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SC backs EC circular on counting staff

Dismissing Trinamool's plea, it questions need for proportionate representation; Trinamool had said that EC was skewing playing field in favour of BJP by appointing more Central officers at counting centres; court says poll body is not required to consult political parties in such decisions

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Saturday called it a "fallacy" nursed by the Trinamool Congress that West Bengal Government services' employees owe allegiance to it and Central employees were loyal to or controlled by the party ruling the Centre.

"They are employees of the government and are part of the Election Commission in the exercise of their electoral duties during the poll time, it said.

The oral observations were made while disposing of a petition filed by the Trinamool, which alleged that the EC was deliberately skewing the playing field in favour of the rival Bharatiya Janata Party by appointing more Central officers, disregarding State employees, at counting centres across West Bengal.

Justice P.S. Narasimha, heading a Special Bench,

questioned the Trinamool's perceived need to have a "proportionate representation" of officers drawn from both Centre and State services at counting centres on May 4. "This is yet another fallacy, that is those belonging to State government services have a different allegiance... These are but employees of the government. Give them some credit," Justice Narasimha said.

Control of EC

Justice Joymalya Bagchi, the associate judge on the Division Bench, said that once these officers were deployed for poll duties, they belonged to the EC. "All these persons, whether Central or State employees, are in the control of the EC in the discharge of electoral duties," Justice Bagchi said.

The special sitting, merely 48 hours before counting started in West Bengal, was convened on a petition filed by the Trinamool challenging an April



13 circular issued by the State's Additional Chief Electoral Officer directing that at least one counting supervisor and assistant at each counting table would be a Central government or Central Public Sector Unit employee.

The party, represented by advocates Kapil Sibal and Sanchit Garga, said the circular was a "textbook example of an unjust executive action".

"The Trinamool is the main opponent to the BJP, which admittedly runs and controls the Central government. It is obvious and well known that the Cen-

tral government employees would be directly under the control of the Centre and likely to be susceptible to the control of persons in the BJP. Such direct control of the BJP over them gives rise to an apparent risk of bias, influence, and partisan conduct during the process of counting of votes," the Trinamool submitted.

'Cannot be a wild horse'

Mr. Sibal said the EC's powers under Article 324 (power to conduct, superintend and control elections) cannot be a "wild horse", giving them "freedom to do

what they like and anytime they like".

He read out from the April 13 circular, which said that in view of the "apprehensions expressed from various quarters regarding possible irregularities during the process of counting of votes". He asked the court about the source of the EC's "so-called apprehensions" that the counting process would be marred by irregularities.

"Such 'apprehensions' raise a finger at the State government... There must be some data to back these 'apprehensions'," Mr. Sibal said.

Mr. Sibal said the Trinamool was informed of the April 13 circular only on April 29. He said the Central government already had its employees in the role of 'micro-observers' at counting booths.

Justice Bagchi observed that the EC could take decisions on the ground based on its subjective satisfaction, and there was no question of conferring with

political parties on calls that had to be taken.

The senior advocate pointed out that the April 13 circular itself required the "random selection" of both State and Central governments' employees for counting duty through a dedicated module containing personnel databases incorporated in the ECINet. He said the circular should be complied with strictly. "You want 'strict compliance' of the challenged circular? You came here challenging the circular, and now you are saying 'follow the circular,'" he asked.

Senior advocate Dama Seshadiri Naidu, for the EC, said the poll body was studiously following the circular.

He said the Returning Officer, drawn from the State government services, had the overarching power to make a random selection of counting supervisors and counting agents from pools of Central and State employees.

- **Key Terms and Explanations**

- **Article 324:** The constitutional provision that vests the power of superintendence, direction, and control of elections in the Election Commission. It is the "fountainhead" of the ECI's authority.
- **Permanent Executive:** Civil servants and government employees who remain in office regardless of which political party is in power. They are expected to be politically neutral.
- **Subjective Satisfaction:** A legal term where a decision-maker (like the ECI) acts based on their own assessment of a situation rather than an externally imposed rigid formula, provided it isn't malafide.
- **Counting Supervisor/Micro-Observer:** Officials responsible for overseeing the integrity of vote counting. Micro-observers are typically Central Govt/PSU employees acting as the ECI's "eyes and ears."
- **ECINet:** A dedicated technology platform used by the ECI for candidate tracking, election management, and the randomized deployment of personnel to prevent "fixing" of duties.
- **Deemed Deputation:** The legal fiction whereby state and central employees, while on election duty, are considered to be on deputation to the ECI, making them answerable only to the Commission and not their parent departments.

- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**

- **The Myth of Political Allegiance:** A core argument is that the "employer" (State vs. Centre) does not dictate the "loyalty" of a public servant. The judiciary asserts that assuming a State employee favors the regional party or a Central employee favors the national party is a logical fallacy.
 - **ECI's Plenary Power:** The ECI possesses the autonomy to deploy personnel based on ground-level "apprehensions" of irregularities. This power is discretionary and does not require consensus from political parties.
 - **Neutrality through Randomization:** The use of technology (ECINet) for randomizing staff deployment serves as a procedural safeguard against bias. If the process is automated and random, the "identity" of the staff becomes secondary to the "integrity" of the system.
 - **Role of the Returning Officer (RO):** Even with Central employees present, the RO (usually a State officer) remains the statutory head of the counting process, maintaining a balance of power between different tiers of administration.
-

- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**

- **Pre-1950:** Colonial bureaucracy was designed for revenue and order, not democratic exercises. The transition to Universal Adult Franchise required a neutral machinery.
- **The Era of One-Party Dominance (1950s-60s):** Minimal conflict between Centre and States regarding election machinery as the same party usually ruled both.
- **Post-1967 & The TN Seshan Era (1990s):** As regional parties grew, the ECI began asserting its independence. TN Seshan famously utilized "deemed deputation" to discipline state officials who showed partisan leanings.
- **The Era of Multi-Phase Elections:** To manage security and neutrality, the ECI started "inter-mixing" personnel and security forces (Central Armed Police Forces) to prevent local bias.
- **Present Day:** High-tech surveillance and digitized randomization (ECINet) have replaced manual assignments to eliminate the "risk of bias" allegations.

- **Way Forward**

- **Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs):** The ECI should formalize these "hybrid counting teams" into a permanent SOP rather than "last-minute circulars" to avoid political friction.
- **Inter-State Deployment:** Explore using State employees from *neighboring* states for counting duties to ensure neutrality without over-relying on the Centre.
- **Transparency in Randomization:** Allow political party agents to witness the "button click" for computer-generated randomization to build trust.
- **Strengthening Deemed Deputation:** Legally clarify that any interference by a parent department (State or Centre) during an election period will lead to immediate disciplinary action.

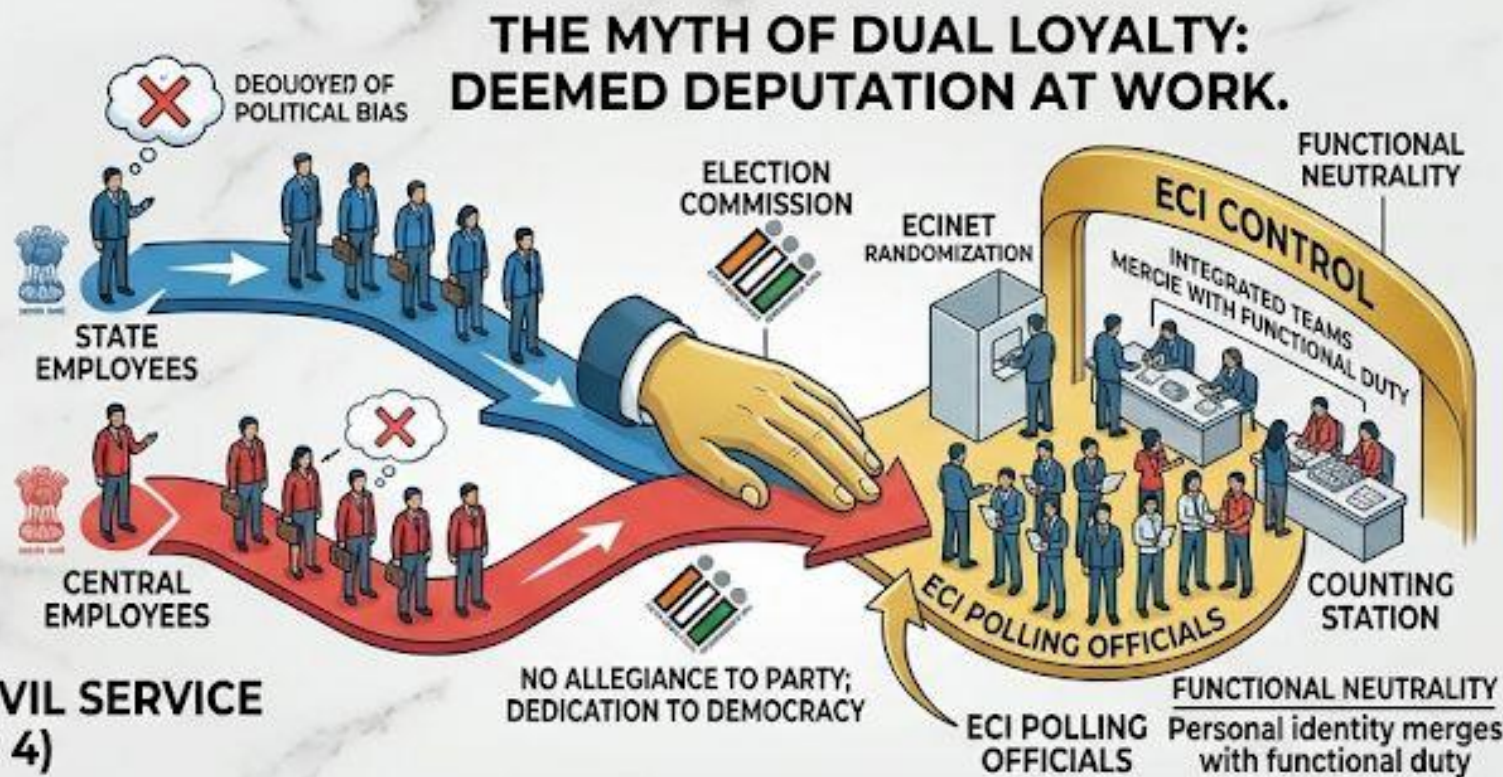
- **All Previous Years' UPSC Questions**

- **Prelims (2017):** Consider statements about the Election Commission (3 or 5 members, schedule of elections, etc.).
- **Mains (2012, GS 2):** "Discuss the role of the Election Commission of India in the light of the evolution of the Model Code of Conduct."
- **Mains (2017, GS 2):** "To enhance the quality of democracy in India, the Election Commission has proposed electoral reforms. What are the suggested reforms and how far are they significant to make democracy successful?"
- **Mains (2020, GS 4):** Case study on a civil servant facing political pressure during election duty.



ANALYSIS: THE 'ALLEGIANCE FALLACY' & ELECTION INTEGRITY: ECI'S AUTONOMY vs. STATE ALLEGATIONS.

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JUDICIAL PRINCIPLES & LEGAL DOCTRINE

- Doctrine of Deemed Deputation (TN Seshan Era)
- Article 324: ECI Plenary Power
- The 'Allegiance Fallacy': Employer identity ≠ Political Loyalty
- Judicial Restraint: EC Discretion and Subjective Satisfaction

ETHICS & CIVIL SERVICE VALUES (GS 4)

- Neutrality and Impartiality of the Permanent Executive
- Code of Conduct: Integrity under Pressure
- Philosophical Foundation: Rawlsian 'Veil of Ignorance' in Administration
- Functional Accountability vs. Organizational Paymaster



TECHNOLOGICAL PROCEDURAL SAFEGUARDS

- ECINet & Randomized Staff Deployment
- Hybrid Counting Teams (State + Central)
- Returning Officer (State) and Central Micro-Observers Balance
- Transparency against 'Fixing' Duties

UPSC GS PAPER 2 LINKAGES

- Constitutional Safeguards for ECI independence
- Appointment of Election Commissioners (2023 Act context)
- Powers, Functions of Constitutional Bodies
- Federal Trust Deficit and Centre-State Relations.

U.S. not committed to pacts, 'renewed conflict likely': Iran

Agence France-Presse
Associated Press
TEHRAN

A senior Iranian military officer said on Saturday that renewed fighting with the U.S. was "likely", hours after President Donald Trump said he was not satisfied with an Iranian negotiating proposal. In a letter to U.S. Congressional leaders, Mr. Trump said hostilities with Iran "have terminated" as the cease-fire was holding.

Iran delivered the new draft to mediator Pakistan on Thursday evening, state media reported, without detailing its contents. The war, launched by the U.S. and Israel, has been on hold since April 8, with one failed round of peace talks having taken place in Pakistan since then.

'No promises'

Mohammad Jafar Asadi, a senior figure in the Iranian military's central command, said "a renewed conflict between Iran and the U.S. is likely", in quotes published by Iran's Fars news agency. "Evidence has shown that the U.S. is not committed to any promises or agreements," he said.

The U.S. has warned shipping firms that they could face sanctions for making payments to Iran to safely pass through the Strait of Hormuz.



U.S. warns shipping firms against paying Iran for safe passage through Strait. REUTERS

Iran's judiciary chief Gholamhossein Mohseni Ejei said on Friday that his country had "never shied away from negotiations", but would not accept an "imposition" of peace terms.

The White House has declined to provide details on the latest Iranian proposal, but news site Axios reported that U.S. envoy Steve Witkoff had submitted amendments to a previous one putting Tehran's nuclear programme back on the negotiating table.

The changes reportedly include demands that Iran not move enriched uranium from bombed sites or resume activity there during talks.

News of the Iranian proposal briefly pushed oil prices down nearly 5%, though they remain about 50% above pre-war levels amid the ongoing closure of the Strait of Hormuz.

- **Key Terms and Explanations**

- **Strait of Hormuz:** A narrow, strategically vital waterway between the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman. It is the world's most important oil transit chokepoint; nearly 20% of global oil consumption passes through it.
- **War Powers Resolution (1973):** A U.S. federal law intended to check the president's power to commit the United States to an armed conflict without the consent of the U.S. Congress.
- **Enriched Uranium:** A type of uranium in which the percent composition of uranium-235 has been increased through isotope separation. High enrichment is a prerequisite for nuclear weapons.
- **Ceasefire:** A temporary suspension of fighting in which each side newly agrees with the other to halt aggressive actions. It is often a precursor to a formal peace treaty.
- **Sanctions:** Commercial and financial penalties applied by one or more countries against a self-governing state, group, or individual to influence behavior or policy.
- **Circular Trading (Contextual):** While not in the primary text, the user's professional background in GST fraud detection defines this as a fraudulent practice where invoices are traded without the actual movement of goods to claim Input Tax Credit (ITC).

- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**

- **The Fragility of Peace:** The core thesis is that the current cessation of hostilities is an "armed peace" rather than a resolution. The threat of renewed conflict remains "likely" according to Iranian command.
- **The Nuclear Deadlock:** The U.S. insists on placing Iran's nuclear program back on the negotiating table, demanding zero movement of enriched uranium from damaged sites as a precondition for lasting peace.
- **Economic Warfare:** Beyond kinetic strikes, the U.S. is utilizing secondary sanctions on shipping firms to maintain a naval blockade, effectively strangling Iran's revenue from the Strait of Hormuz.
- **Credibility Gap:** Iran's military leadership argues that the U.S. lacks commitment to international agreements, citing past withdrawals (like the JCPOA) as evidence that negotiations are futile.
- **The Oil Pressure Point:** High energy prices serve as Iran's primary leverage. Even the hint of a proposal dropped prices by 5%, illustrating how the global economy is a hostage to this regional conflict.

- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**
 - **1953 – The Coup:** The U.S. and UK-backed coup (Operation Ajax) overthrew Prime Minister Mossadegh, reinstating the Shah and sowing long-term Iranian resentment.
 - **1979 – Islamic Revolution:** The fall of the Shah and the subsequent Hostage Crisis ended formal diplomatic relations between Washington and Tehran.
 - **2015 – The JCPOA:** The Obama administration, along with global powers, signed the "Iran Nuclear Deal," trading sanction relief for limits on Iran's nuclear capabilities.
 - **2018 – Maximum Pressure:** The Trump administration unilaterally withdrew from the JCPOA, re-imposing crippling sanctions and leading to a cycle of escalation.
 - **2026 – The Current Conflict:** Following a regional spark, a kinetic war broke out in February, leading to the April ceasefire and the current stalemate.

 - **Way Forward**
 - **Phased De-escalation:** Moving from a "comprehensive" deal to a "step-by-step" approach—partial sanction relief for partial uranium freezing to build trust.
 - **Institutionalizing Mediation:** Replacing ad-hoc letters with a permanent regional security forum involving India, China, and the EU to guarantee the neutrality of the Strait of Hormuz.
 - **Legal Clarity:** The U.S. Congress should provide a definitive ruling on the "Termination" clause to prevent future executive overreach and ensure democratic oversight.
 - **Energy Diversification:** For nations like India, this crisis underscores the urgency of the **Green Energy Transition** to reduce strategic vulnerability to Persian Gulf instability.

 - **Previous Years' Questions (PYQs)**
 - **UPSC Mains (2017, GS-2):** "The World is now moving from a 'Balance of Power' to a 'Balance of Interests'. Discuss in the context of West Asian politics."
 - **UPSC Mains (2019, GS-2):** "The US-Iran tension has pushed India into a tight spot. Evaluate India's options."
 - **APSC Mains (2023, GS-2):** "Explain the significance of the Strait of Hormuz for the global economy and India's energy security."
 - **UPSC Prelims (2022):** "The term 'West Bank' or 'Levant' sometimes appears in the news. Which region does it refer to?" (Similar map-based themes).
-



GLOBAL CRISIS ANALYSIS: U.S.-IRAN STANDOFF & TENSIONS (2026)



STRATEGIC IMPASSE: A FRAGILE 'ARMED PEACE'

SECTION 1: THE DIPLOMATIC DEADLOCK



U.S. Counter-Demands
(withoff Amendments)

- Trump: 'Not Satisfied'
- withoff: Halt Enrichment Movement, No Activity at Sites
- Iran: 'Not Accept Imposition' (Ejei)

NO DEAL

Iranian 14-Point
'War-Ending'
Proposal

SECTION 2: RISKS OF MILITARY ESCALATION



DANGER

April 8:
Ceasefire Starts

- Renewed Fighting 'Likely' (Asadi)
- IRGC on High Alert
- Asadi: U.S. Fails on Promises



SECTION 3: CONSTITUTIONAL & LEGAL CONFLICT



Trump's Letter
to Congress
(May 1)



WAR POWERS
ACT BYPASS
(60-day limit)



'Hostilities
TERMINATED'

Congressional Opposition:
Deployed, Naval Blockade
= Hostilities

SECTION 4: ECONOMIC & MARITIME IMPACT



THE HORMUZ
IMPASSE

OIL PRICES: +50% | Peak
▲ Above Pre-War | \$126/bbl

U.S. Treasury
Sanctions Warned



Payments for Safe Passage = Sanctions

NGT directs southern States to use clean air funds

Jacob Koshy

NEW DELHI

The National Green Tribunal's Southern Zone Bench in Chennai has directed all five southern States and the Puducherry Union Territory to ensure "strict and time-bound implementation" of their State Action Plans (SAP) under the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP).

The judgment flags persistent particulate pollution across the region and warns that continued under-utilisation of clean air funds could attract environmental compensation.

These directions as-



The Bench flagged that more than 86% of utilised funds went to road dust control, with just 6.6% on vehicular emissions. FILE PHOTO

sume significance as they put the spotlight on air pollution governance in the southern States – an issue that largely dominates the northern regions, particu-

larly Delhi-NCR.

The tribunal recorded that Karnataka had received ₹597.54 crore between 2019-20 and 2023-24, with Bengaluru alone re-

ceiving ₹541.1 crore but utilising only 13% by October 2024. A subsequent affidavit reported that 76% of total funds released up to 2025-26 had been utilised by September 2025.

However, the Bench flagged that more than 86% of utilised funds went to road dust control, with just 6.6% on vehicular emissions and 4.1% on biomass burning – describing this as "disproportionate expenditure" that must be "rationalised". "In the event of continued under-utilisation or ineffective deployment of funds, the tribunal may consider imposition of environmental

compensation. The State of Karnataka and its Urban Local Bodies, particularly Bengaluru, shall ensure effective utilisation of funds allocated under NCAP and the Finance Commission within a time-bound manner," the order noted.

The tribunal issued 13 directions, including sector-wise implementation roadmaps within six months, monthly review meetings in Karnataka, and the establishment of an "appropriate institutional arrangement" for airshed-level coordination among southern States. A compliance report is due in six months.

- **Key Terms and Explanations**

- **National Clean Air Programme (NCAP):** Launched in 2019, it is a long-term, time-bound national strategy to tackle air pollution. It aims for a 20% to 30% reduction in Particulate Matter (PM10 and PM2.5) concentrations by 2024 (later revised to 40% by 2026), taking 2017 as the base year.
- **Particulate Matter (PM2.5 and PM10):** Microscopic solid or liquid droplets. PM10 (diameter ≤ 10 micrometers) often comes from dust, while PM2.5 (≤ 2.5 micrometers) is primarily from combustion and is more hazardous as it can enter the bloodstream.
- **Airshed Management:** A geographical area where local topography and meteorology limit the dispersion of pollutants. Managing pollution at an "airshed" level means looking beyond administrative city boundaries to include the surrounding region that contributes to that city's air quality.
- **Non-Attainment Cities:** Cities that do not meet the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) for over five years. Currently, over 130 cities in India are categorized as such.
- **Environmental Compensation:** A "polluter pays" legal principle where the NGT imposes monetary penalties on authorities or industries for failing to protect the environment, intended to restore damaged ecosystems.
- **15th Finance Commission Air Quality Grants:** Performance-linked grants provided specifically to million-plus cities to improve air quality, distinct from the standard NCAP funding.

- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**

- **End of the "South India Exception":** The core thesis is that air pollution is no longer a "North Indian problem." While Delhi-NCR faces seasonal crises, the Southern States are witnessing persistent, year-round particulate pollution that has been overlooked by policymakers.
- **The Funding Gap vs. Utilization Gap:** The argument highlights a paradox: while states claim they need more resources, they are failing to spend the hundreds of crores already allocated. For example, Bengaluru utilized a mere fraction of its ₹541 crore allocation initially.
- **Misaligned Spending Priorities:** A substantive critique is the "disproportionate expenditure" on road dust (over 80%) compared to high-impact sectors like vehicular emissions and biomass burning. This suggests a preference for "easy" engineering solutions over "difficult" regulatory or behavioral shifts.
- **Institutional Inertia:** The NGT highlights a lack of urgency in creating the infrastructure required to implement existing policies, such as vehicle scrapping centers or industrial emission monitoring systems.

- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**

- **Pre-1980s (The Era of Neglect):** Air pollution was seen as a byproduct of progress. The focus was entirely on economic growth with minimal environmental safeguards.
- **1981 (The Air Act):** The Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act was the first major legislative step, establishing the Central and State Pollution Control Boards (CPCB and SPCBs).
- **1990s–2000s (Judicial Activism):** The Supreme Court (MC Mehta cases) led to the introduction of CNG in Delhi and the shifting of hazardous industries.
- **2015 (The AQI Era):** Launch of the National Air Quality Index (AQI) to simplify air quality data for the public.
- **2019 (The NCAP Shift):** The government moved from reactive measures to a proactive, target-based national program.
- **Present (Regionalization):** The focus is expanding from the Indo-Gangetic Plain to Southern and Coastal India, emphasizing that air is a shared regional resource (Airshed approach).

- **Way Forward**

- **Source Apportionment Studies:** Every non-attainment city must conduct scientific studies to identify exactly where pollution is coming from before spending funds.
- **Green Public Transport:** Shift the budget from "road dust" to subsidizing electric buses and last-mile connectivity.
- **Airshed Governance:** Create a "Southern Air Quality Commission" (similar to the CAQM in Delhi) to synchronize policies across state borders.
- **Public Audit:** Monthly utilization reports should be made public to allow for civil society oversight.

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

- **Mains (2015):** "The Afghan war, the global warming... (contextual) – How can the concept of 'Polluter Pays' be applied?"
- **Mains (2018):** "How does air pollution affect the health of people in India? Discuss the various government initiatives to tackle this problem."
- **Prelims (2020):** Questions on the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP) and its targets.
- **Mains (2021):** "Describe the key points of the revised Global Air Quality Guidelines by WHO. How are these different from India's standards?"

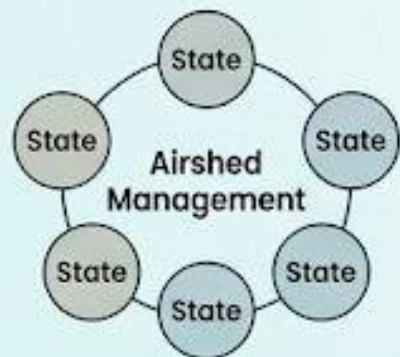


ANALYSIS: AIR POLLUTION GOVERNANCE IN SOUTHERN STATES & NGT JUDGMENT

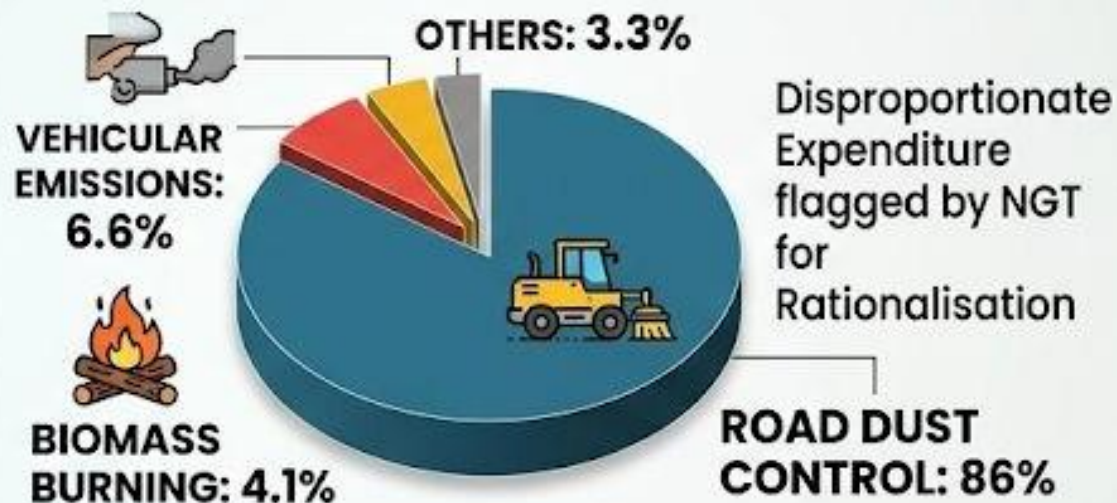


NGT (Southern Zone) Directives: Focus on Southern States & Puducherry

- Enforce State Action Plans (SAP) under NCAP
- Address Persistent Particulate Pollution
- Warning against Continued Under-utilisation of Funds
- Shift Focus from Delhi-NCR



BENGALURU NCAP FUND UTILIZATION PRIORITIES (2025)



STATE OF UTILIZATION (KARNATAKA & BENGALURU)

- Initial Utilization (by Oct 2024): **13% of ₹541.1 Cr**
- Updated Utilization (by Sept 2025): **76% of Funds Released up to 2025-26**

WAY FORWARD: 13 NGT DIRECTIONS

- Sector-wise Roadmaps within 6 months
- Monthly Review Meetings
- Environmental Compensation (Fines) for non-compliance



Centre launches emergency alert system for citizens

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

Mobile phones across the country went abuzz after Union Telecom Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia launched the cell broadcast alert system on Saturday that will warn citizens about emergency and natural disasters in their area.

The Department of Telecom had already alerted citizens about the trial run of the service on April 29 to avoid panic, with an appeal to ignore any alerts they receive.

The test message read: "Extremely Severe Alert. India launched Cell Broadcast using indigenous technology, for instant disaster alerting service for its citizens. Alert citizens, safe nation. No action is required by the public upon receipt of this message. This is a test message- Government of India."

The alert system was sent across the network of all telecom operators across the country, except in poll-bound States.

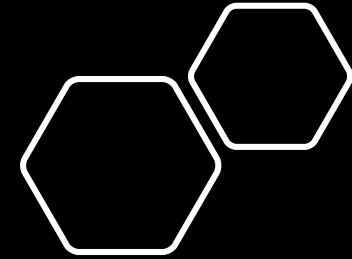
'Indigenous technology'
"Union Minister for Communications, Jyotiraditya



Women show their mobile phones after receiving an alert message on Saturday. PTI

Scindia, today launched the Cell Broadcast Alert System, developed indigenously by C-DOT in collaboration with the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), under the guidance of Home Minister Amit Shah," an official statement said.

Through this system, critical information related to disasters, emergencies, and public safety will be transmitted directly and instantly to citizens' mobile phones, the statement said. The system is based on the Common Alerting Protocol (CAP) as recommended by the UN body International Telecommunication Union.



- **Key Terms and Explanations**

- **Cell Broadcast Alert System (CBAS):** A mobile communication technology that allows messages to be sent to all mobile devices in a specific geographical area simultaneously. Unlike SMS, it is one-to-many and does not require the recipient's phone number.
- **C-DOT (Centre for Development of Telematics):** The premier R&D centre of the Department of Telecommunications, Government of India. It focuses on indigenous telecom technology.
- **National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA):** The apex statutory body for disaster management in India, chaired by the Prime Minister. It lays down policies and plans for disaster resilience.
- **Common Alerting Protocol (CAP):** A digital format for exchanging all-hazard emergency alerts and public warnings over different networks (Radio, TV, Internet, Mobile).
- **International Telecommunication Union (ITU):** The United Nations specialized agency for information and communication technologies. It sets global standards like CAP to ensure interoperability.
- **Indigenous Technology:** Technology developed entirely within a country (India) using local resources and intellectual property, reducing dependency on foreign vendors.

- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**

- **Technological Shift:** The core thesis revolves around shifting from a "point-to-point" (SMS) warning system to a "point-to-area" (Broadcast) system to eliminate delays during network congestion.
- **Life-Saving Potential:** The primary argument is that real-time, intrusive alerts (with sound and vibration) provide the critical "Golden Hour" window needed for evacuation during cyclones, floods, or earthquakes.
- **Strategic Autonomy:** By using C-DOT technology, India ensures that its critical emergency infrastructure is free from foreign backdoors and is tailored to the specific density of the Indian telecom landscape.
- **Universal Reach:** The system is designed to work on all telecom operators, ensuring that socio-economic status or service provider choice does not determine a citizen's right to safety.

- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**

- **Pre-2004 (Reactive Era):** India's disaster response was largely reactive. The 1999 Odisha Cyclone highlighted the lack of early warning systems.
- **2005 (Legislative Shift):** Passing of the **Disaster Management Act, 2005**, which moved the focus from relief to "Preparedness and Mitigation."
- **2010-2020 (The SMS Era):** Usage of bulk SMS for warnings. However, limitations emerged, such as network choking during disasters and the "queuing" of messages.
- **2021-Present (The CAP-SAKAL Initiative):** The government initiated the Integrated Public Alert System. C-DOT began developing the indigenous CBAS to meet ITU standards, culminating in the nationwide trials and launch in 2024-2026.

- **Way Forward**

- **Standardization:** Ensure all future mobile handsets sold in India are "CBAS-ready" by default through mandatory Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) norms.
- **Simulation Drills:** Regular, non-invasive tests to keep the system calibrated and the public informed.
- **Integration with IoT:** Future versions could integrate with smart city speakers or traffic lights to provide a multi-modal warning.
- **Community Feedback:** Establish a loop where citizens can report if they *did not* receive an alert in a targeted zone to fix "dead zones."

- **Previous Years' UPSC Questions**

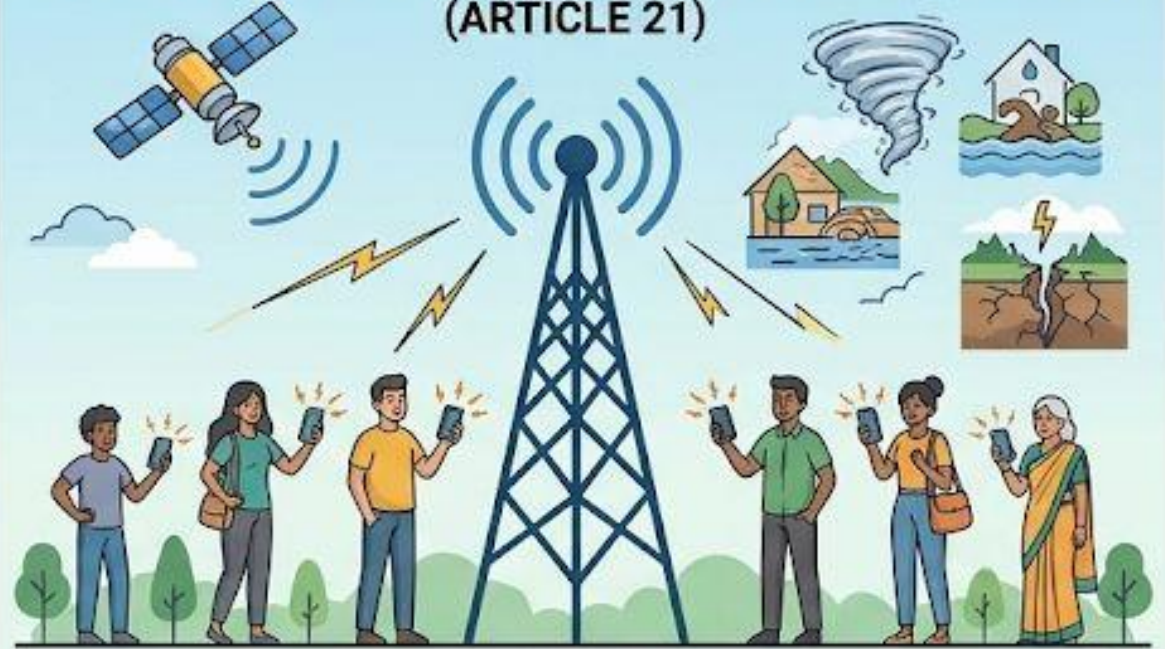
- **UPSC 2023 (GS3):** "Explain the mechanism and importance of Early Warning Systems for various hazards."
- **UPSC 2019 (GS3):** "Vulnerability is an essential element for defining disaster. Discuss the different types of vulnerability with reference to disasters."
- **UPSC 2017 (GS3):** "The frequency of urban floods is increasing... Discuss the role of technology in its mitigation."

UPSC PREPARATION GUIDE

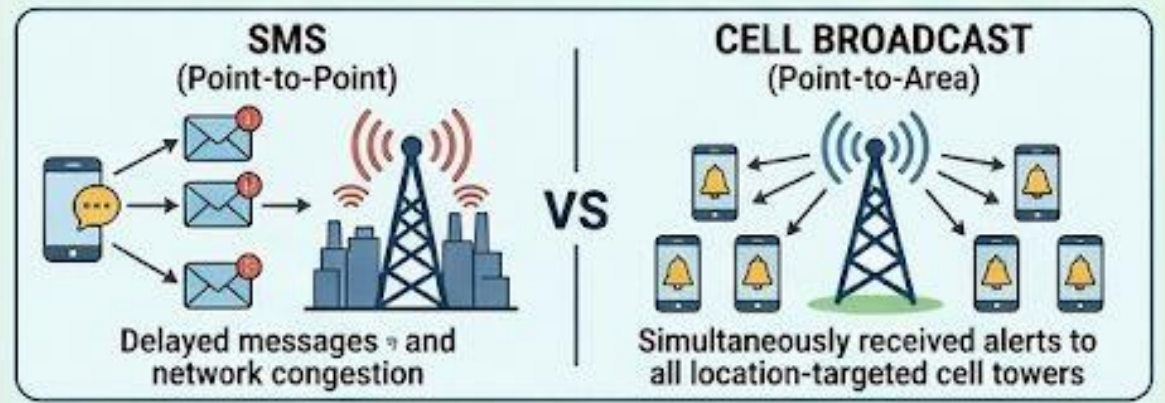
KEY CONCEPTS & ACRONYMS

- CBAS:** Indigenous Cell Broadcast Alert System (CBAS) instant detection content.
- C-DOT:** Conntraouts cell alert for network on: communication and delerent congestion.
- NDMA:** Indigenous cell anasphate and eartinquakes monders
- CAP:** Indigenous cartnright system (TUS) is ia colm agontruszo entotom ritila inkor entention.

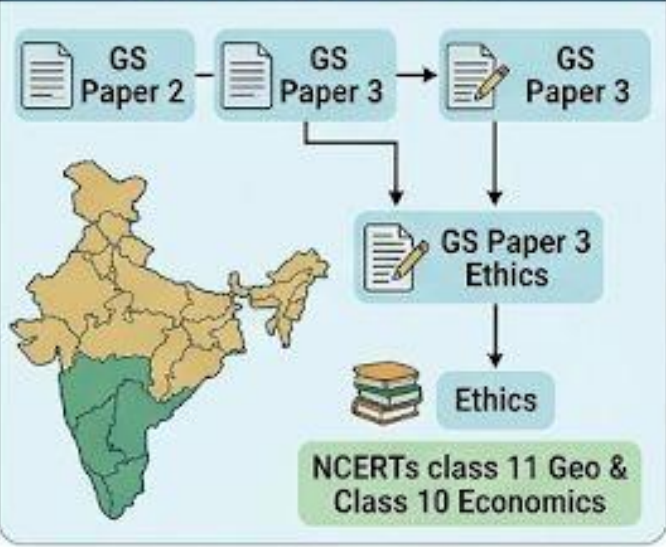
INSTANT DISASTER WARNING FOR PUBLIC SAFETY (ARTICLE 21)



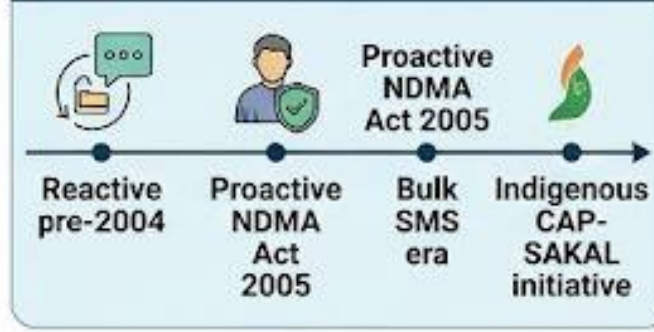
INSTANT DISASTER WARNING FOR PUBLIC SAFETY (ARTICLE 21)



SYLLABUS LINKAGES



HISTORICAL EVOLUTION



STRATEGIC DIMENSIONS

- ✓ Social inclusivity vs. alert fatigue
 - ✓ Economic cost-benefit
 - ✓ Political Atmanirbhar Bharat
 - ✓ Ethical public interest vs. consent
- Geofencing

CHALLENGES & WAY FORWARD

- Digital literacy, handset compatibility, key users care amand nature
- Inter-agency coordination vs. BIS norms, and security access and henseiment
- Simulation drills vs right contol
- IoT integration to natset contability
- IoT integration

SPOTLIGHT

Aaratrika Bhaumik

Nearly a year after unaccounted cash was allegedly recovered from his official residence in Delhi, Allahabad High Court judge Yashwant Varma wrote to President Droupadi Murmu on April 9, conveying his decision to step down from office.

"While I do not propose to burden your august office with the reasons that have constrained me to submit this missive, it is with deep anguish that I hereby tender my resignation," Justice Varma said in his letter.

The decision brought to a close months of mounting scrutiny dating back to the night of March 14, 2025. Then a judge of the Delhi High Court, Justice Varma found himself in the eye of the storm after firefighters responding to a blaze at his official residence allegedly discovered stacks of half-burnt currency notes in a storeroom.

In the following weeks, the Supreme Court Collegium, then headed by Chief Justice of India (CJI) Sanjiv Khanna, repatriated him to his parent Allahabad High Court and divested him of judicial work as an in-house inquiry was set up.

A three-judge committee concluded that Varma and his family members exercised "covert or active

control" over the storeroom, and cash had been recovered from the premises. This, the panel said, "belied the trust" reposed in him as a constitutional court judge and warranted impeachment proceedings.

Acting on these findings and following Varma's refusal to resign, the then CJI wrote to the Prime Minister and the President on May 8, 2025, enclosing the report and recommending removal proceedings under Article 124(4) of the Constitution and the Judges (Inquiry) Act, 1968. While this recommendation set the stage for impeachment, Varma stepped down before a Lok Sabha-constituted inquiry committee could conclude its proceedings.

On February 13, 2026, Union Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal informed the Lok Sabha that the office of the CJI had received 8,630 complaints against sitting judges between 2016 and 2025, a rise of over 51% from 729 in 2016 to 1,102 in 2025. No details were given on whether these complaints pertained to corruption, sexual misconduct, or other wrongdoing, nor which High Courts recorded the highest numbers or what action had been taken.

Prashant Bhushan, a Delhi-based advocate and convenor of the non-profit Campaign for Judicial Accountability and Reforms, said there is opacity be-

Silence, the court is in session

The resignation of Allahabad High Court judge Yashwant Varma last month, amid parliamentary proceedings to remove him over allegations that burnt wads of unaccounted cash were found at his Delhi residence in 2025, has brought into focus how the judiciary holds itself to account

cause "inquiry reports are not made public, and there is little disclosure on proceedings against judges or action taken." He said judicial corruption is difficult to address "because of the extent to which it remains shielded from public scrutiny", pointing to "the fear of contempt of court" and "the near absence of any effective mechanism to hold errant judges to account".

Even impeachment, he noted, requires the support of at least 100 Lok Sabha or 50 Rajya Sabha members, "making it contingent on political will rather than the merits of the complaint".

Activist asks for more
Delhi-based legal journalist and Right to Information (RTI) activist Saurav Das called the Minister's response "conspicuously incomplete" and filed an RTI request with the Supreme Court Registry. He sought year-wise data on the 8,630 complaints, including those pending, disposed of, found to be mala fide or motivated, and those forwarded to High Courts. "Publishing figures



The Law Ministry said it has no mechanism to monitor complaints against judges of the Supreme Court and High Courts. FILE PHOTO

without any clarity on how complaints were handled risks creating the impression that nothing was done. This can undermine trust in the judiciary," he said.

In a response seen by *The Hindu*, Supreme Court Registry CPIO S.K. Kamesh Nookala said "necessary action" had been taken, but the remaining information was "spread over numerous files", the collation of which would "disproportionately divert" resources. Exemptions under Section 8 of the RTI Act were also invoked.

Mr. Das appealed and sought inspection of records under Section 20(D)

and B. Lokur, former Supreme Court judge, said, "Numbers are not particularly important, since many complaints are frivolous or malicious, often filed by disgruntled litigants. What matters more is how many complaints were serious and how they were dealt with."

In Parliament

An analysis by *The Hindu* showed that between January 2011 and March 2026, 48 parliamentary questions sought data on complaints against judges, but disclosures were made in only five instances.

In many responses, the Law Ministry said it "does not maintain records" and has "no mechanism to monitor complaints" against judges of the Supreme Court and High Courts, stating that such matters are handled under the judiciary's in-house procedure. Complaints concerning the district judiciary fall under the administrative control of the concerned High Courts.

Where data have been disclosed, responses indicate that complaints are routed through the Cen-

tralised Public Grievance Redress and Monitoring System (CPGRAMS) and forwarded to the CJI or Chief Justices of High Courts. Responding to MPs S. Gnanathiraviam and Malook Nagar on April 1, 2022, then Law Minister Kiren Rijija said 1,631 complaints were received through CPGRAMS between January 1, 2017 and December 31, 2021, and forwarded accordingly.

Legal academic and author Prashant Reddy T. said, "Such sparse disclosures reflect a deep-rooted culture of opacity within the Indian judiciary, particularly in its administrative functioning."

Consequences of a post

The transparency debate has also intersected with concerns over free speech. In February, a three-judge Bench led by CJI Surya Kant took *suo motu* cognisance and ordered the withdrawal of an NCERT Class 8 textbook that referenced "corruption in the judiciary". The court observed that the references reflected a "discernible underlying agenda" and *prima facie* constituted criminal contempt.

NCERT tendered an "unconditional and unqualified apology" and withdrew the textbook, but the court directed authorities to dissociate from those involved in preparing the chapter, including author Michel Danino, educationist Suparna Di-

wakar and legal researcher Alok Prasanna Kumar.

The order triggered debate among students and academics. Rishi A. Kumar, a 22-year-old law student, wrote in a blog post that "the more the judiciary tries to suppress discussion of its failures, the more distrust it generates". "Law school trains you to think critically and question public institutions as an essential feature of democracy," he said.

His university initially asked him to take down the post after receiving calls from members of the legal fraternity, but later expressed support for him. Kumar refused to comply, stating that the university did not "own" his "voice or conscience".

Abhay S. Oka, former Supreme Court judge, echoing the observations of English judge Lord Denning (1899-1999), said contempt powers should not be invoked to uphold the court's dignity. "The dignity of the institution must rest on surer foundations. However, where there is clear defiance of its orders, the court must act firmly," he added.

In June last year, speaking at the U.K. Supreme Court, former CJI B. R. Gavai acknowledged instances of corruption and misconduct within the judiciary, cautioning that they could undermine public confidence.

aaratrikabhaumik@
thehindu.co.in

- **Key Terms and Explanations**

- **Judicial Independence:** The principle that the judiciary should be free from influence by the other branches of government or private interests. This is considered a "Basic Structure" of the Indian Constitution.
- **The Collegium System:** A forum consisting of the Chief Justice of India and the most senior judges of the Supreme Court that decides on the appointment and transfer of judges.
- **In-House Procedure:** A formal mechanism adopted by the Supreme Court in 1999 to examine complaints of misconduct against High Court and Supreme Court judges. It is designed to maintain institutional integrity without external interference.
- **Article 124(4):** The constitutional provision outlining the removal of a judge. It requires an order by the President after an address by each House of Parliament, supported by a special majority, on the grounds of "proved misbehaviour or incapacity."
- **Judges (Inquiry) Act, 1968:** The law that regulates the procedure for the investigation and proof of the misbehaviour or incapacity of a judge.
- **Contempt of Court:** Power under Article 129 (SC) and Article 215 (HC) to punish individuals for "scandalizing the court" or disobeying its orders.
- **CPGRAMS:** The Centralised Public Grievance Redress and Monitoring System, an online platform for citizens to lodge complaints against public authorities.

- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**

- **The Fragility of Accountability:** The core thesis suggests that current mechanisms for judicial accountability are reactive and opaque. The resignation of a judge amidst an inquiry highlights how the "exit" option is often used to bypass formal parliamentary removal.
- **The Opacity of the In-House Process:** While an inquiry can lead to recommendations for removal, the findings are rarely made public. This creates a "paternalistic" environment where the public is told "necessary action" was taken without being shown evidence.
- **Political vs. Judicial Merit:** The impeachment process is criticized for being more contingent on political consensus than on the legal merits of a corruption charge.
- **Free Speech Concerns:** The judiciary's sensitivity to criticism—evidenced by the withdrawal of educational content or pressure on student bloggers—suggests an increasing use of contempt powers to shield the institution from scrutiny.
- **The Data Gap:** A 51% rise in complaints indicates a growing grievance trend, yet the lack of categorization (corruption vs. administrative delays) makes it difficult to diagnose systemic rot.



- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**
- **Post-Independence (1950s-70s):** The executive held significant sway over judicial appointments. Accountability was largely seen through the lens of constitutional morality.
- **The Emergency Era (1975-77):** Massive executive interference led the judiciary to seek greater autonomy, eventually leading to the "Three Judges Cases."
- **The 1990s and the In-House Procedure:** Following allegations against various judges, the SC adopted the "In-House Procedure" in 1999 to allow the judiciary to police itself.
- **The Veeraswami Case (1991):** The SC ruled that no FIR could be registered against a sitting judge without the prior permission of the CJI, further insulating the judiciary from criminal investigation.
- **NJAC and Beyond (2014-Present):** The striking down of the National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC) reaffirmed the Collegium's power, but intensified the debate over the lack of an independent disciplinary commission.

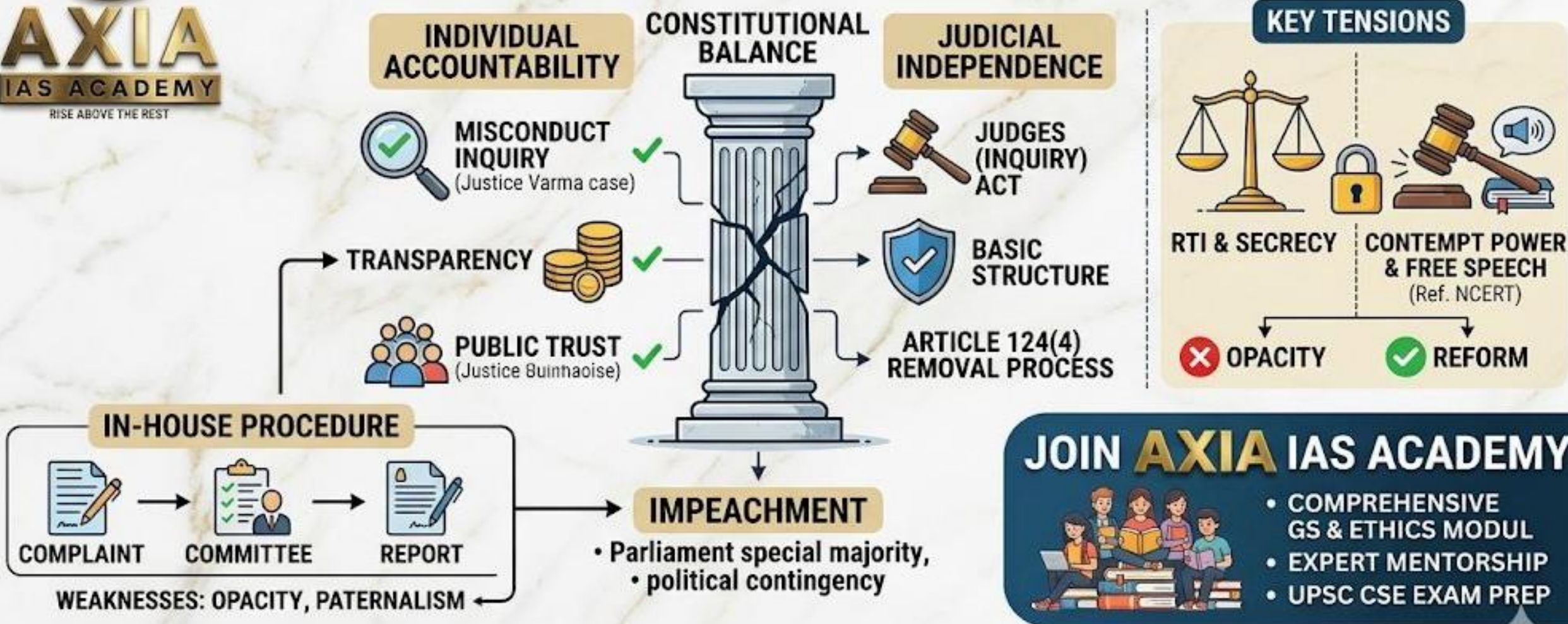
- **Way Forward**
- **Statutory Body:** Enact a "Judicial Standards and Accountability Act" to create an independent body (including laypeople) to investigate complaints.
- **Categorized Disclosure:** The Supreme Court should voluntarily publish annual statistics on the types of complaints and the status of inquiries without revealing individual names.
- **Reform Contempt Laws:** Narrow the definition of "scandalizing the court" to ensure that honest criticism of judicial administration is not penalized.
- **Post-Resignation Consequences:** Ensure that resignation does not grant immunity from criminal investigation if the misconduct involves financial crimes.

- **Previous Years' UPSC Questions**
- **2023 (GS 2):** "The exercise of executive power by the judiciary is often seen as a dilution of the principle of separation of powers. Discuss."
- **2020 (GS 2):** "The judicial systems in India and the UK seem to be converging as well as diverging in recent times. Highlight the key points of convergence and divergence."
- **2017 (GS 4):** "The current crisis in the judiciary is not about judicial activism but judicial accountability. Discuss."



JUDICIAL INDEPENDENCE VS ACCOUNTABILITY: AXIA'S UPSC ANALYSIS

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West Bengal tea garden workers seek ILO intervention over wages

Shiv Sahay Singh
KOLKATA

Highlighting the government's failure to protect the rights of tea plantation workers, the Paschim Banga Cha Majoor Samity (PBCMS), a non political trade union representing these workers in West Bengal, has sought international intervention by filing a representation before the International Labour Organization.

"The representation documents a persistent and deliberate failure of the government to secure compliance with binding international obligations under ratified ILO Conventions, including those prohibiting forced labour, mandating equal remuneration, prohibiting discrimination, and protecting the rights of indigenous and tribal populations among others," the PBCMS said in a statement.

The tea plantation workers' union has invoked the Article 24 jurisdiction of the ILO which allows employers' or workers' organisations to make a repre-



At the heart of the PBCMS complaint lies the continued non-payment of wages, to thousands of tea plantation workers. ANI

sentation against any member State, alleging ineffective observance of a ratified Convention.

Seeks intervention

At the heart of the PBCMS complaint lies the continued non-payment of wages and statutory dues, including provident fund and gratuity, to thousands of tea plantation workers, in direct defiance of the law and the repeated directions of the courts.

"The Union Government has failed to invoke even its own statutory powers under the Tea Act, 1953, exposing a willful ab-

dications of responsibility.

Simultaneously, the State's failure to fix and enforce a statutory minimum wage for plantation workers, despite the sector being a scheduled employment, has entrenched a regime of poverty wages that fall far below even the most conservative estimates of a living wage," the statement said.

The representation was made to the ILO seeking international intervention to hold the Indian government accountable for its continuing failure to give effect to ratified Conventions, and to refer the

grave violations of trade union rights to the Committee on Freedom of Association.

Limits of remedies

"Despite sustained engagement with domestic institutions, including ongoing and past proceedings before constitutional courts, the situation on the ground remains unchanged, exposing the limits of domestic remedies in the face of entrenched executive inaction," the PBCMS statement said.

There are over 250 tea gardens spread across five districts of north Bengal that employ lakhs of workers.

Apart from their struggle for minimum wages, these plantation workers are also denied Provident Fund and other statutory benefits.

Over the past few years, a number of tea gardens have closed without taking their workers into confidence, further exacerbating their plight. There have been reports of deaths due to malnutrition in some gardens.

- **Key Terms and Explanations**

- **Article 24 of ILO Constitution:** A specific procedure that allows workers' or employers' organizations to file a "representation" against a member state for failing to observe a ratified convention.
- **Forced Labour (ILO Convention 29):** Work performed involuntarily under the threat of any penalty. In the tea gardens, "debt bondage" or the inability to leave due to unpaid dues often falls under this umbrella.
- **Statutory Minimum Wage:** The lowest wage permitted by law. In West Bengal, tea workers often receive "scheduled" wages rather than "minimum" wages, which are significantly lower.
- **The Tea Act, 1953:** A central legislation providing for the control of the tea industry. Section 16 of this Act allows the Union government to take over the management of tea gardens in specific circumstances.
- **Scheduled Employment:** Occupations listed under the Minimum Wages Act, 1948, where the government is legally mandated to fix and periodically revise minimum wages.
- **Gratuity and Provident Fund (PF):** Statutory social security benefits. PF is a retirement-cum-savings scheme, while gratuity is a lump sum paid by the employer as a mark of recognition for long-term service.

- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**

- **Failure of Domestic Remedies:** The primary argument is that Indian institutions—including the judiciary and executive—have failed to enforce existing laws. Despite court orders, workers remain unpaid.
- **Willful Abdication by the State:** The PBCMS argues that the Union government refuses to use its powers under the Tea Act to intervene in mismanaged gardens, while the State government refuses to fix a statutory minimum wage.
- **The "Entrenched Poverty" Regime:** The union posits that the current wage structure is a "poverty wage," intentionally kept low, which violates the right to a dignified life.
- **International Accountability:** By moving the ILO, the workers are shifting the narrative from a local industrial dispute to a violation of international treaty obligations, putting India's global labor record under scrutiny.

- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**

- **Colonial Era (1830s–1947):** The plantation system was built on "indentured labor" brought from Central India (Adivasis). The "Master and Servant" logic prevailed, treating workers as assets tied to the land.

- **Post-Independence Legislation:** The **Plantations Labour Act, 1951** and **Tea Act, 1953** were enacted to regulate the sector and provide housing, health, and education to workers.

- **The 1990s Crisis:** Global price fluctuations led to the "sick garden" syndrome. Many estates were abandoned by owners without paying workers their accumulated dues.

- **2010s–Present:** Frequent closure of gardens in North Bengal (Dooars and Terai) led to reported starvation deaths. This spurred legal battles in the Supreme Court, yet implementation remains a hurdle.

- **Way Forward**

- **Statutory Minimum Wage:** Immediate notification of a minimum wage for the tea sector that is at par with other scheduled employments.

- **PF Task Force:** A dedicated judicial or administrative task force to recover unpaid PF and gratuity dues from defaulting owners.

- **Modernization of the Tea Act:** Amending the 1953 Act to provide for faster government intervention in closed or abandoned gardens.

- **Social Security Integration:** Linking tea workers with national schemes like Ayushman Bharat and PMAY to reduce their dependence on the "in-kind" plantation model.

- **Previous Years' UPSC Questions**

- **Mains (2017, GS 2):** "The local self-government system in India has not proved to be an effective instrument of governance." (Context: Lack of grassroots empowerment in plantations).

- **Mains (2021, GS 3):** "Explain the difference between computing methodology of India's GDP before and after 2015." (Relevant to how labor productivity and wages are calculated).

- **Mains (2018, GS 2):** "Appropriate local community-level healthcare intervention is a prerequisite to achieve 'Health for All' in India." (Context: Health crisis in tea gardens).



ENTRENCHED POVERTY

UNPAID GRATUITY

FAILURE OF DOMESTIC REMEDIES



ENTRENCHED POVERTY

UNPAID GRATUITY

FAILURE OF DOMESTIC REMEDIES

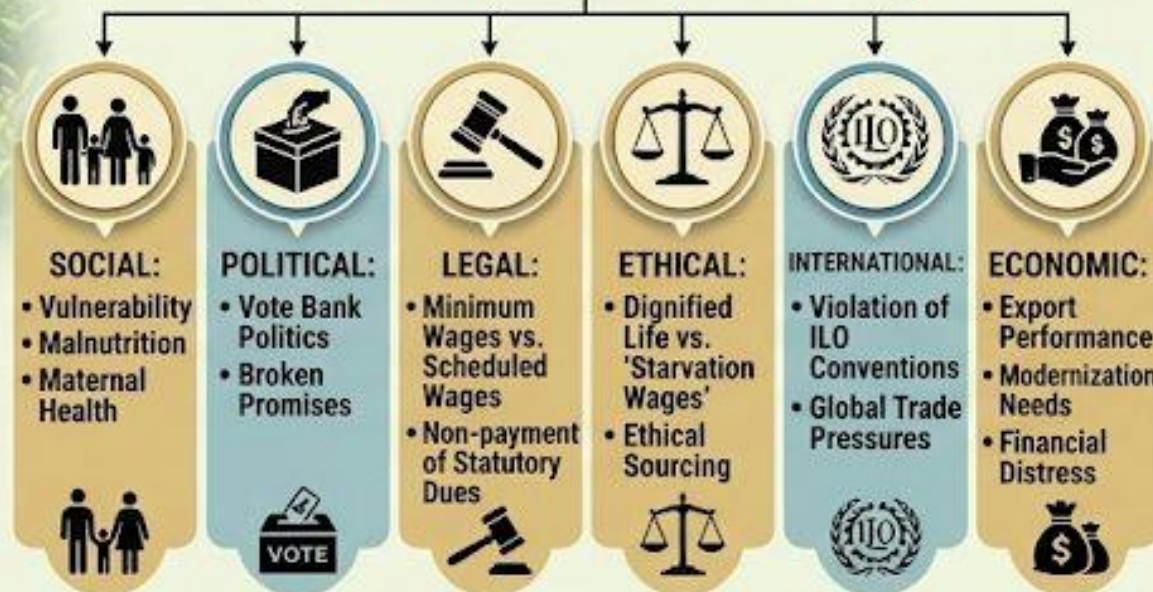
KEY ARMS:

- PBCMS strategy for bypassing in Article 24 of the ILO strategy.
- Article 24 of the ILO Constitution, governs the rights and entitlements of workers.
- Bypass the courts due to non-enforcement and enforcement in the union strategy.

HISTORICAL EVOLUTION:



MULTIDIMENSIONAL ANALYSIS:



WAY FORWARD:



UPSC RELEVANCE:

This topic its syllabus:

- Poverty
- Governance
- International Orgs
- Ethics Case Studies

Question: The warers of the count, what is sample to evantate the Poverty of IPGO Gtandant?

A pioneer artist takes Swang, a folk art, from village gatherings to international audiences

Ashok Kumar
GURUGRAM

In the age of YouTube and Netflix, a folk theatre play has not just survived but thrived for 25 years. The remarkable achievement of Swang *Jaani Chor*, led by Satish Georgy Kashyap – popularly called the ‘King of Swang’ – has turned attention to a journey that began inside Hisar jail in 2001 and travelled from village *chaupals* (gatherings) to international festivals.

Swang, or Saang, is a centuries old dialogue-driven folk form from Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, and Rajasthan.

It blends music, poetry, farce, and dance, usually in open-air settings. Among its best-loved stories is *Jaani Chor*, the tale of a witty, Robin Hood-like thief who outsmarts the rich and corrupt.

Under Mr. Kashyap's direction, the classic has



Satish Georgy Kashyap, left, performing with a co-artist in a Swang, a folk play. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

been reimagined without losing its rustic spirit.

Sustaining legacy

Mr. Kashyap has brought together veteran folk artists and young performers, creating an intergenerational exchange on stage. Traditional live music, local dialects and expressive acting were retained, while pacing and staging were adapted for modern audiences. “The journey is not just about a play, but

about reclaiming and sustaining a cultural legacy,” Mr. Kashyap said.

“From the walls of Hisar jail to international platforms, *Swang Jaani Chor* represents the voice of the people and the timeless relevance of folk traditions,” he added.

Gatherings to global

Over two decades, Mr. Kashyap has not just taken Swang from open-air *chaupals* to structured auditori-

um stages but also collaborated with artists like Sandhya Sharma and Alpana Suhasini, bringing women into lead roles in a traditionally male-dominated art form.

He also helped introduce Saang into youth festivals and staged at the National School of Drama (NSD), Bharangam, Theatre Olympics, and international venues in Denmark, Sweden and Australia. The troupe has also performed for Sangeet Natak Akademi, SPIC MACAY, Prithvi Theatre and NZCC.

The journey began in 2001 with a full-length production in Hisar jail, where theatre doubled up as a tool for reform and connection with marginalised audiences.

From there, *Jaani Chor* moved to village *chaupals*, then to university stages, national festivals, and finally to global platforms. “For the first time in India, a folk theatre play has sur-

vived in the ever-changing time of YouTube or Netflix,” organisers noted.

The story of *Jaani Chor* follows a gentleman thief who uses wit and disguise to challenge kings and authorities. Rich with humour, satire and social commentary, it delivers a moral victory of good over evil while keeping entertainment at its core. The recent production stayed rooted in linguistic authenticity, creating an immersive experience that scholars and community members praised for its creativity and cultural depth.

Mr. Kashyap, a qualified veterinary surgeon who left his job to pursue folk performance, later trained in *commedia dell'arte* in Copenhagen.

His work pays homage to pioneers like Pandit Lakhmi Chand, Dhanpat Singh, Pandit Mange Ram, Chander Badi, and Ali Baksh of Rewari.

- **Key Terms and Explanations**

- **Swang (or Saang):** A traditional folk theatre form prevalent in the Hindi heartland, particularly Haryana, Rajasthan, and Western Uttar Pradesh. It is a "complete" art form, blending music, dance, poetry, and satirical dialogue.
- **Chaupal:** A community space or village square that traditionally serves as a platform for social gatherings and local justice. In the context of folk art, it represents the "open-air" stage where the boundary between performer and audience is blurred.
- **Robin Hood-like Figure:** A literary archetype representing a "gentleman thief" who steals from the corrupt rich to aid the marginalized. **Jaani Chor** is the quintessential example in North Indian folklore.
- **Commedia dell'arte:** A 16th-century Italian theatrical form characterized by improvised dialogue and masked "types." Its mention highlights the cross-cultural pedagogical exchange in modernizing Indian folk forms.
- **Sangeet Natak Akademi:** India's national academy for music, dance, and drama. It is the apex body for the promotion of intangible cultural heritage.
- **SPIC MACAY:** Society for the Promotion of Indian Classical Music and Culture Amongst Youth. A non-profit organization that brings Indian heritage to educational institutions to foster awareness among students.

- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**

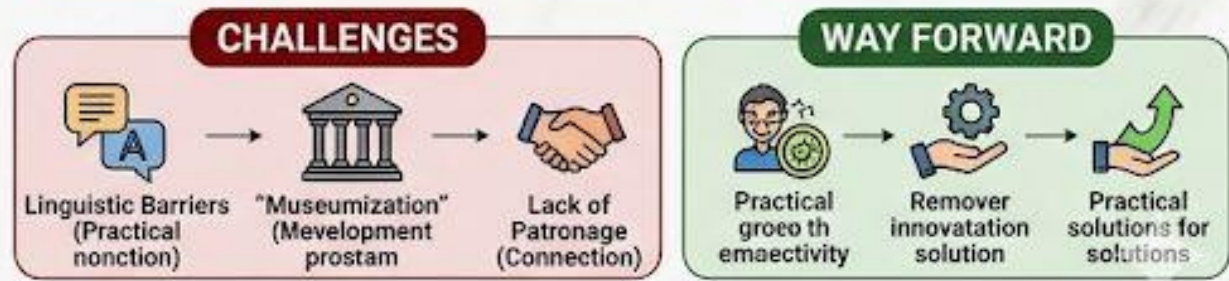
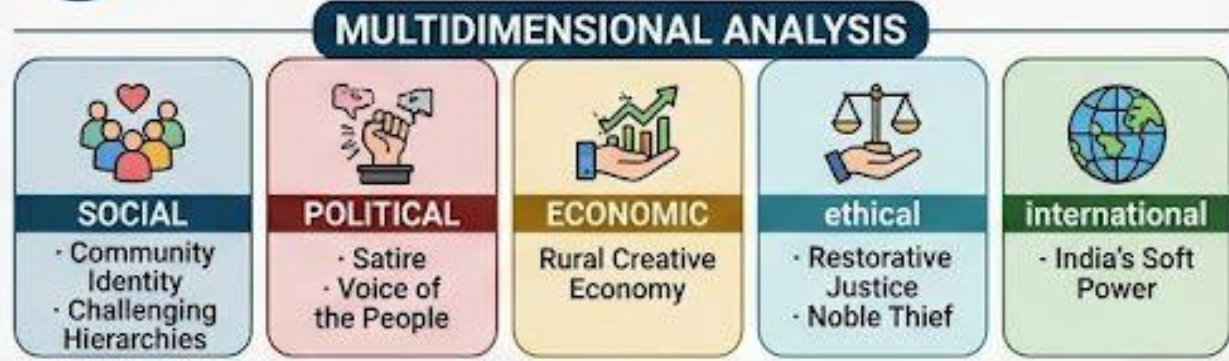
- **Resilience of Folk in the Digital Age:** The central thesis argues that traditional folk forms like Swang are not obsolete. Despite the dominance of OTT platforms like Netflix, these forms can thrive if they adapt their "packaging" while retaining their "soul."
- **Theatre as a Reformatory Tool:** The journey began in Hisar Jail (2001), underscoring the argument that performing arts can serve as a powerful medium for prisoner rehabilitation and social reintegration.
- **Democratization and Gender Inclusivity:** Traditionally, Swang was a male-only domain where men played female roles. The substantive shift here is the inclusion of women in lead roles, which modernizes the social fabric of the art form.
- **Intergenerational Bridge:** The movement focuses on a "mentor-protege" model, where veteran artists collaborate with youth. This ensures the transmission of oral traditions and local dialects that are otherwise at risk of extinction.
- **Institutional Mainstreaming:** The transition from village *chaupals* to the National School of Drama (NSD) and international venues suggests that folk art is moving from the "periphery" to the "center" of global cultural discourse.

- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**
- **Pre-Independence Era:** Swang flourished under legends like **Pandit Lakhmi Chand** (often called the Shakespeare of Haryana). It served as a medium for moral instruction and community bonding during colonial times.
- **Post-Independence (1950s–1980s):** With the advent of cinema and radio, folk theatre faced a decline. It remained restricted to rural fairs and local festivals, often viewed as "crude" or "unrefined" by urban elites.
- **The 2001 Turning Point:** The staging of *Jaani Chor* in Hisar Jail marked a departure from traditional performance spaces, initiating a "socially conscious" era of Swang.
- **The Institutionalization Phase (2010s):** Integration into university youth festivals and national platforms like the Theatre Olympics provided Swang with academic and professional legitimacy.
- **The Global Era (Present):** The art form has now reached international festivals in Europe and Australia, proving its universal appeal despite its deep linguistic and regional roots.

- **Way Forward**
- **Digital Archiving:** Creating a high-quality digital repository of Swang scripts and performances to ensure they are available for future researchers on platforms like YouTube (turning the "enemy" into a "library").
- **Rural-Urban Exchange Programs:** Setting up "Folk Residencies" where urban theatre students learn from rural Swang masters, ensuring the craft's technical survival.
- **CSR Funding:** Encouraging corporations to use CSR funds for the "Preservation of National Heritage" to support local troupes.
- **Educational Integration:** Introducing basic modules of folk theatre in school curricula to build an "informed audience" for the future.
- **GI Tagging for Cultural Forms:** Exploring "Geographical Indication" or similar protections for specific regional folk styles to prevent commercial misappropriation.

- **All Previous Years' UPSC Questions**
- **UPSC 2018 (GS 1):** "Safeguarding the Indian art heritage is the need of the moment. Discuss."
- **UPSC 2012 (GS 1):** "Examine the role of traditional folk theatre in the struggle for independence." (Relevant to the historical context of Swang).
- **UPSC 2015 (GS 1):** "The spirit of tolerance and love is not only an interesting feature of Indian society from very early times but it is also playing an important part at the present. Elaborate." (Link to the inclusive nature of folk art).
- **Essay 2023:** "A society that has more justice is a society that needs less charity." (Link to the Jaani Chor theme).

UPSC CSE CULTURAL ANALYSIS: 'SWANG JAANI CHOR' - A FOUL THEATRE PHENOMENON (25-YEAR JOURNEY FROM JAIL TO GLOBAL STAGE)



Can Vantara house Colombia's hippo problem?

Why are the hippos scheduled to be culled? Can Vantara house 80 hippos? Can wild animals be relocated to India?

Jacob Kosby

Vantara, the 3,500-acre wildlife rescue and rehabilitation center in Indragiri, Cengalut, owned by Ariati Aribandi, son of Indonesia chairman Mukesh Ambani, has offered to take in 80 hippos scheduled for culling.

Where did Colombia's hippos come from?
The animals descended from four hippos – three females and one male – imported in 1991 by Colombian drug lord Pablo Escobar, to his private menagerie at Hacienda Napoles in Antioquia. After Escobar was killed in 1993, the estate was abandoned and the hippos were judged too dangerous and logistically complex to recapture. They escaped into the Magdalena River basin and have been reproducing since. There are roughly 170 today.

How did the Colombian government arrive at the decision to cull?
Colombia declared Hippopotamus amphibius an invasive alien species in March 2022. A sterilization programme began in October 2024, but was deemed laborious, expensive, and ineffective unless a high proportion of dominant males were castrated, since they can mate with multiple females. A 2024 paper by Anasua Sutulyuky at the University of Florida, Sarah Bell at Alaska Pacific University, and Elizabeth Anderson at Florida International University, has influenced Colombia's measures. In the journal *Science*, *Report*, they concluded the hippo demography and argued that rapid population growth and high management costs had created a “narrow window” for control. They said even if some hippos could be shipped out, some culling was unavoidable.

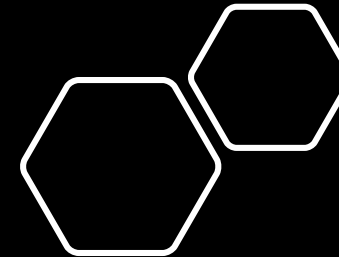
What does the peer-reviewed literature say about why these hippos must be controlled?
Jonathan Shreef, a community ecologist at the University of California, San Diego, and colleagues published in *Ecology* in 2020 that lakes containing hippos in Colombia showed altered ecosystem metabolism, elevated nutrient loading from terrestrial grazing transferred to water via waste and phytoplankton communities increasingly dominated by cyanobacteria.

Why is moving hippos so difficult?
A study in the South African journal, *Koedoe*, in 1989 documented chemical immobilization of 27 hippos where 12 of them died within an hour of leaving. Hippos are difficult to tranquilize because they have thick skin, are usually in or near water where a sedated animal can drown, and are dangerous to approach. Capture inequality – the malignant outcome of stress during capture, reviewed in *Conservation Physiology* – accounts for the highest number of deaths in wildlife translocations globally. An adult male hippo weighs up to 3,000 kg; per animal care would run to tens of thousands of dollars before receiving facility costs.

Could Vantara physically house 80 hippos?
The Green Zoological Rescue and Rehabilitation Center at Vantara spans about 400 acres. The Global Federation of Animal Sanctuaries (GFAS) specifies a minimum of 100 square meters of enclosure per adult hippo. Eighty hippos on the GFAS minimum would require around 80 acres – easily within the available footprint. The harder constraints, however, are that wild hippos form pods of 20 to 30 animals dominated males, meaning 80 individual animals cannot be housed on one level, at least 4-8 separate good enclosures with visual and physical separation would be needed. The Indonesian climate is also hotter and drier than the Maghreb or Sahel, requiring engineered freshwater inputs year-round.

What does CITES say about transferring wild animals to India?
CITES – the multilateral treaty that regulates international trade in endangered species – sent a Secretariat team to inspect Vantara last year, prompted by allegations of alien reptiles in animal imports from Congo, Mexico, and elsewhere. In a document published in October, the Secretariat found that India had not exercised “due diligence” in issuing several import permits and recommended that India issue no further permits for endangered wildlife imports until it implemented procedural reforms and properly identified the provenance of imported animals. The recommendation was revised in November after India, the U.S., Japan and Brazil argued the measure was “premature.”

Would moving 80 hippos solve the problem?
No. The peer-reviewed consensus is that no single intervention – sterilization, translocation, or culling – is sufficient on its own, and that the window for combined intervention is narrowing each year.



- **Key Terms and Explanations**

- **Invasive Alien Species (IAS):** Species introduced to a non-native environment that cause economic or environmental harm.
 - *Example:* Parthenium (Carrot grass) in India, which suppresses native flora.
- **Capture Myopathy:** A complex metabolic disease in wild animals triggered by the extreme stress of pursuit, capture, and handling, often leading to organ failure or death.
- **Trophic Cascades:** Side effects that occur when a species is added to or removed from an ecosystem, causing a ripple effect throughout the food web.
- **Ecosystem Metabolism:** The total rate of organic matter production and consumption within an ecosystem, often measured through oxygen and carbon dioxide levels in water.
- **CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species):** A multilateral treaty to ensure that international trade in specimens of wild animals and plants does not threaten their survival.
- **Cyanobacteria:** Also known as blue-green algae; they can bloom excessively when nutrient levels (like hippo waste) rise, often producing toxins that kill fish.
- **Due Diligence:** The investigation or exercise of care that a reasonable business or government is expected to take before entering into an agreement or permit.

- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**

- **The Ecological Burden:** The hippos have altered the chemistry of Colombian lakes. Their massive waste output increases nutrient loading, leading to toxic algal blooms that threaten native biodiversity.
- **The Failure of Sterilization:** While non-lethal, sterilization is deemed too slow and expensive. Dominant males are hard to catch, and since one male can mate with dozens of females, partial sterilization does not stop population growth.
- **The Relocation Dilemma:** Moving 80 hippos to Vantara (India) is physically possible in terms of acreage, but logistically a nightmare. The cost per animal is tens of thousands of dollars, and the physiological risks during transport are high.
- **The Necessity of Culling:** Peer-reviewed models suggest a "narrow window" for action. Scientists argue that even if some animals are exported, culling (controlled killing) is unavoidable to prevent the population from reaching unmanageable levels.
- **International Regulatory Friction:** The CITES Secretariat has flagged India's import processes, suggesting that "due diligence" was missing in previous wildlife imports, creating a diplomatic hurdle for the Vantara proposal.

- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**

- **1981:** Pablo Escobar imports one male and three female hippos to his private estate, Hacienda Nápoles.
- **1993:** Following Escobar's death, the estate is abandoned. The hippos escape into the Magdalena River, a habitat perfectly suited for them with no natural predators.
- **2000s–2010s:** The population grows exponentially. Sporadic attempts at containment fail due to public sympathy for the "charismatic megafauna."
- **2020:** Studies confirm that the hippos are fundamentally changing the aquatic ecosystem of Colombia.
- **2021–2022:** The Colombian government officially declares them an invasive species and begins a sterilization program.
- **2023–2024:** Vantara offers to intervene as the population hits approximately 170. CITES raises concerns about India's wildlife import protocols.

- **Way Forward**

- **Integrated Management:** Move away from "either/or" solutions. A combination of sterilization, limited translocation to qualified facilities, and culling is the only scientific path.
- **Strengthening CITES Compliance:** India must reform its import permit process to ensure transparency and "due diligence," as highlighted by the Secretariat.
- **Local Community Engagement:** Educating Colombian river communities on the dangers of the hippos to reduce public resistance to control measures.
- **Science-Led Policy:** Decisions on wildlife should be based on peer-reviewed demographic modeling (like the Subalusky paper) rather than emotional or political optics.

- **Previous Years' UPSC Questions**

- **2011 (Prelims):** Regarding CITES and its role in international trade.
- **2019 (Mains GS 3):** "Coastal sand mining... is one of the biggest threats to biodiversity." (Relates to ecosystem degradation).
- **2020 (Mains GS 3):** Discuss the causes and effects of "Invasive Species" on native ecosystems.
- **2023 (Mains GS 4):** Case study on balancing developmental goals with environmental conservation (Parallel to balancing "Animal Rights" with "Ecosystem Health").



CASE STUDY: COLOMBIA'S "COCAINE HIPPOS" & THE VANTARA RELOCATION PROPOSAL

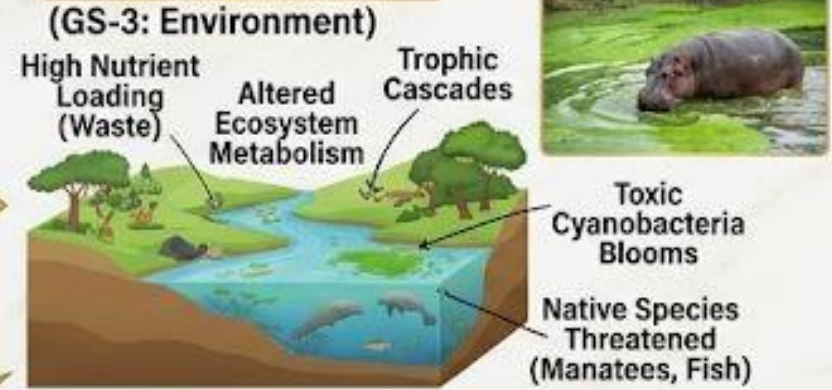
ISSUE OVERVIEW

- Imported 1981 by Pablo Escobar
- Current population ~170



Origin: Hacienda Nápoles → Escape: Magdalena River → Spread: 170+ Hippos

Ecological Impacts (GS-3: Environment)



RELOCATION & LEGAL CHALLENGES (GS-3: Environment, GS-2: International)

Vantara's Offer (Private sector led rescue)

- Physical Space vs. Pod Structure
- Ennical Rooms
- Vantara's Arid Climate vs. Floodplain

CITES Secretariat Concerns: India's "Due Diligence" in wildlife imports (Reverse recommended permit ban)

Key Challenge: Biological & Physiological (GS-3: Science & Tech)



Multi-Dimensional Analysis



UPSC RELEVANCE & Way Forward

RELEVANCE FOR UPSC CSE (GS-1 to GS-4)

- Integrated Management (Sterilization, Culling, Limited Relocation)
- Precautionary Principle
- Multilateral Cooperation

Why did the UAE quit OPEC and OPEC+?

What explains the years of simmering competition between Riyadh and Abu Dhabi? How will the UAE's decision impact oil prices? How has its decision to leave impacted OPEC and OPEC+? Will this move benefit India and if so, how?

M. Kalyanaraman

The story so far:

 In May 1, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) officially exited the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and OPEC+. While OPEC is a permanent intergovernmental organisation founded in 1960 to coordinate the petroleum policies of its member countries and stabilise global oil markets, OPEC+ is a broader alliance formed in 2016 that includes the core OPEC members along with 10 additional major oil-producing nations, most notably Russia. The UAE's decision dealt a heavy blow to the oil exporting groups and their de facto leader, Saudi Arabia, at a time when the Iran war has caused a historic energy shock and unsettled the global economy.

Why did the UAE leave OPEC and OPEC+?

Differences between the UAE and OPEC, in particular Saudi Arabia, have been simmering for a while. Saudi Arabia deferred recognition of the UAE after the latter became independent from the U.K. in the 1970s, until some disputed territory it claimed was ceded.

The political structure and society of the two countries are different. While Saudi Arabia, through a monarchy, acts slowly and builds through consensus within the large extended royal family, the UAE has historically sought to be nimbler and quicker-acting.

However, the UAE has so far formally banded with Saudi Arabia, especially in energy production, because of a large and powerful Iran seen as a common adversary.

OPEC allocates quotas for oil production to control global oil prices. Saudi Arabia plays a key role in fixing these quotas and functions as a swing producer. Currently, it has a quota of

India can leverage enhanced flows from Fujairah port at reduced rates if the UAE's increased production drives down global oil prices.

around 90 million barrels a day but has spare capacity of another 2 million. Saudi Arabia can ramp up or ramp down production quickly to counteract any volatility in oil prices. The UAE has a quota of some 3.5 million barrels but has a capacity of 4.85 million. By 2027, its capacity is expected to increase to 5 million.

A cautious Saudi Arabia seeks to even out and prolong fossil fuel use partly by curtailing production and benefiting from it; for instance, it has actively worked against efforts to decarbonise global shipping and to retain the use of crude oil-based shipping fuel.

The UAE recognises the inevitability of energy transition, involving the use of renewables and green fuels. It seeks to quickly boost oil profits and funnel them into its economy. The UAE has a much more diversified economy and is seeking to expand it even further.

In foreign policy, too, the UAE and Saudi Arabia have been at loggerheads. In Yemen, the two, which cooperated against the Iran-backed Houthis, fought a proxy battle recently through the groups they were supporting. In Yemen, Saudi Arabia supports the country's internationally recognised government and works with the Islamist group, Al-Islah, while the UAE is backing a separatist force, the Southern Transitional Council. In Sudan, the two are again on opposing sides. The UAE has been active in seeking leverage in Libya, now an emerging alternative to the Persian Gulf for oil and gas.

In 2021, the differences came to a head with the UAE raising major objections to OPEC decisions. But a consensus was reached and the UAE was given a bigger slice of the oil pie to convince it to stay in the group.

In the aftermath of the war on Iran, the UAE, which has in recent times become more assertive in its economic, political, and foreign policy goals, has announced its decision to quit OPEC. While it is unclear whether the UAE expects the crisis to reduce in intensity, its OPEC announcement did not have much impact on oil prices, given that oil transport has stalled across the Strait of Hormuz.

How will the UAE act next?

The UAE will review its relationships with nations and reset them as per its priorities. Emirati officials have said some of the Arab states did not do much by way of support even as the UAE bore the brunt of Iranian attacks, which were more than what even Israel faced.

When normalcy returns, even if only in stages, there will be an immediate demand for more oil and the UAE can take advantage of that.

The country seeks to increase its production by 1 million barrels through this year in stages. U.S. President Donald Trump has welcomed the UAE's move to leave the cartel as he believes it could help lower oil prices.

As the war began, the UAE and Saudi Arabia sought to use alternatives to restore some 4.5 million barrels out of the 15 million that had stopped flowing across the strait. While Saudi Arabia used its East-West Pipeline to send oil to the Red Sea port of Yanbu, the UAE sent its oil to Fujairah port downstream of the strait. Fujairah, though hit hard by attacks, saw near capacity utilisation of 1.8 million barrels being sent out per day as the war progressed. It will continue to be a key exit point for greater UAE oil flows.

What will happen to OPEC?

So far, there is no panic. Russia, the other major oil producer which is part of OPEC+, is in sync with Saudi Arabia on oil production goals. Neither wants booms and busts inevitable in a free market and wants to manage the market.

In the past, Angola and Qatar left the cartel but it must be said that both nations were smaller players. The UAE, on the other hand, was OPEC's third-largest producer. But cranking up production may ruffle feathers among its neighbors that the UAE may not want. Kazakhstan, Algeria, and Russia have all reaffirmed their commitment to OPEC+.

Will India benefit?

India likely enjoys the greatest comfort with the UAE among Arab nations. As Trucial States, the sheikhdoms reported to the British in India and the rupee was recognised there.

Since Independence, the UAE has been a big employer of the Indian diaspora. While the Emirati population is only a little over 10% of the total UAE population, Indians constitute almost half of non-Emirati who prosper in the country.

The UAE has recently strengthened its security relations with India as well. India can leverage enhanced flows from Fujairah port at reduced rates if the UAE's increased production drives down global oil prices. Indian refineries are well adapted to processing UAE crude and can pursue flexible, long-term contracts.

V. K. Krishnaswamy, who has served in the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company for nearly 45 years including as a top executive, points out that the Indian rupee continues to be in demand in the UAE. The UAE has put in place a state-of-the-art system for payments in other currencies, particularly in Yuan. So far, across the world, oil payments are typically paid in the U.S. dollar, reinforcing the perception that the dollar's strength comes in part from its role as the petro-dollar. "Not just the yuan, the UAE may accept payments in other currencies such as the rupee, as well," he adds, recalling India paying Russia and the Soviet Union in rubles.



The logo of OPEC outside its headquarters in Vienna, Austria. (PTI/ANI)

- **Key Terms and Explanations**

- **OPEC & OPEC+:** OPEC (Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries) is a permanent intergovernmental organization founded in 1960. OPEC+ includes 10 additional non-member countries like Russia to exert greater control over global supply.
- **Swing Producer:** A producer that can increase or decrease supply at a low cost to maintain market stability. Saudi Arabia traditionally holds this role.
- **Production Quotas:** Ceilings set by OPEC on how much oil each member can produce. This is intended to prevent oversupply and keep prices high.
- **Spare Capacity:** The volume of production that can be brought online within 30 days and sustained for at least 90 days. The UAE has high spare capacity relative to its quota.
- **Petrodollar:** The practice of pricing and trading crude oil in U.S. dollars. This underpins the dollar's status as the world's primary reserve currency.
- **Decarbonization:** The process of reducing carbon emissions through the use of low-carbon power sources.
- **Separatist Forces (STC):** The Southern Transitional Council in Yemen, backed by the UAE, which seeks independence for South Yemen.

- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**

- **The Divergence of Economic Visions:** The core thesis is that the UAE and Saudi Arabia are pursuing different "endgames." Saudi Arabia wants to manage oil prices to maximize long-term life for fossil fuels. The UAE, believing the "Green Transition" is inevitable, wants to pump as much as possible now to fund a post-oil economy.
- **Capacity vs. Constraint:** The UAE has invested billions to reach a 5 million barrels per day (mb/d) capacity but is restricted by OPEC quotas to ~3.5 mb/d. This "trapped investment" became economically untenable.
- **Geopolitical Friction:** The "War on Iran" acted as a catalyst. The UAE felt it bore the brunt of security threats without sufficient support from Arab allies, leading to a more "UAE-first" foreign policy.
- **Functional Rivalry:** Beyond oil, the two nations are competing for regional dominance in Yemen (supporting different factions) and Sudan, as well as vying to be the Middle East's primary financial and logistics hub.

- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**

- **1960-1971:** OPEC is formed; the UAE gains independence. Early years were defined by British influence and the use of the Indian Rupee in the Trucial States.
- **1970s-2016:** Periodic border disputes between the UAE and Saudi Arabia. UAE joins OPEC, generally following the Saudi lead to counter a powerful Iran.
- **2016:** Formation of OPEC+ to include Russia, shifting the power dynamic and further institutionalizing production cuts.
- **2020-2021:** Tensions peak during the pandemic. UAE demands a higher baseline for its production quota, threatening to leave for the first time. A temporary compromise is reached.
- **2026 (Present Day):** Amidst the "War on Iran" and the disruption of the Strait of Hormuz, the UAE officially exits, prioritizing independent exports via the Fujairah port.

- **Way Forward**

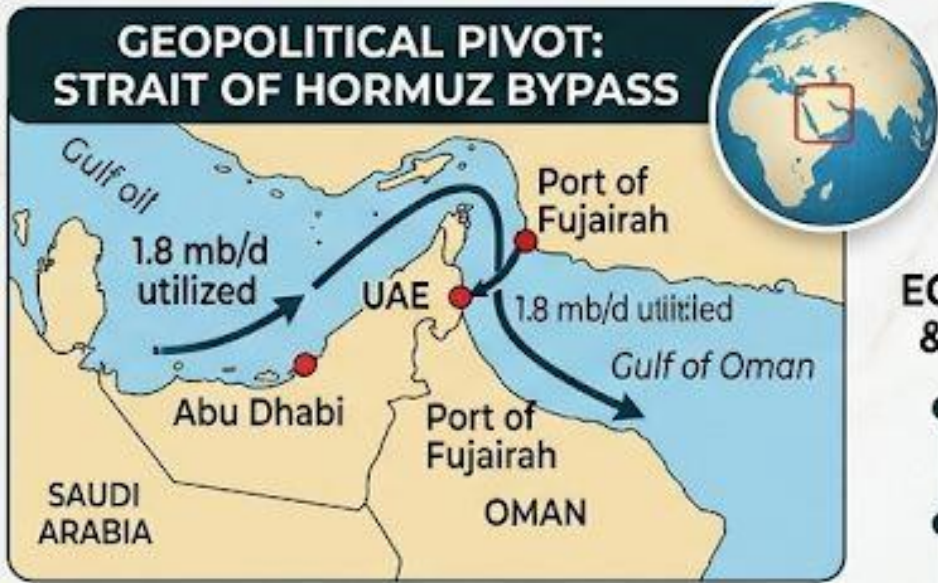
- **For India:** Fast-track the **Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR)** filling using discounted UAE crude and institutionalize the **Rupee-based payment system** for oil.
- **For the UAE:** Balance the production surge with "Green Certificates" or Carbon Capture to maintain international climate standing.
- **For Regional Stability:** Establish a new "Gulf Security Framework" that separates oil policy from regional defense to prevent the UAE-Saudi rift from turning into a security vacuum.
- **For Global Markets:** Shift from a focus on OPEC quotas to a "Global Energy Governance" model that includes consumers (India/China) in price-setting discussions.

- **Previous Years' UPSC Questions**

- **2021 (GS 2):** "The political and economic stability of the Middle East is vital for India's energy security." Discuss.
- **2019 (GS 3):** "Examine the role of OPEC in global oil price determination and its impact on the Indian economy."
- **2020 (GS 1):** "Account for the present location of the global petroleum industry."
- **2022 (Essay):** "Economic self-reliance is the basis of a nation's strength."

UAE QUILS OPEC & OPEC+: COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS FOR UPSC CSE

GEOPOLITICAL PIVOT: STRAIT OF HORMUZ BYPASS



NEW FEATURES & UNIQUE IDEAS

DE-DOLLARIZATION & PAYMENT MULTIPOLARITY



UAE system accepts non-dollar payments



Fujairah: Crucial Strategic Port

THE GREAT DIVERGENCE: ECONOMIC VS. CARTEL LOGIC

UAE

ECONOMIC PRAGMATISM & ENERGY TRANSITION

- Trapped Investment (Capacity > Quota)
- Pump Now to Fund Post-Oil Economy
- Diversified Interests (AI, Tourism)

SAUDI ARABIA & OPEC+

CARTEL MANAGEMENT & PROLONGATION

- Price Stability via Production Cuts
- Extend Fossil Fuel Era
- Saudi as Swing Producer

OPEC+ weakens



IMPACT ON INDIA & WAY FORWARD

- Improved Energy Security (Lower prices, non-Hormuz route)
- Refining Synergies
- Payment in Rupees
- Fill Strategic Reserves

UPSC RELATE

- GS 2 (IR)
- GS 3 (Economy, Energy)
- Essay

Cracks in the oil crown

OPEC

The cartel, already grappling with changes in the global energy landscape, geopolitical tensions, and declining influence, faces a litmus test with the exit of the UAE, one of its top oil producers with capacity to influence the market

Smriti Sudeh

In April 2025, the UAE announced it would leave the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), ending nearly six decades of membership. The decision, effective May 1, removes one of the group's largest producers.

OPEC traces its origins to September 1960, when representatives from Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Venezuela gathered in Baghdad. At the time, the global oil industry was controlled largely by a consortium of Western companies known as the Seven Sisters. Producing countries had a limited say over how much oil was extracted, or at what price it was sold and revenues depended on decisions made elsewhere.

The founding members sought to change this. OPEC was conceived as a platform for coordination among producers. Here, producers could exert greater control over supply and pricing, and secure a larger share of the value of their resources. In its early years, however, OPEC's influence was modest. The global oil system was still shaped by multinational firms, and non-OPEC production remained significant. The organisation existed, but it did not yet define the market.

That changed in the 1970s. During the 1973 Arab-Israeli War, also known as the Yom Kippur War, Arab OPEC members imposed production cuts and an embargo on the U.S. and the Netherlands. Oil prices quadrupled. The episode demonstrated OPEC's ability to use oil as a geopolitical tool and established the group as a major force in the global economy.

A second shock followed in 1979 with the Iranian Revolution. For a period, OPEC controlled around 75% of global oil exports and accumulated significant petrodollars that funded infrastructure and reshaped international finance.

By the 1980s, OPEC introduced formal production quotas, with Saudi Arabia often acting as the swing producer. In 1986, after a period of market flooding, prices collapsed. The following decades brought repeated cycles of cuts, recoveries, and new



REUTERS

pressures from the Gulf War and Asian financial crisis to China's demand surge in the 2000s.

The U.S. shale revolution, which accelerated in the 2000s, represented a structural change. Starting around 2012, American producers, using hydraulic fracturing and horizontal drilling, began unlocking vast reserves of tight oil in Texas, North Dakota and elsewhere. Shale production was faster, more flexible, and highly responsive to price. When prices rose, output followed within months.

Uneasy coordination

In 2004, OPEC made its most decisive attempt to tackle the challenge. Rather than cut output to defend prices, it kept pumping, hoping to push prices low enough to force higher-cost shale producers out of the market. Prices duly fell below \$30 a barrel. In 2006, the group formed the broader OPEC+ alliance with Russia, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan and other non-OPEC producers to coordinate output more effectively. Even then, the combined group accounted for roughly 40% of global supply, which was far from the dominance of earlier decades.

What followed was a period of

uneasy coordination. The first major test came in 2020. As the COVID-19 pandemic led to the collapse of global demand, oil consumption fell at a pace not seen before. OPEC+ responded with unprecedented production cuts, removing millions of barrels per day from the market. In the years that followed, the alliance settled into a pattern of tailored corrections. Output was gradually restored as demand recovered, but disagreements persisted. Some members, facing fiscal strain, pushed for higher production. Others, led by Saudi Arabia, prioritised price stability.

By late 2025, prices had dipped below \$60 a barrel as the group began unwinding production cuts. Saudi Arabia and Russia were pushing to restore output, while others wanted to hold the cuts in place. The internal arguments that had always plagued the group – between those who needed high prices to balance their budgets and those who wanted to maximise market share – were intensifying.

Then came the war.

On February 28, the U.S. and Israel launched attacks on Iran and assassinated Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei. Iran retaliated with missile

and drone attacks across the Persian Gulf and blockaded the Strait of Hormuz. Global oil supply plummeted by more than 10 million barrels a day in March alone. The crisis exposed OPEC's deepest structural contradiction. Iran, one of its founding members, attacked other members in the region in response to the U.S. Israeli strikes.

For the UAE, the crisis sharpened an existing tension. A member since 1967, it has spent years expanding its production capacity, with the aim of reaching close to 5 million barrels per day. Under recent OPEC+ agreements, however, its output was capped lower, around 3.2–3.4 million bpd. But by leaving, the UAE gains flexibility to increase production once shipping routes stabilise and to pursue bilateral arrangements. The move also exposes the UAE's growing differences with Saudi Arabia, the cartel's de facto leader, on issues ranging from quotas to regional policy.

The UAE is not the first country to leave OPEC. Qatar departed in 2009, redirecting its energy identity toward liquefied natural gas. Ecuador, Gabon, Angola, and Indonesia have all come and gone at various points. But the

UAE's departure is different in scale. It was OPEC's third-largest producer. It was one of only two members, Saudi Arabia being the other, with the ability to rapidly increase or decrease output to stabilise markets. Without the UAE, OPEC's capacity to respond to supply shocks is materially diminished.

OPEC's ability to move prices depends heavily on whether its remaining members, many of them economically fragile, politically unstable, or at war with each other, can maintain unity. It also depends on whether Russia continues to coordinate through the OPEC+ framework. And it depends on whether the shale producers, the renewables build-out, and the broader energy transition continue to erode the structural centrality of Gulf oil.

Long-term benefits

For large importers such as India, which depends on imports for nearly 90% of its roughly 5.8 million barrels per day consumption, the change could bring longer-term benefits. Analysts say greater UAE production outside quotas may support additional supply, enable direct bilateral deals, and reduce freight costs due to proximity. This could help moderate import bills and support energy security efforts amid ongoing global uncertainty.

In the short term, however, the Strait of Hormuz disruptions continue to dominate price movements. Any additional supply from the UAE will only fully materialise once safer shipping conditions return. Until then, the exit's primary effect is symbolic rather than immediate.

OPEC now retains substantial reserves and influence through its core members, particularly Saudi Arabia. The organisation now operates in a more complex environment. Renewables continue to gain ground, energy efficiency improvements persist, and major consumers are actively diversifying sources. At the same time, geopolitical risks add layers of uncertainty.

For 65 years, OPEC held the world over a barrel. The barrel is now cracked, and the oil is running in directions no cartel can follow.

THE GIST

▼ OPEC was conceived as a platform where producers could exert greater control over supply and pricing, and secure a larger share of the value of their resources.

▼ During the 1973 Arab-Israeli War, also known as the Yom Kippur War, Arab OPEC members imposed production cuts and an embargo on the U.S. and the Netherlands, establishing the group as a major force in the global economy.


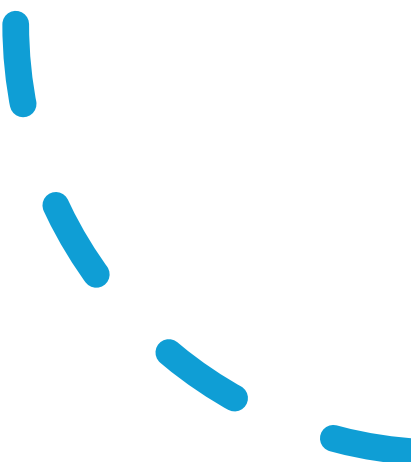
▼ In 2006, the group formed the broader OPEC+ alliance with Russia, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan and other non-OPEC producers to coordinate output more effectively.

- **Key Terms and Explanations**

- **OPEC (Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries):** An intergovernmental organization founded in 1960 to coordinate and unify petroleum policies. *Example:* Think of it as a "producers' club" that decides how much oil to release to keep prices profitable.
- **OPEC+:** An extension of OPEC formed in 2016 that includes non-OPEC allies like Russia, Kazakhstan, and Mexico to exercise greater market control.
- **Seven Sisters:** A term for the seven Western multinational oil companies that dominated the global petroleum industry from the mid-1940s to the 1970s.
- **Swing Producer:** A supplier that has the spare capacity to increase or decrease production at a low cost to balance global supply and demand. Saudi Arabia traditionally holds this role.
- **Shale Revolution:** The boom in U.S. oil production using **hydraulic fracturing (fracking)** and horizontal drilling to extract oil from "tight" rock formations.
- **Petrodollars:** Crude oil export revenues denominated in U.S. dollars. These funds are often reinvested in global financial markets.
- **Strait of Hormuz:** A narrow chokepoint between the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman. It is the world's most important oil artery; a blockade here can cause a global energy "cardiac arrest."

- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**

- **Core Thesis:** The UAE's departure from OPEC signals the fragmentation of traditional energy cartels in the face of regional war, internal economic divergence, and the global energy transition.
- **The "Capacity vs. Quota" Conflict:** The UAE has invested heavily in production capacity (aiming for 5 mbpd) but feels "handcuffed" by OPEC quotas that limit it to ~3.3 mbpd, preventing it from maximizing its return on investment.
- **Geopolitical Fractures:** The 2026 regional war involving the U.S., Israel, and Iran created an ideological and security vacuum. The UAE can no longer align economically with a regional rival (Iran) that threatens its shipping routes.
- **The Loss of Market Discipline:** With the UAE's exit, OPEC loses its second-largest "spare capacity" holder. This weakens the group's ability to respond to price shocks, making oil markets more volatile and less "managed."
- **Shift Toward Bilateralism:** The move allows the UAE to bypass collective bargaining and enter direct long-term supply deals with major importers like India, potentially offering more competitive pricing.

- 
- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**
 - **1960 (Foundation):** Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Venezuela form OPEC in Baghdad to challenge the "Seven Sisters."
 - **1973 (The First Shock):** The Arab Oil Embargo during the Yom Kippur War proves oil can be a geopolitical weapon; prices quadruple.
 - **1980s (The Quota System):** OPEC introduces formal production limits to manage oversupply, marking the beginning of internal friction.
 - **2012–2016 (The Shale Challenge):** U.S. shale production surges. OPEC initially tries to "flood the market" to kill shale competition but fails, leading to the formation of **OPEC+** with Russia.
 - **2020 (The COVID Collapse):** Global demand craters; OPEC+ implements the largest production cuts in history to prevent a total price collapse.
 - **2025–2026 (The Breaking Point):** Tensions peak over production unwinding, culminating in the 2026 war and the UAE's exit on May 1, 2026.
-
- **Way Forward**
 - **For India:** Diversify energy sources immediately. While bilateral deals with the UAE are good, the Hormuz blockade proves that physical dependency on the Gulf is a vulnerability.
 - **For the UAE:** Reinvest oil windfalls into "Green Hydrogen" and nuclear energy to ensure that when the oil "cracks" completely, the economy remains intact.
 - **For Global Markets:** Establish a new "Producer-Consumer Dialogue" forum that includes shale producers and renewable giants to stabilize energy prices, moving beyond the outdated OPEC model.
-
- **Previous Years' Questions (UPSC)**
 - **2021 (GS2):** "The critical determinants of the changing geopolitics of West Asia."
 - **2019 (GS3):** "It is argued that the strategy of OPEC to protect its market share has failed. Discuss."
 - **2017 (GS2):** "The USA is facing an internal policy crisis in West Asia. Examine its impact on India."
- 



AXIA
IAS ACADEMY

RISE ABOVE THE REST
AXIA COMPETITIVE EXAM CENTRE

COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS: THE UAE EXIT FROM OPEC & GLOBAL OIL DYNAMICS

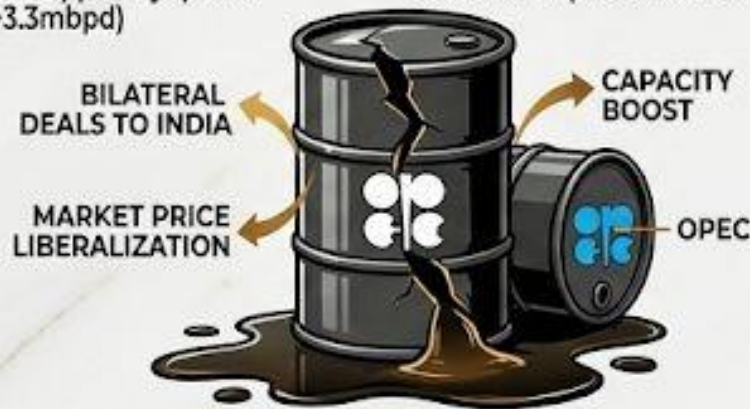


MODULE 1 KEY TERMS & EXPLANATIONS

- OPEC & OPEC+**
(Producers' clubs for market control)
- SEVEN SISTERS**
Domination by Western oil giants
- SWING PRODUCER**
Ability to manage supply, e.g., Saudi Arabia
- SHALE REVOLUTION**
U.S. boom using fracking
- PETRODOLLARS**
Oil revenue in U.S. dollars
- STRAIT OF HORMUZ**
Crucial oil artery/chokepoint

MODULE 2 MAIN ARGUMENTS & SUBSTANTIVE PARTS

- CORE THESIS:** fragmentation of traditional energy cartels
- CAPACITY VS. QUOTA:** invested in capacity (5mbpd) but capped by quotas (~3.3mbpd)
- GEOPOLITICAL FRACTURES:** regional war (2026) made cooperation impossible (e.g., Iran)
- SHIFT TOWARD BILATERALISM:** direct long-term supply deals for importers like India



MODULE 3 HISTORICAL EVOLUTION



MODULE 4 LOGICAL & PHILOSOPHICAL BASE

REALISM National Interest > Collective Good	LIBERAL MARKET Capacity-driven > Centrally Planned	TIME-LIMITED ASSET Unlock value now* before Peak Oil
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MOL 4 LOGICAL & PHILOSOPHICAL BASE

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NS 5 NEW FEATURES & SUSTAINABILITY

NEW FEATURES Feasibility: ★★ ★ UAE as "Free Agent" ★ Security-Driven Economics	SUSTAINABILITY Feasibility: ★★ ★ Economic Viability (High Short-term) ★ Environmental/Ethical Gamble on Transition Pace
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N6 MULTIDIMENSIONAL ANALYSIS (Key Points)

POLITICAL shift in Middle Eastern power balance; UAE asserting independence	ECONOMIC from Price-over-Volume to Volume-over-Price; lower bills for importers	INTERNATIONAL strengthens importers (India, China); weakening of "oil weapon"
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The phantom that flies

Fibre-optic drones

The small first-person view attack machines have emerged as a disruptive force in the Russia-Ukraine war and parts of the West Asia conflict

Murali N. Krishnaswamy

Low-cost, hard to track, harder to stop and capable of overwhelming in swarms, the fibre-optic-guided drones are proving to be a disruptive force in the Russia-Ukraine conflict and parts of the West Asia war.

According to Rahul Bedi, a Delhi-based journalist reporting on military and security matters, fibre-optic drones represent an inflection point in modern warfare – cheap expendable systems that are no longer constrained by electronic jamming or battlefield visibility. “In Ukraine and in southern Lebanon, they have redefined the front line, enabling persistent low-altitude strikes in heavily contested zones. The result is a battlefield where control is increasingly determined not by scale or sophistication of conventional weapon systems alone, but by adapting these phantom-like drones to dominate the environment.”

To Manmohan Bahadur, retired Air Vice Marshal and a former Additional Director General of the Centre for Air Power Studies, fibre-optic drones are the classic result of the cycle of counter-measures and counter-counter measures in warfare. “The net result is that modern and



technologically savvy armies are having to face a threat that is difficult to intercept.”

The Russia-Ukraine war has been significantly shaped by drone warfare, with drones accounting for up to 80% of casualties in some engagements. However, the vulnerability of drones that use wireless radio frequency (RF) communications led to further innovation, most notably, the use of drones guided by fibre optic cables. These drones – or what are called single-use fibre optic drones – have become increasingly common. As the first mover in deploying this technology, Russia gained a combat advantage. Its effectiveness prompted Ukraine to adopt it, and fibre-optic drones are now estimated to account for about 10% of Ukraine’s drone production.

In the Israel-Hezbollah conflict, Hezbollah’s lethal use of first-person view (FPV) attack drones, guid-

ed by a physical fibre optic cable, has forced personnel manning Israel’s defence and jamming systems to blink, marking a shift in battlefield tactics.

Real-time control

At the core of the operations is a thin fibre-optic line or spool, extending up to even 50 km in some instances. As a direct connection it has two benefits – first, real-time control and second, replacing the earlier grainy drone-generated visuals with high-resolution video transmission and spectacular battlefield imagery right up to the moment of attack.

The fibre controls the signals, telemetry, and also high-bandwidth video which are transmitted using light signals. Though the enemy could be unleashing electronic countermeasures, the operator does not even flinch, getting only a consistent and responsive connection.

But what may seem flawless has its challenges

too such as the weight of the attached fibre canister and military payload – which in turn could affect drone battery life – and the loss of communication in case the fibre is destroyed or damaged during flight by even strong winds. There are reports of soldiers snipping the fibre, but as a counter, fibre manufacturers are adding protective coating with an infusion of Kevlar, though this results in a larger fibre diameter.

Israeli forces are reported to be using physical defences, which include protective nets and even metal cages on military equipment to block drones, a point Mr. Bahadur highlights.

“At present, the counter measures to these drones are rudimentary. There is no doubt that a counter-measure would be developed for this technology too, but the impact is the psychological effect on ground troops who, at present, can only try and shoot them down, if they are able to see and engage these small sized drones in time,” he says.

More research in early detection of these unmanned aerial vehicles using infra red or acoustic sensors, apart from among other methods such as disabling of the fibre optic lines using lasers, would be key, he adds.

- **Key Terms and Explanations**

- **Fibre-Optic-Guided Drones:** Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) connected to the operator via a physical spool of thin fibre-optic cable. Unlike wireless drones, they communicate through light signals.
- **Electronic Jamming/Electronic Countermeasures (ECM):** Tactics used to disrupt an enemy's radio frequency (RF) signals. Traditional drones are vulnerable to "jamming," which severs the link between pilot and drone.
- **FPV (First-Person View):** A method where the pilot sees what the drone sees in real-time through goggles or a screen, allowing for high-precision "kamikaze" strikes.
- **Telemetry:** The automatic measurement and wireless transmission of data from remote sources. In these drones, telemetry (speed, altitude, battery) travels through the wire.
- **Bandwidth:** The capacity for data transfer. Fibre optics offer massive bandwidth, allowing for high-definition (HD) video feed that doesn't "break up" near the target.
- **Kevlar Infusion:** Adding high-strength synthetic fibre (Kevlar) to the optical wire to prevent it from snapping due to wind or physical obstacles.

- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**

- **The "Unjammable" Advantage:** The central thesis is that physical tethering renders electronic warfare (EW) obsolete. Since there is no radio signal to intercept or "noise" to drown out, the drone remains fully controllable even in high-interference zones.
- **Precision and Resolution:** Wireless signals often degrade as a drone approaches the ground or moves behind obstacles (the "Non-Line-of-Sight" problem). Fibre optics provide a crystal-clear feed until the moment of impact, increasing lethality.
- **Psychological Impact:** The article argues that these "phantom-like" drones create a unique terror among ground troops because traditional warning systems (RF detectors) fail to pick them up.
- **The Weight-Utility Trade-off:** While revolutionary, the physical wire adds weight and limits range. The spooling mechanism consumes space that could otherwise hold larger batteries or explosives.

- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**

- **Pre-2000s (Niche Use):** Wire-guided technology is not new; it was the backbone of Anti-Tank Guided Missiles (ATGMs) like the **9M14 Maljutka** or the **TOW missile**. However, these were missiles, not maneuverable drones.
- **The Drone Revolution (2010s):** The rise of consumer-grade quadcopters made aerial surveillance cheap. Warfare shifted toward "attrition by drone."
- **The Jamming Era (2022–2023):** In the early stages of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, EW systems became so advanced that thousands of drones were lost to signal interference monthly.
- **The Pivot to Fibre (2024–Present):** To bypass EW, Russia pioneered the return to "wired" control in a drone format. Ukraine quickly followed, marking an "inflection point" where the front line is redefined by physical tethers rather than invisible waves.

- **Way Forward**

- **Integrated Defence Systems:** Moving beyond RF jammers to include **Hard-Kill** systems (nets, cages) and **Directed Energy Weapons (DEWs)** like lasers to melt the fibre.
- **Indigenous Production:** Under 'Atmanirbhar Bharat', India must develop its own fibre-optic drone spools to avoid reliance on foreign supply chains (China/Russia) during a conflict.
- **Doctrine Update:** The Indian Armed Forces need to update their "Infantry Doctrine" to train soldiers in acoustic detection and physical concealment from FPV drones.

- **All Previous Years' UPSC and APSC Questions**

- **UPSC Mains 2023 (GS3):** "The use of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) by our adversaries across the borders... is a new threat to India's internal security. Discuss."
 - **UPSC Mains 2020 (GS3):** "What is the Cyber Dome Project? Explain how it can be useful in controlling internet crimes in India." (Related to security infrastructure).
 - **UPSC Prelims 2023:** Question on the use of drones in agriculture and mapping (showing UPSC's interest in UAV tech).
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UPSC CIVIL SERVICES EXAMINATION ANALYSIS: THE RISE OF FIBRE-OPTIC-GUIDED DRONES

1. THE SHIFT: WIRELESS vs. FIBRE-OPTIC GUIDANCE



2. OPERATIONAL ADVANTAGES & CHALLENGES

ADVANTAGES

- UNJAMMABLE COMMUNICATION** (no disruption signal)
- HIGH-DEFINITION (HD) VISUALS** (e.g., delition camera)
- PERSISTENT LOW-ALTITUDE STRIKES** (drone/runting now-drones to-in altitude persistent/ buildings/ urban)

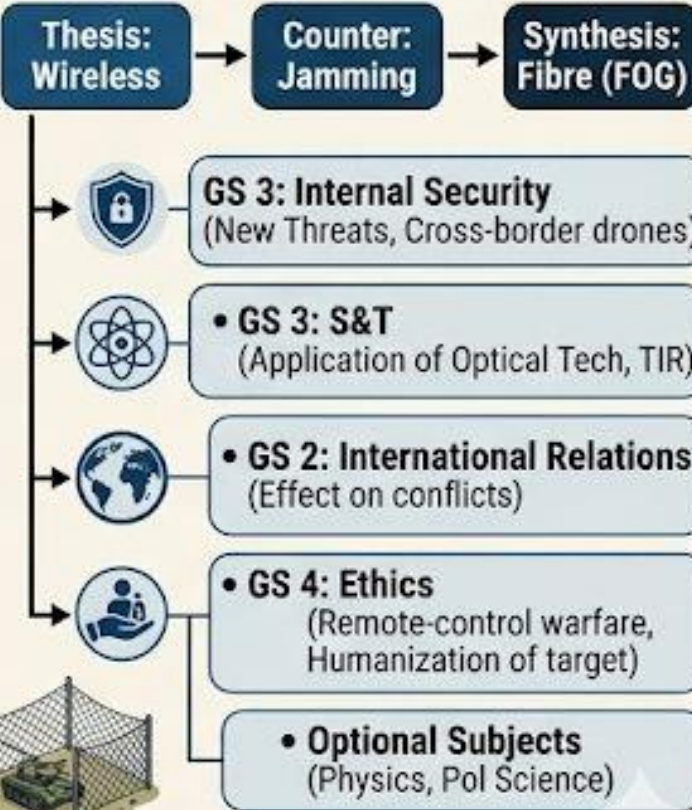
CHALLENGES

- FIBRE WEIGHT & DRAG**
- RANGE LIMITATIONS** (e.g., 50km spool)
- VULNERABLE TETHER** (broken cable)

4. THE WAY FORWARD & COUNTER-MEASURES

- Directed Energy Weapons (Lasers)** to disable fibre
- Acoustic Sensors** for early detection
- Hard-Kill Defences** (Cages, Protective Nets)
- 'Atmanirbhar Bharat'** Drone Production

3. MULTIDIMENSIONAL IMPACT & BEST LINKAGES WITH UPSC CSE SYLLABUS





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