Mundathikode, Thrissur, Kerala on April 21. #1

festival is conducted in Thrissur violates ICU norms. Many facilities do not have soundproof windows, and the district hospital is minutes away from the fireworks," he told *The Hindu*. The World Health Organization notes that noise pollution is the third most hazardous environmental threat to human health, after air and water pollution.

What are the noiseless alternatives?

"It is time to go noiseless," said Professor Gurukkal, on April 21, when 13 people were killed and 40 injured in a blaze at a fireworks manufacturing unit in Mundathikode near Thrissur. "We do not need to reinvent the wheel, cold spark technology is available, but not yet scaled up."

This technology, unlike traditional fireworks, uses a chemical combustion reaction of very fine granulated metal

alloy powders of titanium and zirconium, explained Samrat Ghosh, Assistant Professor at the Frugal Innovation Lab for Societal Benefit, Department of Chemical Sciences.

The 'cold sparkular', for instance, is a gun-like device equipped with a heater and a fan. The heater warms the fine alloy powder to increase its activation energy, while the fan blows the fine granulated metal alloy powders out. "When these fine powders eject out of the barrel of the hand-held gun, the heated fine powder reacts with the oxygen in the air and undergoes a rapid exothermic reaction that emits light with a sparkler-like effect as seen in traditional fireworks – but with no noise," Dr. Ghosh explained.

They can prevent burn injuries. While traditional sparklers emit temperatures of around 1,200 °C, cold sparkulars and cold anars operate at 60-100 °C, he added.

Though already available commercially online, these pyrotechnics remain expensive – a single 'cold anar' can cost around ₹400 – and are largely manufactured in China. "We have plenty of scope in India as the technology is well known and one can indigenously make these nano-powders," Dr. Ghosh said.

Prof. Gurukkal emphasised that what is needed is "professionalism and management." Contemporary stage technologies show that we can create in-house spark fountains and colourful spark-circles on the floor, he said, adding that televisions routinely employ cold spark systems that generate bright, upward jets of sparkling light without explosive combustion, heavy smoke and high-decibels "but giving the same, if not a superior, visual effect".

"It is possible to deploy arrays of dozens or hundreds of spark units across open grounds, arranged linearly, radially, or in clusters, with sequential triggering of waves, expanding bursts, and cascading effects," he said. These could even be mounted on temporary towers to extend the visual field, "creating the illusion of vertical expansion into the night sky".

What is the way forward?

Delhi, which celebrated its loudest Divali in three years, could also benefit from cold spark technology. As for Thrissur, Prof. Gurukkal said there should be an incremental transition strategy in Kerala, but that it would be ideal "to start with the Thrissur Pooram, the greatest among occasions that use parasols of intense air pollution with sound and smoke".

Initial integration of large-scale cold spark-based displays should be tested in Thrissur, the district famed in the country for its high-quality air, he said. "It is the responsibility of the Thrissur Corporation to substitute the existing method."

THE GIST

▼
Noise levels at Thrissur Pooram peaked at 122.4 decibels – close to the legal cap – raising concerns over risks to animals, hospitals, and infant brain development.

▼
Experts call for a shift to noiseless alternatives like cold spark technology, which can deliver similar visual effects without high decibel levels, smoke, or burn injuries.

- **Key Terms and Explanations**

- **Decibel (dB):** A logarithmic unit used to measure sound intensity. A 10 dB increase represents a tenfold increase in sound intensity.
- **Silence Zones:** Areas within 100 meters around hospitals, educational institutions, and courts where noise-producing activities are strictly regulated.
- **Cold Spark Technology:** A pyrotechnic system that uses metal alloys (Titanium/Zirconium) to create sparks via friction/heating rather than explosive combustion.
- **Activation Energy:** The minimum energy required to initiate a chemical reaction. In cold sparklers, a heater provides this to the alloy powder.
- **Exothermic Reaction:** A chemical reaction that releases energy through light or heat. Traditional fireworks are highly exothermic (1,200°C), whereas cold sparks are moderately so (60-100°C).
- **Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU):** Specialized hospital units for newborns. High decibel levels here are linked to developmental issues in infants.
- **RTI (Right to Information):** A legal tool for citizens to seek information from public authorities, used here to uncover noise level data.

- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**

- **The Crisis of Tradition**

- The core thesis posits that traditional high-decibel fireworks at festivals like Thrissur Pooram have become a public health and animal welfare hazard.
- **Animal Cruelty:** Captive elephants like Uttoly Raman experience sensory overload, leading to "running amok," which endangers the public.
- **Health Violations:** Noise levels (122.4 dB) nearly reach the legal limit (125 dB) but drastically exceed the recommended limits for "Silence Zones" (40-50 dB).
- **Vulnerability of Infrastructure:** Hospitals near festival grounds lack soundproofing, exposing vulnerable patients and neonates to trauma.

- **The Technological Solution**

- The article advocates for a shift from **Combustive Pyrotechnics** to **Cold Sparklers**.
- **Safety:** Reduction in temperature from 1,200°C to under 100°C eliminates fire risks.
- **Visual Equivalence:** Offers similar aesthetic "sparkler" effects without the explosive report or heavy smoke.

- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**
- **Pre-Independence:** Traditional use of native crackers and elephant parades in temple festivals; noise was localized and less "industrial."
- **1981:** Passage of the **Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act**, which later included noise as a pollutant.
- **2000:** The **Noise Pollution (Regulation and Control) Rules** were established, defining ambient air quality standards for different zones.
- **2005:** Supreme Court of India banned firecrackers between 10 PM and 6 AM, citing the Right to Life (Article 21).
- **2016:** The Puttingal Temple fire tragedy in Kerala (100+ deaths) catalyzed the demand for stricter fireworks management.
- **2018-Present:** SC pushes for "Green Crackers"; emergence of cold spark technology as a "noiseless" alternative.

- **Way Forward**
- **Policy Mandate:** Kerala State should mandate soundproofing for hospitals in "Festival Zones" as a part of building codes.
- **R&D Subsidies:** Provide incentives for Indian startups to manufacture nano-powders and sparkular machines to bring down costs.
- **Community Engagement:** Sensitize temple boards to the welfare of temple elephants; perhaps moving toward robotic/mechanical elephants (as seen in some Kerala temples).
- **Zoning Enforcement:** Strict "No-Bursting" corridors within 100-200m of NICUs and ICUs, regardless of the festival's scale.

- **Previous Years' UPSC Questions**
- **GS III (2023):** "Damages caused by noise pollution and the measures to control it."
- **GS IV (2014):** "Environmental ethics vs. Economic development."
- **GS I (2018):** "The impact of globalization on Indian culture." (Relevant to the shift from local to Chinese-made tech).

AXIA IAS ACADEMY PRESENTS: THE FUTURE OF FESTIVALS – A BALANCED ANALYSIS

1) THE PROBLEM: TRADITIONAL FIREWORKS



Excessive Noise
(Over 120dB near
Silence Zones)



Disoriented Animals
(e.g., Thrissur
Pooram cases)



Public Health Risk
(Vulnerable patients
& infants)

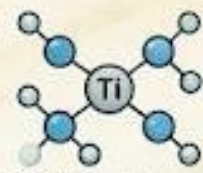


**Fire Hazards &
Livelihood Risks**
(Factory blaze case)

2) THE SOLUTION: COLD SPARK TECHNOLOGY



Noiseless
(Silent operation)



Ti & Zr alloys
Cold Spark

(Safe at 60-100°C)



Smoke-free
(Reduced pollution)



**Indigenously
Manufacturable
Nano-powders**

3) UPSC CSE LINKAGES & KEY TAKEAWAYS



**GS III: Pollution
& Environment**
Environment



GS I: Indian Culture (e.g.,
Governments, legator problems
for festivrs and more propasts)



**GS II: Indian
& Exlimational
Environments**



**GS I:
Culture**



**GS II: RTI
& Policies**

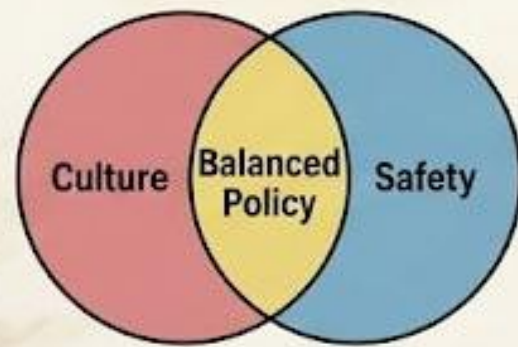


**GS IV: Ethics
& Community
Responsibility**



R&D/Make in India
Current the anovative
environmental

A BALANCED CONFLICT: TRADITION vs. RESPONSIBILITY



PROPOSED TRANSITION STRATEGY



What Telangana's survey shows about caste inequality

When caste is measured, the gap is not incremental but exponential, with SC and ST households structurally locked in despite economic growth

Srinivas Goli

For decades, Indian policymakers have relied on income as the measure of disadvantage. A landmark government report from Telangana, based on one of the largest population surveys ever conducted in the country, offers a stark correction: when caste itself is measured, the gap is not incremental – it is exponential.

The Telangana Socio-Economic, Educational, Employment, Political and Caste (SEEEPC) Survey 2024, a cross-sectional, census-scale enumeration covering 97% of the State's population (35 million people), introduces a rigorous Composite Backwardness Index (CBI). The findings, published in a government report funded by the Government of Telangana with no external conflicts of interest, show that Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) are not merely "disadvantaged." They are structurally locked in.

A gap too wide to ignore

Using 57 main questions along with several sub-questions, administered

through household visits across the State, the survey calculated CBI scores on a scale where higher values indicate greater backwardness. The results are stark.

An SC community scores 96 out of 100 on the backwardness index, while a general caste (GC) community scores 31. In other words, by the government's own multidimensional metric – covering education, occupation, living conditions, assets, and social integration – the average SC household is three times more backward than the average upper-caste household. The gap is not a margin of error; it is a chasm.

Perhaps the most politically consequential finding concerns scale. The survey assessed 242 distinct castes across Telangana. Of these, 135 castes, a staggering 67% of the State's population, recorded a CBI score higher than the State average.

The report explicitly notes that "not all backward castes are equally backward." There is significant heterogeneity within the Backward Classes category: some groups score close to SCs, while others approach GC levels. This finding destroys the utility of treating any broad category, SC, ST, or BC, as a monolith. Policy

Telangana is among India's fastest-growing States. Yet the SEEEPC Survey 2024 proves that economic growth and caste inequality operate on separate tracks

cannot be one-size-fits-all.

Inequality across spaces and systems
The survey disaggregates outcomes across rural and urban areas. While urbanisation improves absolute outcomes, a Dalit family in Hyderabad may fare better than one in a remote village. However, urban-rural disparities persist sharply in education, income, and housing quality. Upper castes disproportionately benefit from city growth, while SC/ST households remain concentrated in urban informal settlements with amenities barely superior to rural slums.

The survey also identifies high educational backwardness among ST communities, even relative to SCs. This suggests that tribal communities face distinct barriers, including geographic isolation, language, and cultural distance

from mainstream institutions, that require targeted, not generic, interventions.

What the data demands from policy

The Independent Expert Working Group behind the SEEEPC report is unequivocal in its recommendations. The single most crucial lever is education – but not merely access.

"Strengthening government school systems and ensuring quality education is crucial," the report states. This is a pointed rebuke to the current policy obsession with school enrolment (which has improved) over learning outcomes (which remain abysmal for disadvantaged castes). Without functional, high-quality government schools in SC/ST-majority areas, the cycle of occupational segmentation documented in the SEEEPC report will continue across generations for some more time.

The report is not without limitations. The data are self-reported, which may introduce bias: respondents could under-report discrimination or misrepresent social practices. Moreover, certain forms of untouchability were not explicitly captured, suggesting that the extent of social exclusion may be even greater than documented.

Growth without equity

Telangana is among India's fastest-growing States. Its GDP is rising, its cities are expanding, and poverty rates are declining.

Yet the SEEEPC Survey proves that economic growth and caste inequality operate on separate tracks. An SC household remains three times more backward than a GC household, not because of income but due to structural

A pattern of inequality

The SEEEPC Survey reveals wide gaps across castes, occupations, and outcomes

Table 1. Composite Backwardness Index (CBI) by social group

Social group	Mean CBI score	Relative backwardness (vs. General Castes)
Scheduled Castes (SC)	96	3.1x more backward
Scheduled Tribes (ST)	95	3.0x more backward
Backward Classes (BC)	86	2.7x more backward
General Castes (GC)	31	Reference (1.0x)

Table 2. Population share of backwardness

Category	Number of castes	Share of State population
Castes more backward than State average	135	67%
Castes less backward than State average	107	33%

Table 3. Occupational distribution by social group

Occupation	SC/ST	BC	GC
Agricultural labour	High	Moderate	Low
Informal work	High	Moderate	Low
Salaried/formal jobs	Low	Moderate	High

exclusion embedded in education, labour markets, and social systems.

The message to policymakers is simple: income-based targeting has failed the math test. Only caste-sensitive, multidimensional, and rigorously targeted interventions, beginning with government schools, can begin to close a gap of this magnitude.

(Srinivas Goli is an Associate Professor of Fertility and Social Demography at the International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS), Mumbai. Views are Personal)

- **Key Terms and Explanations**
- **Composite Backwardness Index (CBI):** A multidimensional metric used to quantify disadvantage. Unlike a single-variable measure (like income), it aggregates scores across education, occupation, living conditions, and social integration.
 - *Example:* A household might have a moderate income but score high on CBI due to poor housing quality, lack of ancestral land, and low educational attainment.
- **Cross-Sectional Census-Scale Enumeration:** A study that captures a "snapshot" of a massive population at a specific point in time, aiming for near-total coverage rather than a small sample.
- **Heterogeneity within Categories:** The existence of diverse sub-groups within broad administrative labels (like SC, ST, or BC).
 - *Example:* Within "Backward Classes," some castes might be economically stable and urbanized, while others remain as marginalized as Scheduled Castes.
- **Occupational Segmentation:** A systemic trend where certain castes are "locked" into specific types of labor (often low-wage or informal), preventing upward social mobility across generations.
- **Multidimensional Poverty/Backwardness:** The idea that poverty is not just a lack of money, but a lack of access to healthcare, education, clean water, and political representation.

- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**

- **Core Thesis**

- The central argument is that **caste-based disadvantage is structural and exponential**, rather than incremental. Income alone fails to capture the depth of marginalization because the "gap" between privileged and underprivileged castes is rooted in historical exclusion across systems—not just the bank balance.

- **Key Points & Evidence**

- **The Chasm of Scores:** The CBI reveals a 3:1 ratio in backwardness between SC communities (scoring ~96/100) and General Castes (~31/100).
- **The Fallacy of the Monolith:** 67% of the population scores above the state average for backwardness, but the intensity varies wildly. This suggests that "General BC" policies are too blunt to be effective.
- **Urbanization is not a Panacea:** Urban growth disproportionately benefits upper castes. Marginalized groups often move from rural poverty to urban "informal settlements," maintaining the same relative gap.
- **Education as the Weakest Link:** The report identifies that "enrolment" is a hollow victory if the quality of government schools in marginalized areas remains low.

- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**

- **Pre-Independence:** The 1931 Census was the last to comprehensively record caste data. The colonial British administration used "Depressed Classes" as a category, leading to the Poona Pact (1932) and the eventual creation of the SC/ST schedules.
- **Post-Independence (1950s):** The Constitution of India abolished untouchability (Art. 17) and introduced reservations. However, the focus remained on identifying "backwardness" through commissions like Kaka Kalelkar.
- **The Mandal Era (1990s):** The Mandal Commission shifted the focus toward "Other Backward Classes" (OBCs), identifying them based on socio-educational criteria.
- **The "Income-Only" Shift (2010s-2020s):** The introduction of the EWS (Economically Weaker Sections) quota signaled a policy shift toward using income as the primary proxy for disadvantage.
- **The Modern Data Revival (2023-Present):** Recent state-led caste surveys (Bihar, Telangana) represent a move back toward granular, data-driven caste mapping to challenge the "creamy layer" and "income-only" narratives.

- **Way Forward**

- **From Enrolment to Excellence:** Shift the focus from 100% school enrolment to the **quality of pedagogy** in government schools.
- **Granular Policy (Sub-categorization):** Use the CBI to identify "the most backward" within the BC/SC categories for priority resource allocation.
- **Urban Planning for Equity:** Move beyond "slum redevelopment" to inclusive urban planning that prevents the ghettoization of marginalized castes.
- **Regular Data Audits:** Establish a permanent Social Justice Commission to update this data every decade, similar to the Census.

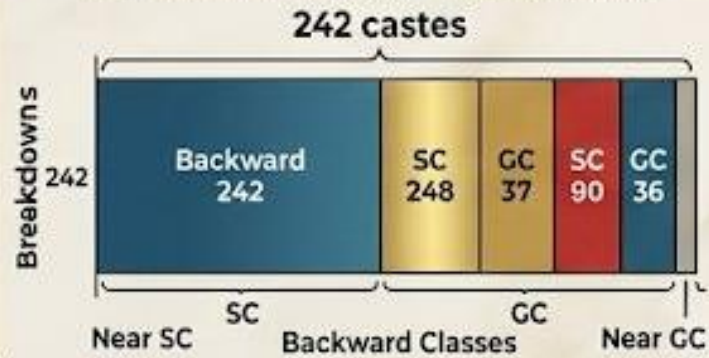
- **Previous Years' UPSC Questions**

- **Mains (2023, GS2):** "The formalizing of a sub-categorization of OBCs will provide more equitable distribution of benefits." Discuss.
- **Mains (2020, GS1):** "Has caste lost its relevance in understanding the multi-cultural Indian Society? Elaborate."
- **Mains (2018, GS2):** "Appropriate local community-level healthcare intervention is a prerequisite to achieve 'Health for All' in India." (Can be adapted for Education/Caste).

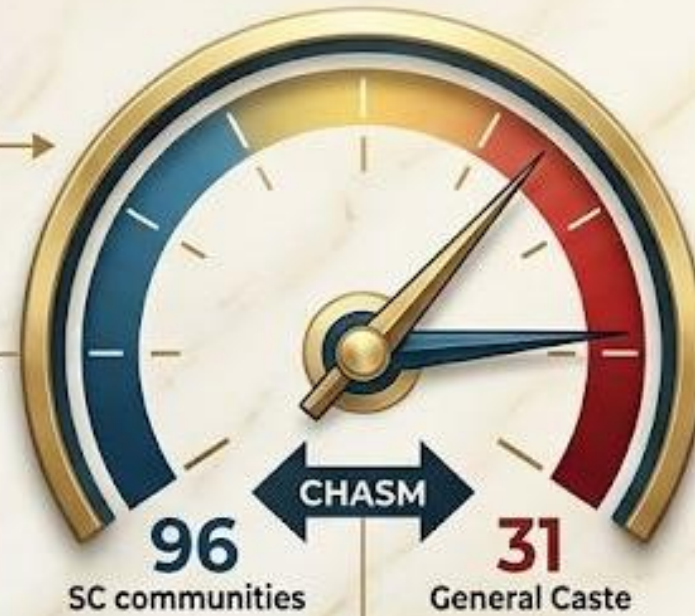


A DEEP-DIVE ANALYSIS: DECONSTRUCTING DISADVANTAGE BEYOND INCOME (TELANGANA SEEPC SURVEY 2024 DATA-DRIVEN INSIGHTS)

1 DISMANTLING THE ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL MONOLITH

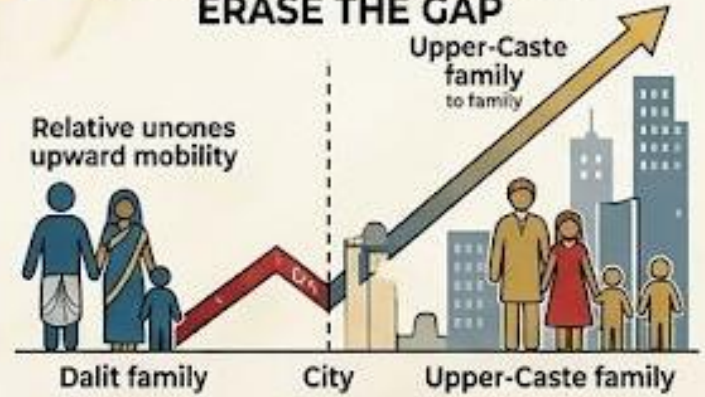


2 THE CHASM: COMPOSITE BACKWARDNESS INDEX (CBI)



A 3x GAP: From 57 multidimensional parameters including education, assets, and social integration.

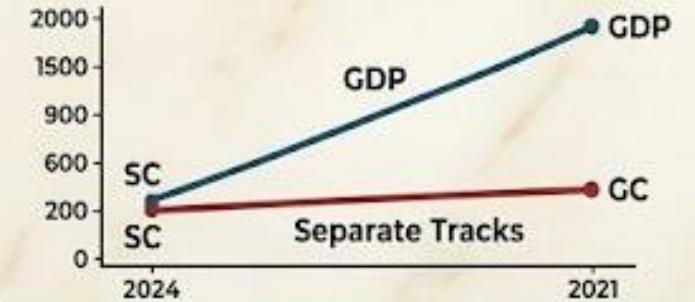
3 URBANIZATION DOES NOT ERASE THE GAP



4 THE EDUCATIONAL CYCLE (The Core Intervention)



5 GROWTH WITHOUT EQUITY



China selects two Pakistani candidates as its first foreign astronauts: reports

Vasudevan Mukunth

China announced on April 22 that it had selected Muhammad Zeeshan Ali and Khurram Daud of Pakistan to be its first batch of foreign astronauts.

The China Manned Space Agency (CMSA) said in a statement that the two men will come to China as reserve astronauts for training, *Global Times* and *Xinhua* reported. After completing all training and evaluation, one of them will participate in a mission to Tiangong, the Chinese space station, as a payload specialist.

The reports also said Pakistan's Space and Upper

Atmosphere Research Commission (SUPARCO) had confirmed that Mr. Ali and Mr. Daud had cleared the checking process and were departing for China.

The mission is expected to happen later this year. The selected astronaut will conduct scientific experiments in microgravity covering fields including materials science, fluid physics, life sciences, and biotechnology, according to the reports.

Pakistan now stands to be the first country to place a citizen onboard Tiangong as a crew participant. For decades now, China has been Pakistan's primary partner in de-

fence procurement, infrastructure, and satellite technology more recently.

Pakistan placed a remote sensing satellite in orbit in July 2025 launched from the Xichang Satellite Launch Centre in China.

Excluded by the U.S.

China initially sought to take part in the International Space Station programme but was denied participation. The U.S. entrenched the exclusion in 2011 with its Wolf Amendment, a law prohibiting NASA from engaging with Chinese space programme. Having been shut out of the ISS for more than two decades on the



To the stars: Khurram Daud (left) and Muhammad Zeeshan Ali. MINISTRY OF INFORMATION AND BROADCASTING, GOVT. OF PAKISTAN/FACEBOOK

grounds that its space programme was too intertwined with the military to be trusted, China is extending Tiangong to those partners that western or

west-led coalitions have historically excluded.

In 2019, China collaborated with the UN Office for Outer Space Affairs to open Tiangong to scientific pro-

jects from other countries, selecting research projects from Switzerland, Poland, Germany, Italy, and 13 other countries.

Tiangong is one of only two currently operational space stations. It hosts a crew of three astronauts – six during handovers – and has undertaken more than 260 scientific and applied research projects.

The station became fully operational in late 2022.

Europe was briefly a candidate for the first foreign crew on Tiangong. The European Space Agency (ESA) and China signed an agreement in 2015 to boost collaboration, with the stated goal of flying Eu-

ropean astronauts to the Chinese space station.

Those plans unravelled, however, with the ESA saying they had neither the budgetary capacity nor the political intention to send its astronauts to Tiangong.

China has undertaken regular crew rotations to Tiangong. The programme is also (currently) planning to launch the Xuntian space telescope module, which will orbit independently but is capable of docking with Tiangong, in late 2026.

There are also plans to expand Tiangong itself to six modules, possibly from 2027.

This schedule has

spurred the U.S. government to redouble its commitment to the NASA Artemis programme, which plans to land American astronauts on the moon by 2028, to 'beat' China.

Pakistan's space capabilities have historically been far behind those of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), which has landed a probe on the moon's south pole region and is preparing to send its first crew into orbit as part of the 'Gaganyaan' programme.

A Pakistani astronaut in orbit ahead of an Indian one as part of 'Gaganyaan' is at minimum a reversal of the usual regional optics.

- **Key Terms and Explanations**

- **Tiangong Space Station:** China's permanently inhabited space station in Low Earth Orbit (LEO). Unlike the International Space Station (ISS), which is a multilateral project, Tiangong is indigenously built and operated by China.
- **Payload Specialist:** A crew member responsible for managing specific scientific equipment or experiments rather than piloting the spacecraft.
- **Wolf Amendment (2011):** A U.S. legislative provision that prohibits NASA from using government funds to engage in bilateral cooperation with the Chinese government or any Chinese-affiliated organizations without explicit congressional authorization.
- **SUPARCO:** The Space and Upper Atmosphere Research Commission, Pakistan's national space agency, established in 1961.
- **Microgravity:** A state of "weightlessness" where gravity's effects are greatly reduced, allowing for unique experiments in fluid physics and biotechnology.
- **Xuntian Space Telescope:** China's upcoming optical space observatory, designed to co-orbit with Tiangong. It has a field of view 300 times larger than the Hubble Space Telescope.

- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**

- **Core Thesis**

- China is leveraging its space capabilities to build a parallel international coalition, offering "access to the stars" to nations traditionally excluded or sidelined by Western-led space programs.

- **Key Points**

- **Strategic Symbolism:** By training Muhammad Zeeshan Ali and Khurram Daud, China is positioning itself as a leader of the "Global South" in space technology.
- **Exclusion as a Catalyst:** The article argues that U.S. exclusion of China from the ISS (via the Wolf Amendment) inadvertently accelerated China's drive for self-reliance and its desire to create its own space ecosystem.
- **Scientific Utility:** The mission is not merely symbolic; it involves high-level research in materials science and life sciences, contributing to the global scientific body of knowledge.
- **Regional Optics:** The mission timeline suggests a Pakistani astronaut may reach orbit before India's indigenous 'Gaganyaan' mission, potentially shifting the prestige dynamics in South Asia.

- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**
- **1961:** Pakistan establishes SUPARCO (pre-dating ISRO by 8 years).
- **1990s-2000s:** China begins the "Shenzhou" program for manned spaceflight.
- **2011:** The **Wolf Amendment** is passed in the U.S., effectively barring China from the ISS.
- **2015:** ESA and China sign a cooperation agreement, which later stalls due to geopolitical and budgetary shifts.
- **2021-2022:** Tiangong's core modules are launched, and the station becomes fully operational.
- **2024:** Pakistan's ICUBE-Qamar (lunar satellite) is launched as part of China's Chang'e-6 mission.
- **2026 (April):** Official selection of the first batch of foreign astronauts (Pakistanis) for Tiangong.

- **Way Forward**
- **For India:** Accelerate the 'Gaganyaan' mission to maintain regional technological parity and expand the 'Artemis' partnership to ensure diversified space alliances.
- **For Global Space Governance:** The UN Office for Outer Space Affairs (UNOOSA) must play a larger role in ensuring that space stations remain "global commons," preventing a Cold War-style division of LEO.
- **For Pakistan:** Focus on "indigenization" within the partnership to ensure that technical skills are transferred back to SUPARCO.

- **Previous Years' UPSC Questions**
- **GS-3 (2022):** Discuss India's achievements in the field of Space Science and Technology. How has the application of this technology helped India in its socio-economic development?
- **GS-2 (2017):** 'China is using its economic relations and positive trade surplus as tools to develop strategic hold in South Asia.' Discuss.
- **Prelims (2016):** Which of the following is/are the aim/aims of the 'Digital India' Plan of the Government of India? (Relevant to satellite-based connectivity).







AXIA
IAS ACADEMY

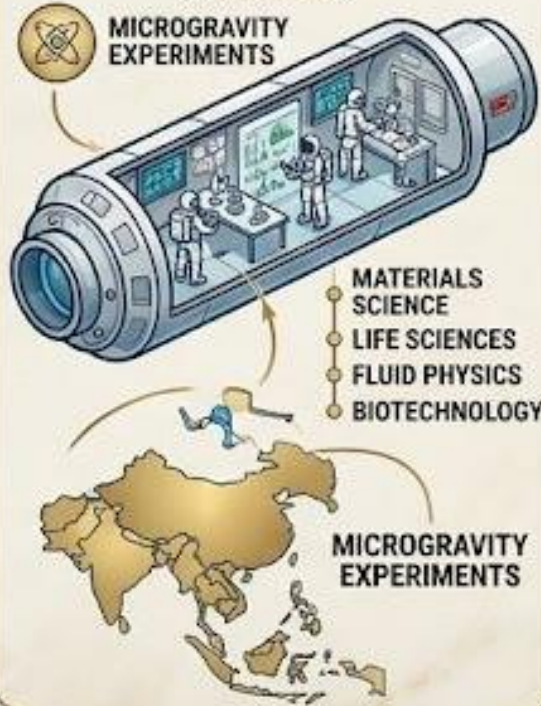
RISE ABOVE THE REST

GLOBAL SPACE SHIFT



- BIFURCATED SPACE ORDER
- WESTERN EXCLUSION (e.g., WOLF AMENDMENT)
- EMERGENCE OF PARALLEL SPACE COALITION

MISSION OBJECTIVES (TIANGONG)

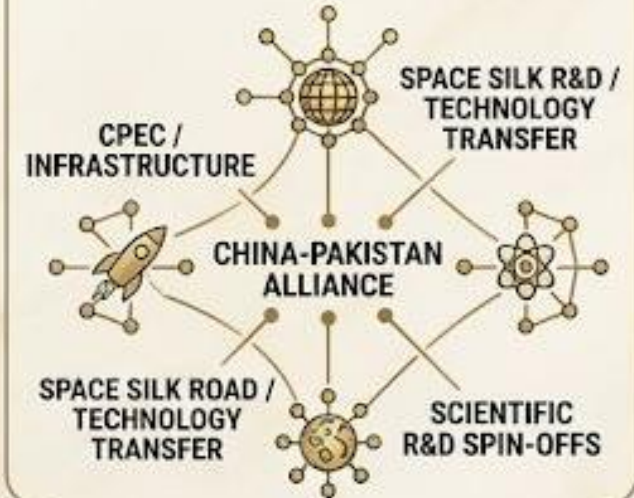


PAKISTAN'S NEW FRONTIER



- FIRST FOREIGN CREW MEMBER
- TRAINING OF Z. ALI AND K. DAUD
- STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP CULMINATION
- REGIONAL OPTICS & PRESTIGE SHIFT

STRATEGIC & ECONOMIC LINKAGES



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• TECH

Online gaming rules expand compliance, leave room for esports

Sourajendra Bork

New Delhi, April 23

INDIA'S LONG-AWAITED reckoning with its online gaming sector has finally arrived, with the government Wednesday notifying rules to operationalise the Promotion and Regulation of Online Gaming Act. The move paves the way for the sector's digital-first regulator and sets out a framework that will not require mandatory registration or prior classification for most online social games.

The Promotion and Regulation of Online Gaming Rules, 2024, which the Union Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) finalised after extensive inter-ministerial consultations, are scheduled to come into force on May 1. Its parent Act, passed last year, put a definitive stop to India's burgeoning real-money gaming sector, affecting highly valued start-ups such as Dream11, PkRFLX, Wazze, and Mobile Premier League.

India's online game market has expanded rapidly in recent years, with hundreds of millions of users and increasing monetisation. This rise has been accompanied by concerns over addiction, fraud and regulatory arbitrage, with different states following different rules. This prompted the Centre to step in with a national framework.

New central authority

The rules establish the Online Gaming Authority of India (OGAI) as the sectoral regulator, housed under the MeitY. This authority has wide-ranging powers, including determining whether a game qualifies as an online money game (played after depositing user fees, based on monetary stakes), online social game (not involving staking money) or sport (competitive organised games involving skills like physical dexterity and strategic thinking).

GAME ON

India's online gaming market has expanded rapidly, seeing hundreds of millions of users and increasing monetisation.

This rise has been accompanied by concerns over addiction, fraud, regulatory arbitrage

It can also issue directions, hear complaints, and impose penalties. It is entirely government-led, with representatives from ministries including Home, Finance, Information & Broadcasting, Sports and Law.

A key feature of the framework is the "determination and registration" system, which is not universally mandatory. Games are required to seek formal determination only in specific cases — such as when directed by the regulator, when offered as esports, or when the government notifies certain categories based on factors like transaction value or scale. Similarly, registration becomes compulsory only under notified conditions or for esports offerings. Determination decisions are game- and provider-specific, and remain valid unless the game's payment structure changes.

The rules also widen the compliance perimeter to financial institutions, banks, payment gateways, and other intermediaries that must verify a game's regulatory status before facilitating transactions. In the case of online money games, which are banned, they are required to act on OGAI directions — including suspending or restricting payments — effectively making the payments layer an enforcement tool.

User-facing aspects

The framework institutes a two-tier grievance redressal system. Gaming platforms must first provide an internal mechanism, after which users can escalate complaints to OGAI, with a further appeal available to an Appellate Authority within the government.

The rules also introduce data localisation obligations, requiring gaming platforms offering social games or esports to store traffic and related data within India. At the same time, OGAI can issue future directions on areas such as advertising, user safety and operational compliance, leaving room for regulatory evolution.

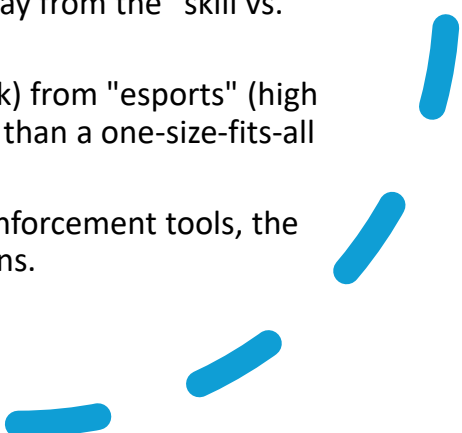
The rules also introduce the concept of user safety features, including age verification, time restrictions, parental controls, user reporting tools, counselling support, and fair play. Service providers are required to disclose their user safety features and internal grievance mechanisms at the time of application for determination or registration.



- **Key Terms and Explanations**

- **Online Gaming Authority of India (OGAI):** The newly established sectoral regulator under the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY). It acts as the "referee" for the industry.
- **Real-Money Gaming (RMG):** Games where users deposit money to win prizes based on stakes. Under the new rules, these are largely prohibited if they fall under "wagering."
- **Esports:** Organized competitive gaming involving physical dexterity and strategy. Unlike casual gaming, these are recognized as a distinct category requiring specific registration.
- **Regulatory Arbitrage:** The practice of companies taking advantage of loopholes or differences in laws between different states. A national framework aims to eliminate this.
- **Data Localization:** The requirement to store and process data within the physical borders of India to ensure national security and judicial access.
- **Grievance Redressal:** A structured system (here, two-tiered) for users to lodge complaints against platforms and receive timely resolutions.

- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**

- The core thesis is that **centralized regulation is necessary to sanitize a "Wild West" industry** while protecting the burgeoning esports ecosystem.
 - **End of Ambiguity:** By creating the OGAI, the government is moving away from the "skill vs. chance" debate that has clogged courts for decades.
 - **Strategic Distinction:** The framework separates "social games" (low risk) from "esports" (high skill) and "money games" (high risk), allowing for tailored oversight rather than a one-size-fits-all ban.
 - **Financial Gatekeeping:** By involving banks and payment gateways as enforcement tools, the government creates a "choke point" to prevent illegal gambling transactions.
- 

- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**

- **Pre-Independence:** The **Public Gambling Act of 1867** prohibited most forms of gambling, a law that became the foundation for state-level regulations post-1947.

- **Post-Liberalization (1990s-2010s):** The rise of the internet led to the first wave of "casual" gaming. Courts began distinguishing between games of "mere skill" and "mere chance."

- **The Startup Boom (2015-2023):** Platforms like Dream11 and MPL saw exponential growth. States like Karnataka and Tamil Nadu attempted bans, which were often struck down by High Courts for being "excessive."

- **2026 Milestone:** The transition from state-led "prohibition" to Centre-led "regulation and compliance."

- **Way Forward**

- **Technological Sandbox:** Create a "test environment" for new games to be evaluated before full-scale launch.

- **Public Awareness:** Regulatory rules are useless if users don't know about grievance redressal.

- **International Cooperation:** Partner with INTERPOL or foreign regulators to crack down on illegal offshore gambling sites.

- **Clarity on GST:** Pair these rules with a stable tax regime (avoiding 28% GST on full face value) to ensure the industry remains viable.

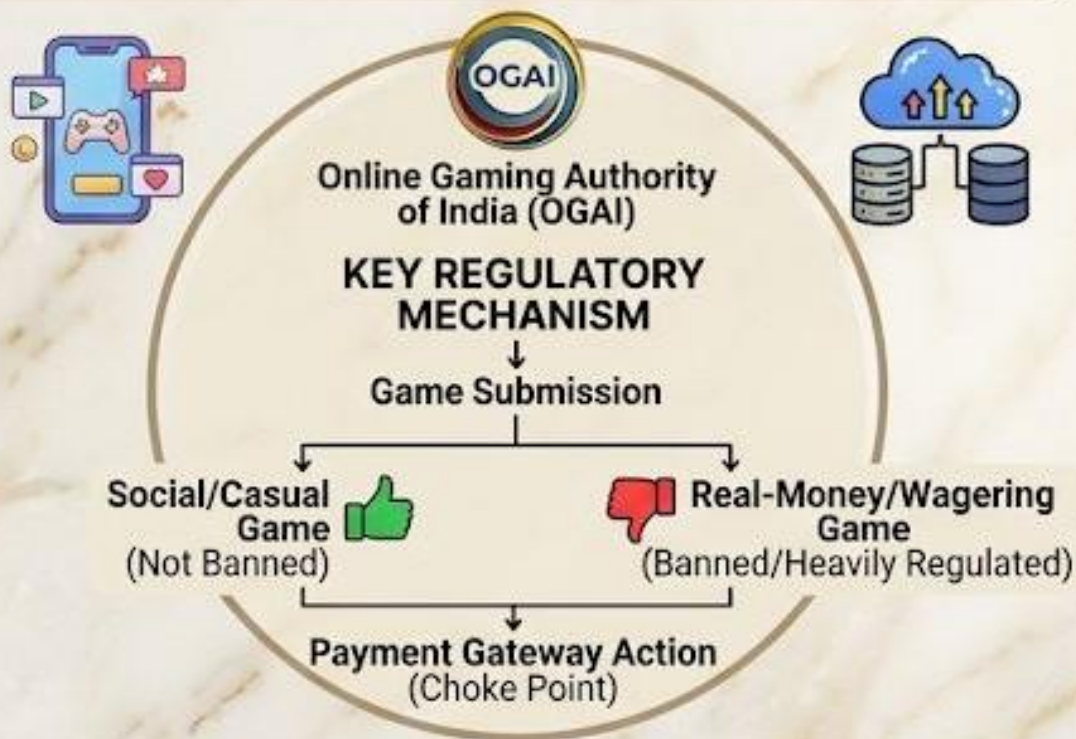
- **Previous Years' Questions (PYQs)**

- **Mains (2019, GS3):** "What is the Cyber-Physical System? How is it expected to change the life of people?" (Related to gaming/AI).

- **Mains (2021, GS2):** "The jurisdiction of the Central Government and State Governments in the context of the Seventh Schedule." (Directly relevant to gaming laws).

- **Prelims (2022):** Questions on "Data protection and Privacy."

AXIA'S COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE: NEW ONLINE GAMING REGULATIONS IN INDIA



1. LEGAL & CONSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

- Public Gambling Act 1867 vs.
- IT Act 2021/2026 Rules (confirms *senomis a visitation*)
- Center-State Conflict (Art 246)



2. KEY COMPLIANCE PERIMETER

- Data Localization
- Age Verification
- Time Restrictions
- Parental Controls



3. GRIEVANCE REDRESSAL (2-TIER)

- User Complaint
- Platform Internal
- OGAI Escalation



4. ECONOMIC & SOCIAL IMPACT

- Protecting Users from Addiction/Debt vs.
- Stifling Innovation/ Tax Collection



• IRAN CEASEFIRE

How US, Iran can break deadlock, end conflict

From the nuclear question to the Strait of Hormuz, both sides need to find middle ground on a range of issues as they seek a face-saving exit



SHUBHANT ROY

THE US and Iran are in a deadlock over the war in West Asia. But the ceasefire is looking.

There are two million as US President Donald Trump faces an Iranian regime that refuses to buckle under pressure.

Pakistan, which has emerged as a useful mediator between the two sides, is reaching out to both for a compromise and a possible deal to end the war.

In the ultimate, it is up to the US and Iran to find middle ground, one that allows both sides to project victory to their domestic constituencies. There are key questions on which both must agree, and possible exit strategies within each.

Iran's nuclear programme

The US wants Iran to give up its right to nuclear enrichment. Tehran does not want to relinquish that right, viewing it as central to its sovereignty and national pride.

Washington also wants Tehran to end and over its enriched nuclear material. Iran, however, is unwilling to give up its 90% enriched uranium — estimated at about 440 kg — which can be further enriched to 90% enough to make 10 nuclear weapons.

The US has proposed that Iran halt enrichment for 20 years, according to media reports, while Tehran has indicated a cap of up to five years. With both sides staking out maximalist positions, a 10-year pause could be a middle ground.

As for the 440 kg of nuclear material, the US President has already offered an opening, saying it lies under rubble — calling it "nuclear dust". This could pave the way for a solution where Tehran commits not to move or use the uranium within heavily fortified facilities at Isfahan and Natanz.

Sanctions relief

Iran is seeking relief from sanctions and the release of its frozen assets (estimated at \$300 billion) in the US, Europe and the Gulf, including Qatar. The US, meanwhile, wants proof that Tehran is serious about capping its nuclear programme.



The crushing western sanctions have devastated Iran's economy. One of the primary catalysts behind the country's massive protests in January was the plummeting value of the domestic currency.

While some let up on the sanctions in key for Tehran to revive its economy, Washington is likely to link any easing of sanctions to its behaviour, using it as leverage.

Strait of Hormuz

Iran has found that its most significant lever in the war is the closure of the Strait of Hormuz. Earlier, about 180 vessels passed through the Strait each day; now, that number has dropped to roughly 180 vessels over seven weeks of war. The economic consequences have affected nearly every country in the world.

Reopening the Strait is, therefore, critical. Iran also stands to lose revenue the longer it remains closed. US blockades have aimed to squeeze Iran financially, though Chinese vessels have so far been given a free pass, creating a loophole.

If both sides reach an agreement on the nuclear programme and sanctions relief,

Tankers anchored in the Strait of Hormuz off the coast of Iran's Qeshm Island.

Peace dividend

Gulf states have long touted their safety to position themselves as global financial, business and logistics hubs.

Any US-Iran deal is therefore crucial for these economies

Iran could reopen the Strait — with the US, China and Gulf states acting as security guarantors — to prevent further disruptions.

A more hardline regime

The Iranian regime has become more hardline following the killing of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, along with key figures such as Ali Shahrghari, Ali Larjani and the senior Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps leadership.

The new Supreme Leader, Mojtaba Khamenei, along with the key national security official Mohammad Bagher Zolghadr, are seen as hardliners. Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf is viewed as a pragmatic manager. Many of them share roots in the Iran-Iraq war.

The remaining moderates include President Masoud Pezeshkian, and former presidents Hassan Rouhani and Mohammad Khatami. Though weakened over the past several weeks, they remain experienced political operators and potential interlocutors.

The US could open channels of communication with these actors to assess how different factions within Iran respond to

the current situation. They may represent the best hope for Iranians seeking greater freedom and a better life.

Many Iranians who have spoken to international media have expressed frustration over the regime once the war ends.

If Trump is to claim success in West Asia, he may need to consider how to engage with different actors within Iran to influence the regime's behaviour towards its people — who have suffered both before and during the war.

Regional players

Pakistan has taken centre stage as a mediator between the US and Iran, hosting the JD Vance-Ghalibaf talks and, thus, creating an opening for direct engagement.

Pakistan's Army Chief, Field Marshal Asim Munir, has engaged with the US President to extend the ceasefire and has travelled to Iran to meet senior leaders. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Deputy Prime Minister Ishaq Dar have disembarked out to regional capitals.

What is clear is that Gulf states have a significant stake in maintaining peace and stability. These countries have long touted safety and security to position themselves as global financial, business and logistics hubs. Their petrodollar wealth and energy dominance have enabled economic diversification, modern infrastructure and technological growth, making them attractive centres for sports, entertainment and tourism.

Any US-Iran deal is therefore crucial for these economies, which have a vested interest in regional stability.

India's interests

India, too, has a strong interest in peace in the region. Despite maintaining communication channels with all sides, India was not called upon to play a larger role.

Instead, the US leveraged its renewed engagement with Pakistan, with Field Marshal Munir acting as an effective conduit to Iran. This appears to have caused discomfort in New Delhi.

India has consistently supported efforts towards peace, and should reiterate this position — even if Pakistan receives credit for now. This is in India's interest — 15 million Indian citizens live in the Gulf, 60% of its energy needs are sourced from the region, and there are significant Gulf investments in its economy.

- **Key Terms and Explanations**

- **Enriched Uranium:** Uranium in which the proportion of the isotope U^{235} has been increased. At 3–5%, it is used for nuclear power; at 90%, it is weapons-grade.
- **Strait of Hormuz:** A narrow chokepoint between the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman. It is the world's most important oil transit passage.
 - **Nuclear Dust:** A term used to describe nuclear material rendered unusable or dispersed due to kinetic action (bombing), complicating verification and cleanup.
- **JCPOA (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action):** The 2015 "Iran Nuclear Deal" which traded sanctions relief for limits on Iran's nuclear program.
- **Strategic Autonomy:** A state's ability to pursue its national interests and adopt a preferred foreign policy without being constrained by other states. This is a pillar of Indian diplomacy.

- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**

- The core thesis posits that while a ceasefire exists, it is fragile. A permanent solution requires a "face-saving exit" for both Washington and Tehran.
- **The Nuclear Standoff:** The US demands a return to strict enrichment limits and the handover of existing stockpiles (approx. 440 kg of 60% enriched uranium). Iran views enrichment as a matter of national sovereignty and "pride."
- **The Strait of Hormuz as Leverage:** Iran uses the closure of the Strait as its primary economic weapon, reducing vessel traffic from 440 to 150 daily, which impacts global energy prices.
- **Internal Iranian Dynamics:** The transition of power to Supreme Leader Mojtaba Khamenei and the rise of hardliners (like Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf) suggest a more rigid Iranian stance, though "moderates" like Pezeshkian still exist as potential channels for dialogue.
- **The Mediation Factor:** Pakistan has emerged as an unexpected mediator, creating a "JD Vance-Ghalibaf" channel, which complicates India's traditional role in the region.



- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**

- **1953 Iranian Coup:** The US-backed overthrow of the democratically elected PM Mossadegh seeded long-term Iranian distrust.
- **1979 Islamic Revolution:** The shift from a pro-West monarchy to an anti-Western theocracy.
- **2015 JCPOA:** A high point of diplomacy under the Obama administration.
- **2018 US Withdrawal:** The Trump administration's "Maximum Pressure" campaign and withdrawal from the JCPOA led to the current escalatory cycle.
- **2024–2026 Conflict:** Recent kinetic exchanges and the blockade of the Strait of Hormuz have pushed the region to the brink of total war.

- **Way Forward**

- **Phased De-escalation:** "Action for Action" approach. The US releases frozen assets (approx. \$100 billion) in exchange for Iran capping enrichment at 20%.
- **Maritime Neutrality:** Reopening the Strait of Hormuz under a neutral international observer force, perhaps involving "middle powers" like India and Brazil.
- **India's Re-engagement:** India must move beyond "discomfort" over Pakistan's role and leverage its own "Strategic Autonomy" to talk directly to the new Iranian leadership.

- **Previous Years' Questions (PYQs)**

- **UPSC 2017 (GS2):** "The project 'Mausam' is considered to be India's answer to China's 'One Belt One Road'. Do you agree?" (Theme: Regional influence).
- **UPSC 2020 (GS2):** "Critically examine the role of WHO in providing strategic direction during the COVID-19 pandemic." (Theme: Effectiveness of International Bodies like IAEA/UN).
- **UPSC 2018 (GS2):** "In what ways would the ongoing US-Iran nuclear pact controversy affect India's national interest?"



US-Iran Geopolitics

The Nuclear Standoff



Diplomatic Deadlock

- **US Demand: Return to Limits**
– US demand: anatomatic readlocks
- **Iran Demand: Right to Enrichment**
– Iran comprorate associated at hamis
- **Stockpile (60% enriched)**
– 60% enriched compilissent
- **Sovereignty & Pride**
– Tehnas signnty & canecy genater lIran



Impact on India

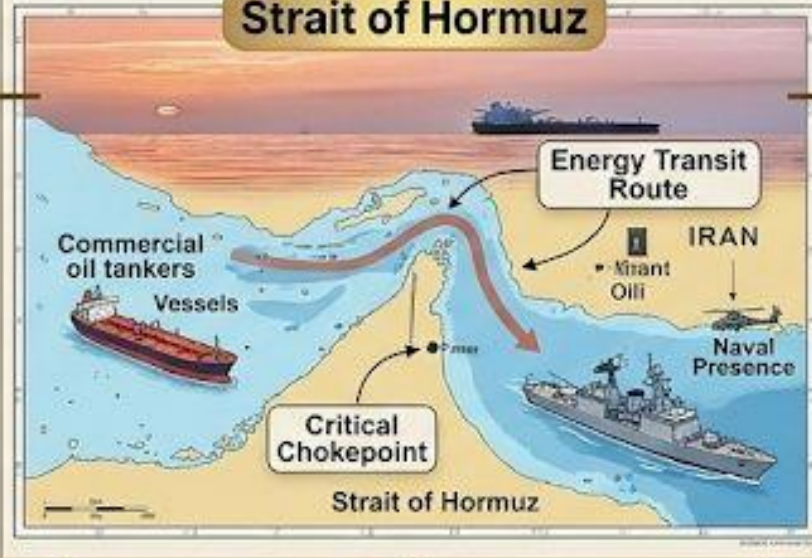


- **60% Energy Dependence**
– Economic: oivune
- **10 Million Diaspora**
(Remittances \$80B+)
- **Strategic Autonomy** Diaspora
(Multi-alignment)



Energy

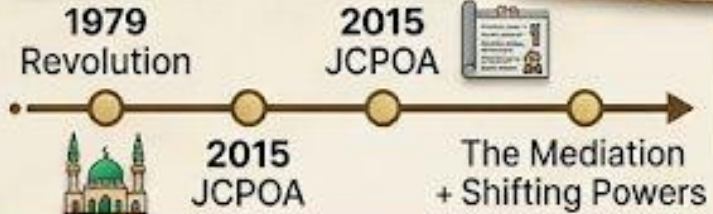
Strait of Hormuz



Way Forward

1. Phased De-escalation
2. Maritime Neutrality
3. India's Re-engagement
4. Pakistanian Goungagement

Historical Context Shifting Powers



The Mediation Pivot: Pakistan



- Tehran athannel contatrious mediators in towerifly mediator.
- Ecainomic sanction: Pakistan

Economic & Security Dimensions



- **Impact of Closure**
(440 to 150 daily vessels)
- **Global Energy Inflation**
– Global energy ional Inflation
- **Economic Sanctions Relief**
– Ecmomic sanctions andialief
- **Strategic Chokepoint Leverage**
– Strategic chokepoint Leverage



What Pakistan stands to gain from Iran mediation efforts

Yashee

New Delhi, April 23

EVEN AS the Iran-US ceasefire hangs fire, both parties have repeatedly appreciated Pakistan's mediation efforts. While this has raised Pakistan's diplomatic profile, what does the country stand to gain apart from praise? And is it staring at potential pitfalls?

Why is Pakistan working hard to mediate the Iran-US conflict?

For Pakistan, ending the Iran war has deep domestic imperatives. Its economy is heavily dependent on fuel imports from the Strait of Hormuz route. Already, the fuel crisis has forced versions of work-from-home policies in many offices and schools. Millions of Pakistanis work in the Gulf countries and send home remittances.

Also, while rising fuel costs affect economic activities down the chain for every country, Pakistan faces another problem. The nation is currently on an International Monetary Fund (IMF) loan programme, as part of which it needs to maintain foreign currency reserves at a certain level. Spending more on oil drains this reserve.

The research body Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE) said in a recent report, "Rising oil prices increase the import bill, intensify inflationary pressures, and place downward pressure on the exchange rate, thereby slowing economic ac-

tivity. The existing closure of the Strait of Hormuz, if prolonged, can elevate industrial input costs and weaken overall business confidence. Furthermore, higher energy prices may also widen the trade deficit and strain external financing needs."

There are geopolitical concerns too. Even as it basks in praise from US President Donald Trump, Pakistan shares deep ties and a 900-km border with Iran. It is on good terms with the Gulf countries Iran has attacked, especially prime benefactor Saudi Arabia, with whom it also has a defence pact. Its other major benefactor, China, is suffering economically because of the war. Thus, Pakistan would want the war to end before any of its ties are put to a more severe test. Also, neither a defeated or weakened Iran — which would lead to instability on its border — nor a decisively victorious and emboldened one — which would reorder Gulf equations and create problems for Saudi Arabia — is in Pakistan's interests.

As Ali Chishti, a defence and security expert from Pakistan, put it, "Pakistan's concerns had been in two parts: that any Israeli-influenced government in Iran would be devastating for its national security, and that attacks on Gulf states have to stop for Pakistan's security and economic interests. Pakistan also wants Iran to open up economically, for its fuel security. So the negotiation efforts are survival tactics for Pakistan."

High stakes

- Pakistan depends heavily on the Strait of Hormuz route for its fuel needs
- Neither a defeated or weakened Iran — which would lead to instability on its border — nor a decisively victorious and emboldened one — which would reorder Gulf equations and create problems for Saudi Arabia — is in Pakistan's interests

What are the likely gains and dangers?

Less than four years ago, in October 2022, then US President Joe Biden said Pakistan "may be one of the most dangerous" countries in the world. Its image in many quarters was that of a failed economy that supported terrorists. From there to being the main actor in ending a war that threatens the global economy is quite a shift. When the ceasefire was first announced two weeks ago, the European Union and the Gulf Council countries had also appreciated Pakistan's role.

Pakistan can hope that such approval, along with its Board of Peace membership, can get it a seat at global high tables. Also, Pakistan's economy needs loans and foreign investments, and an improved diplomatic image could help with that.

Domestically, it gives the government a win to parade, and further cements the authority of Field Marshal Asim Munir and the military complex.

However, there are notes of caution. Some experts say that with one of the negotiating partners being the unpredictable Trump, the talks could blow up, and Pakistan would end up with some of the blame.

Moonis Ahmar, former head of international relations department at the University of Karachi, said: "Pakistan's diplomatic role to stop the war has been pivotal. Pakistan has been able to make sure that it has regional clout. However, it needs to be care-

ful. If the US again tries to betray Iran, Pakistan's position will be very awkward."

What does all of this mean for India?

In the immediate term, an end to the war is good for India, irrespective of who mediates.

In the long term, there are some concerns. If a diplomatically isolated Pakistan is in India's interests, that situation is changing.

But perhaps more importantly, the negotiations have been seen by some as a triumph of Pakistan's "hybrid regime." While Shehbaz Sharif has been talking to the Gulf and other regional countries, Munir has handled Washington. Munir, in his previous role in the spy agency ISI, had worked with Iran, and impressed Trump with his knowledge of the country.

"The hybrid regime in Islamabad, with Field Marshal Asim Munir and PM Sharif, has cracked the code for Pakistan. Munir, due to his intel jobs, has a strategic mind, reinforced by PM Sharif's great diplomacy. A win-win for Pakistan," said Chishti.

A strengthening of Munir, and thus the military, and the celebration of a "hybrid regime" has consequences not just for Pakistan's democracy, but for India too. Pakistan's peace overtures to India have come when the civilian leadership has been relatively powerful. The military has been hostile to India.

- **Key Terms and Explanations**

- **Strait of Hormuz:** A narrow waterway between the Gulf of Oman and the Persian Gulf. It is the world's most important oil transit chokepoint.

- *Example:* If closed, global oil prices would skyrocket, crippling energy-dependent economies like Pakistan and India.

- **Hybrid Regime:** A governing system that combines democratic features (like elections) with autocratic ones (like heavy military involvement in policy). In Pakistan, this refers to the synergy between the civilian government and the Army HQ.

- **IMF Loan Programme:** Financial assistance provided by the International Monetary Fund to countries facing balance-of-payments crises, usually contingent on strict economic reforms.

- **Foreign Currency Reserves:** Assets held by a central bank in foreign currencies, used to back liabilities and influence monetary policy.

- **Remittances:** Money sent by migrants to their home country. For Pakistan, the millions of workers in the Gulf are a primary source of US Dollars.

- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**

- The core thesis posits that Pakistan's mediation is not merely "goodwill" but a **survival tactic** driven by domestic fragility and the need for regional stability.

- **Economic Compulsion:** Pakistan is heavily reliant on fuel imports via the Strait of Hormuz. A regional war would deplete its thin foreign reserves and trigger hyper-inflation.

- **The "Goldilocks" Balance for Iran:** Pakistan views a defeated Iran as a security risk (border instability) and a victorious, emboldened Iran as a threat to its relationship with Saudi Arabia. Mediation seeks a "stable middle."

- **Diplomatic Rehabilitation:** By positioning itself as a "Board of Peace" member, Pakistan aims to shed its image as a "failed economy" or a "sponsor of terror" to attract global investment.

- **Counter-argument:** Experts warn that being the "middleman" is risky. If the talks fail—especially given the unpredictability of US domestic politics—Pakistan could be blamed by either side, leading to further isolation.

- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**

- **Pre-1979:** Pakistan and Iran were close allies under the US-led Baghdad Pact/CENTO.
- **The 1979 Revolution:** The Iranian Revolution shifted Iran away from the US orbit, forcing Pakistan into a delicate balancing act between its neighbor (Iran) and its benefactor (Saudi Arabia/USA).
- **Post-9/11:** Pakistan became a key US ally in the War on Terror, often straining ties with Iran over border security and sectarian issues.
- **2020s Pivot:** Following the US withdrawal from Afghanistan and Pakistan's deepening economic crisis, Islamabad has transitioned toward "Goeconomics," prioritizing regional stability to facilitate trade and energy pipelines.

- **Way Forward**

- **Institutionalize Diplomacy:** Move away from "personality-driven" mediation (Munir/Sharif) to institutional diplomatic channels.
- **Economic Diversification:** Reduce dependence on the Strait of Hormuz by developing alternative energy routes (e.g., TAPI pipeline, though difficult).
- **India-Pakistan De-hyphenation:** For India, the way forward is to monitor if Pakistan's "peace dividends" lead to a more stable neighbor or a more "emboldened" military regime that could return to anti-India activities.

- **Previous Years' UPSC Questions**

- **2017 (GS-2):** "The sphere of 'Soft Power' is becoming more important than 'Hard Power' in international relations." (Relates to Pakistan's image makeover).
- **2020 (GS-2):** "The long-sustained image of India as a leader of the oppressed and marginalized nations has disappeared on account of its new found role in the emerging world order." (Compare this with Pakistan's attempt to find a new role).
- **2019 (GS-2):** "The World is now facing the threat of 'New Cold War'." (Context of US-Iran-China-Pakistan dynamics).



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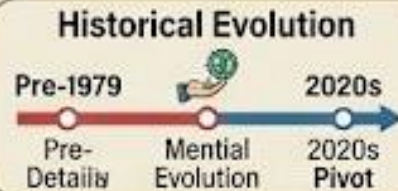
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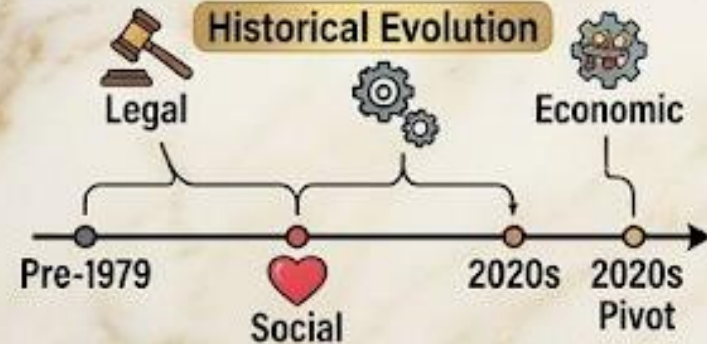
PAKISTAN'S Iran Mediation: A Multidimensional UPSC Analysis



GEOPOLITICAL REALITIES

- Pakistan as a neutral, "middle power"
- Balancing US, Iran, & Saudi interests
- Preventing border conflict & regional war
- Leveraging Kautilya's Mandala (Madhyama)

Historical Evolution



KEY DRIVERS



- Protecting oil energy in soots
- Securing emotions

IMF

ECONOMIC IMPERATIVES

- Protecting oil imports (Strait of Hormuz)
- Reducing energy costs and inflation
- Conserving foreign reserves (IMF terms)
- Securing remittances from the Gulf

DIPLOMATIC SURVIVAL & REHAB

- Improving global diplomatic image
- Attracting foreign investment
- Validating Pakistan's "Hybrid Regime"
- Gaining a "Seat at the global table"

Hybrid

WAYS FORWARD

- Implementing diplomacy to economic economies
- Diversifying to wmsoc costs for schemal and policy
- Unplimenting foreign is discent of resveriment
- Develop ao Pakistan naractions and anrelationships

INDIA'S STAKES (UPSC-focus)

- Impact on energy and border security
- Potential legitimization of the "Hybrid Regime"
- Implications for India's West Asia policy
- Need to de-hyphenate India-Pakistan issues

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