

ForumIAS

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# Mains Marathon

1<sup>st</sup> Week December, 2024

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*HISTORY*  
*ECONOMICS*  
*POLITY*  
*SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY*  
*GEOGRAPHY AND ENVIRONMENT*

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FORUMIAS

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**What is research security, and why is it becoming a critical aspect of India's science and technology policy? Suggest measures to safeguard research without hampering academic freedom. (250 words)**

**Introduction:** Contextual Introduction

**Body:** Why research security is important and what measures to safeguard research in India?

**Conclusion:** Way forward

Research security encompasses safeguarding scientific research from threats such as intellectual property theft, cyberattacks, espionage, and undue foreign influence. It ensures that critical research outputs remain protected, thus contributing to national interests, economic progress, and technological advancement.

**Why Research Security is Critical for India?**

- **Protection of Strategic Interests:** India's focus on advanced technologies like semiconductors, clean energy, and defense systems makes its research ecosystem a potential target for espionage and exploitation by foreign entities.
- **Mitigation of Emerging Threats:** Foreign interference, insider threats, and unauthorized access to sensitive research could derail technological progress and expose critical information to adversaries.
- **Geopolitical Realities:** The military-civil fusion strategy of countries like China underscores the risks of technology transfer through seemingly civilian research collaborations.
- **Global Competitiveness:** Protecting intellectual property and research integrity is essential for India to sustain its innovation-driven economic growth.
- **Precedents from Global Incidents:** Cases such as cyberattacks on COVID-19 vaccine research facilities and incidents involving espionage in academia highlight the vulnerabilities in global research ecosystems.

**Measures to Safeguard Research Without Hampering Academic Freedom**

- **Comprehensive Vulnerability Assessment:** Systematically map vulnerabilities in universities, research labs, and collaborations and analyze the nature of foreign influence in critical areas like funding and personnel hiring.
- **Development of a National Research Security Framework:** Categorize research based on strategic, economic, and security implications. Establish a dedicated research security office within the Anusandhan National Research Foundation (ANRF).
- **Capacity Building and Awareness:** Train researchers and institutional staff on recognizing and mitigating security threats. Develop a cadre of experts to design, implement, and oversee research security efforts.
- **Integration of Cybersecurity Measures:** Ensure robust cybersecurity infrastructure to protect research data and intellectual property. Regular audits and updates to research systems and data-sharing protocols.
- **Strengthening International Collaboration Safeguards:** Establish clear protocols for partnerships and funding, particularly with high-risk nations or organizations. Engage trusted international partners to build capacity and share best practices.

**Conclusion**

Strengthening research security as a pillar of India's broader science and technology policy will ensure that the country remains competitive, secure, and resilient in an evolving global landscape.

**Examine the significance of the Places of Worship Act, 1991, in preserving secularism in India. How can the judiciary balance its constitutional mandate while addressing societal conflicts? (250 words)**

**Introduction:** Contextual Introduction

**Body:** Significance of Act in upholding secularism & the role of the judiciary in this mandate.

**Conclusion:** Way forward

The Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991, is a legislative safeguard that aims to protect the secular ethos of India by maintaining the religious character of places of worship as they stood on August 15, 1947. This law prohibits the conversion of any place of worship and abates pending or future suits on such matters.

### Significance of the Act in Preserving Secularism

- **Constitutional Values and Secularism:** The Act operationalizes the constitutional obligation to uphold secularism, a basic feature of the Constitution. It assures all communities that their religious places will not face arbitrary or politically motivated alterations.
- **Maintaining Communal Harmony:** By freezing the status quo as of August 15, 1947, the Act mitigates potential flashpoints for communal violence, promoting peaceful coexistence among diverse communities.
- **Healing Historical Grievances:** Parliament emphasized that independence from colonial rule provides the foundation to heal past injustices. The law directs citizens and the state to move beyond historical wrongs rather than exploit them for contemporary sectarian agendas.
- **Rule of Law and Equality:** The Act reinforces the rule of law by disallowing any person or group from taking the law into their own hands to settle grievances tied to historical changes.
- **Judicial Endorsement:** The Supreme Court, in its Ayodhya verdict, declared that historical injustices by Mughal rulers or others cannot be used as legal grounds today, emphasizing that redressal must be sought through dialogue rather than litigation.

### Role of the Judiciary in Balancing its Mandate

- **Upholding Legislative Intent:** The judiciary must interpret and enforce the Act to prevent misuse and ensure its uniform application, as underscored in the Supreme Court's categorical declarations in the Ayodhya case.
- **Promoting Reconciliation Over Litigation:** Courts should encourage mediation and dialogue rather than adjudicating disputes that can exacerbate societal tensions.
- **Addressing Contempt for Judicial Precedent:** Judicial leadership must ensure adherence to prior rulings to prevent inconsistency in decisions that may jeopardize the secular framework.
- **Guarding Against Politicization:** The judiciary must remain insulated from political influence to avoid decisions that appear biased or majoritarian.
- **Educating and Advocating Peace:** Beyond legal adjudication, the judiciary can emphasize constitutional values in its judgments, promoting peace and understanding among communities.

### Conclusion

The *Places of Worship Act, of 1991*, is a cornerstone of India's secular democracy, designed to preserve communal harmony and prevent the re-litigation of historical grievances. The judiciary must balance its constitutional obligations with sensitivity to societal conflicts by strictly upholding the rule of law, ensuring impartiality, and fostering reconciliation.

**“The pursuit of faster judicial case disposal can sometimes compromise fairness.”  
Critically analyze the statement in light of recent judicial reforms in India. (250 words)**

**Introduction:** Contextual Introduction

**Body:** What are the reasons for case pendency and suggest judicial reforms?

**Conclusion:** Way forward

The Indian judiciary faces a dual challenge: ensuring timely justice while maintaining fairness. Over 4 crore cases are pending across courts, prompting calls for faster disposal mechanisms.

### Reasons Behind Case Pendency

- **Frequent Adjournments:** About half of the 90 cases listed daily in district courts reportedly get adjourned, often due to lawyers needing more time for evidence gathering or legal research.
- **Structural Inefficiencies:** Delays arise at multiple stages, such as charge sheet filing, evidence gathering, and trial. Misplaced case files, misleading roznama entries, and inefficient police procedures exacerbate these delays.
- **Socioeconomic Barriers:** Undertrials from marginalized backgrounds often lack awareness of free legal aid and face poor-quality representation. This impairs their ability to secure a fair trial.
- **Lack of Technological Resources:** Many district courts lack video conferencing facilities, impeding the potential benefits of technology for case management.

### Balancing Speed and Fairness

- **Address Structural Bottlenecks:** Identify and resolve delays at critical stages, such as improving evidence collection by police, ensuring accurate roznama, and using technology to track case files.
- **Reform Adjudgment Practices:** Categorize cases prone to frequent adjournments and establish permissible limits for delays, without compromising necessary preparations for sensitive cases.
- **Strengthen Legal Aid:** Allocate more resources to improve the quality and accessibility of free legal aid, particularly for undertrials from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- **Technology with Sensitivity:** While video proceedings can save time, they should be used judiciously to avoid compromising the rights of the accused. In-person trials should remain an option for sensitive cases.
- **Judicial Accountability without Pressure:** Performance metrics for judges should consider both disposal rates and the quality of judgments to ensure fairness is not sacrificed for speed.

## Conclusion

The judicial system's efficiency must align with the principles of equity and due process. Structural reforms addressing systemic delays, combined with equitable technological adoption and stronger legal aid systems, can ensure a balance between speed and fairness.

## Critically evaluate the 'One Nation, One Subscription' (ONOS) scheme in the context of equitable access to scientific knowledge and the rise of Open Access publishing models. (250 words)

**Introduction:** Contextual Introduction

**Body:** Highlight the strength of ONOS & evaluate the scheme in the context of equitable access to scientific knowledge.

**Conclusion:** Way forward

The 'One Nation, One Subscription' (ONOS) initiative, approved by the Union Cabinet in November 2024, aims to provide equitable access to scholarly journals across public institutions in India.

## Strengths of ONOS

- **Equitable Knowledge Access:** ONOS promises universal access to research for all public institutions, bridging the gap between well-funded and resource-constrained organizations.
- **Cost Optimization:** Centralized subscriptions could reduce the duplication of expenditure by academic institutions, which currently spend around ₹1,500 crore annually on journal access.
- **Boost to Research Ecosystem:** The scheme ensures immediate availability of high-impact research, enhancing academic output and fostering innovation.

## Challenges and Shortcomings

- **Global Shift Towards OA Publishing:** With over 53% of scientific articles already OA and mandates by nations like the U.S. and EU requiring publicly funded research to be freely accessible, ONOS risks investing taxpayer money in an increasingly obsolete subscription model.
- **Article Processing Charges (APCs):** While OA journals eliminate paywalls for readers, authors face exorbitant APCs (e.g., Nature Communications charges \$6,790 per paper). ONOS does not address these fees, potentially sidelining Indian researchers seeking global publication.
- **Copyright Concerns:** The subscription model forces authors to transfer copyrights to publishers, limiting their control over their work. Instances like Taylor & Francis's AI-related controversy highlight the risks of relinquishing copyright.
- **Lack of Long-term Preservation Mechanisms:** Reliance on publishers for archiving creates risks, as demonstrated by journals becoming inaccessible after discontinuation.
- **Missed Opportunity for Self-Reliance:** India's resources and talent could elevate indigenous journals to global standards. Instead, ONOS reinforces reliance on Western publishers, missing the chance to establish leadership in publishing innovation.

## Alternatives and Recommendations

- **Institutional Open Access Repositories:** Incorporating a green OA model would allow Indian researchers to archive their work, making it globally accessible without APCs.
- **Rights Retention Policies:** Adopting frameworks like those of Harvard University can protect authors' intellectual property rights while promoting accessibility.

- **Investing in Indian Journals:** Building robust domestic publishing platforms can reduce dependency on international publishers and attract global submissions.
- **Digital Preservation:** Ensuring long-term accessibility of research through self-archiving and repository networks should complement ONOS.

### Conclusion

A hybrid approach—adopting ONOS while simultaneously investing in OA infrastructure—would align access with sustainability, fostering a truly inclusive global knowledge ecosystem.

### Discuss the challenges faced by the States due to the current fiscal devolution system in India. Suggest reforms to ensure equitable and efficient resource allocation by the Finance Commission. (250 Words)

**Introduction:** Contextual Introduction

**Body:** Highlight challenges faced by States and reforms suggested for efficient resource allocation

**Conclusion:** Way forward

The Sixteenth Finance Commission, chaired by Arvind Panagariya, faces the complex task of addressing the fiscal challenges that define the relationship between the Union and the States.

#### Key Challenges Faced by States

- **Vertical Fiscal Imbalance:** While the Fifteenth Finance Commission recommended a 41% share of the divisible pool for States, the effective devolution has been much lower, at only 33.16%, primarily due to the Union's reliance on cesses and surcharges. This reduced fiscal autonomy hampers the ability of States to implement locally relevant schemes.
- **Horizontal Fiscal Inequities:** Redistribution policies followed over decades have had limited success in fostering real growth in less-developed States. The current methodology often penalizes performing States like Tamil Nadu by redirecting resources away from them to underperforming States.
- **Centrally Sponsored Schemes (CSS):** Increased counterpart funding for CSS adds financial strain on States, reducing their capacity to focus on state-specific developmental priorities.
- **Unique Challenges for Progressive States:** Progressive States like Tamil Nadu, with a higher median age, face declining consumption-based tax revenues while bearing rising costs for supporting aging populations. Tamil Nadu, expected to have 57.30% urban population by 2031, requires substantial infrastructure investment to address urbanization challenges.

#### Opportunities for Reform by the Sixteenth Finance Commission

- **Hike in Vertical Devolution:** Increase the States' share of gross central taxes to 50% to enhance their fiscal autonomy. Reduce dependence on cesses and surcharges by including them in the divisible pool.
- **Progressive Horizontal Resource Allocation:** Adopt a progressive allocation methodology that incentivizes high-performing States to serve as growth engines while providing adequate resources to less-developed States.
- **Address Demographic and Urbanization Challenges:** Allocate specific grants for States dealing with aging populations to avoid the middle-income trap. Earmark funds for infrastructure development in rapidly urbanizing States like Tamil Nadu to ensure sustainable growth.
- **Link Resource Allocation to Performance:** Recognize States' contributions to national growth by incentivizing manufacturing, climate resilience, and urban governance. Reward fiscal discipline, innovation, and development outcomes as part of the devolution framework.

### Conclusion

The Sixteenth Finance Commission must embrace a vision that ensures progressive resource allocation, addresses unique state-level challenges, and facilitates India's transition into a globally competitive economy.

**Examine how India has sought to mainstream the perspectives of the Global South into G-20 decision-making. Discuss the significance of this approach for global economic and political reforms. (250 Words)**

**Introduction:** Contextual Introduction

**Body:** Highlight India's efforts to mainstream global south perspectives in G20 and its significance.

**Conclusion:** Way forward

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Nigeria, Brazil, and Guyana underscores India's dynamic and evolving foreign policy. This meticulously planned diplomatic foray demonstrates India's commitment to strengthening ties with diverse geographic regions, addressing Global South priorities, and showcasing India as a proactive global leader.

### India's Efforts to Mainstream Global South Perspectives in G-20

- **Voice of the Global South Summit:** The summit provided a platform to identify shared priorities, such as climate finance, food and energy security, and equitable technology access.
- **Focus on Development Agendas:** India's G-20 presidency emphasized inclusive development through initiatives like LiFE (Lifestyle for Environment), digital public infrastructure, and debt restructuring for low-income countries. Key priorities included promoting sustainable development, fostering digital inclusion, and addressing the global debt crisis.
- **Debt Relief and Economic Stability:** India facilitated discussions on debt relief mechanisms for highly indebted nations in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, advocating a multilateral approach to restructuring sovereign debt.
- **Inclusion of the African Union (AU):** India championed the inclusion of the AU as a permanent member of the G-20, ensuring that Africa's perspectives are better represented in global decision-making.

### Significance of Mainstreaming Global South Perspectives

- **Promoting Multilateralism:** India's emphasis on inclusivity and equity reinvigorates multilateralism, countering the dominance of developed nations in global institutions like the IMF and World Bank.
- **Enhancing South-South Cooperation:** India's leadership inspires solidarity among developing nations, creating a unified voice to advocate for reforms in global governance structures.
- **Reshaping Climate Policies:** The Global South perspective emphasizes balancing economic development with climate action, promoting energy transitions that are just and affordable. It also pushes for accountability from developed nations, ensuring they meet their historical and financial obligations.
- **Geopolitical Balancing:** India's efforts provide an alternative to the Global North's narratives, reducing polarization in international relations and fostering a more balanced global dialogue.

### Conclusion

India's approach to mainstreaming the perspectives of the Global South into G-20 decision-making reflects its vision for a more inclusive and equitable global order. By addressing shared challenges like climate justice, debt relief, and technological equity, India has reinforced the relevance of the G-20 as a platform for collaborative global governance.

**Evaluate the role of state policies versus private philanthropy in addressing wealth inequality. Discuss the limitations of relying on private charity to rectify systemic issues created by wealth concentration. (250 Words)**

**Introduction:** Contextual Introduction

**Body:** Highlight the role of state policies versus private philanthropy and the limitations of private philanthropy.

**Conclusion:** Way forward

Wealth inequality is a structural issue influenced by economic policies, social systems, and historical inequities. While private philanthropy, exemplified by figures like Warren Buffet, offers immediate relief and targeted interventions, state policies provide a more systematic approach to addressing the root causes of inequality.

### Role of State Policies

- **Systemic Redistribution of Wealth:** Progressive taxation ensures that those with higher incomes and wealth contribute proportionally more to public welfare. Thomas Piketty advocates for such mechanisms to address structural inequality.
- **Regulation of Monopolistic Practices:** The wealth of individuals like Bill Gates and Jeff Bezos highlights the role of monopolies in market dynamics. State policies ensuring competitive practices can prevent such concentrations of wealth.
- **Intervention in Labor Markets:** Policies like higher minimum wages, collective bargaining rights, and worker protections counteract the stagnation of wages, a trend seen in both developed and developing economies. India's MGNREGA offers an example of redistributive employment policies targeting rural inequality.

### Role and Limitations of Private Philanthropy

- **Contributions to Welfare:** Figures like Warren Buffet have used private wealth to fund education, healthcare, and global development projects. Buffet's philanthropic approach aligns with the philosophical principle of luck egalitarianism, acknowledging systemic privilege.
- **Addressing Immediate Needs:** Philanthropy can swiftly target specific problems, such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation's work on malaria eradication or COVID-19 relief efforts.
- **Limitations of Charity:**
  - **Selective Scope:** Donors often prioritize causes based on personal interest, leaving other systemic issues unaddressed.
  - **Lack of Accountability:** Unlike state initiatives, private philanthropy lacks democratic oversight and accountability mechanisms.

### Conclusion

While private philanthropy can complement state efforts in addressing wealth inequality, it is not a substitute for robust state policies. Only governments have the mandate, scale, and tools to enact structural reforms needed to address the systemic roots of wealth concentration. Therefore, a balanced approach is essential, with state policies forming the foundation and philanthropy providing supplementary support.

### Critically evaluate the impact of the Oilfields (Regulation and Development) Amendment Bill, 2024, on federalism in India. How does it alter the balance of power between the Union and State governments in regulating natural resources? (250 Words)

**Introduction:** Contextual Introduction

**Body:** Concerns of Bill around federalism and how it alters relations between the Union & states.

**Conclusion:** Way forward

The **Oilfields (Regulation and Development) Amendment Bill, 2024** aims to redefine India's regulatory framework for petroleum and mineral oils, addressing gaps in the existing law while promoting domestic production and private investment.

### Federalism Concerns and Criticisms

- **Centralization of Power:** Opposition parties argue that redefining terms such as "mineral oils" and "mining leases" dilutes states' traditional role in managing natural resources within their territories. The Bill undermines the spirit of cooperative federalism by prioritizing Union interests without adequate safeguards for states' involvement.
- **Judicial Precedents and Constitutional Boundaries:** The Supreme Court's July 2024 judgment upheld states' taxation rights under Entry 50. This Bill may be viewed as circumventing this ruling by transferring regulatory and financial authority to the Union.
- **Environmental Oversight:** Critics highlight the potential risks of allowing private operators more discretion and removing criminal penalties for violations. While the Bill introduces provisions for curbing greenhouse gas emissions, the lack of stringent penalties may reduce accountability, particularly in ecologically sensitive states.
- **Revenue-Sharing Mechanisms:** The absence of a clear mechanism for equitable revenue sharing between the Union and states adds to concerns of fiscal imbalance.

### How the Bill Alters the Balance of Power?



- **Shift in Regulatory Authority:** The Bill replaces "mining leases" with "petroleum leases," redefining the jurisdiction over mineral oil resources under Entry 53 of the Union List, which grants Parliament power over oilfields and petroleum products. This reframing could curtail states' power over "mineral rights," which is protected under Entry 50 of the State List. By excluding petroleum from the definition of "mineral rights," states lose direct control over resource management and taxation.
- **Implications for States' Revenue and Autonomy:** States retain the right to grant petroleum leases but may see reduced control over taxation and royalty collection, as these could now be interpreted under the Union List. The Supreme Court's ruling affirming states' exclusive power to tax mining activities adds to the contention that the Bill could weaken fiscal federalism by redefining key terms like "mineral oils."
- **Encouragement of Private Investment:** The Bill prioritizes private sector involvement, with provisions for non-alteration of existing leases, decriminalization of violations, and incentives for private players. While this might boost efficiency and production, it sidelines public sector entities like ONGC, potentially diminishing the role of states in shaping industrial policies in this sector.

### Conclusion

A balanced approach, rooted in *cooperative federalism*, is essential to reconcile national priorities with the autonomy of states and ensure sustainable and equitable development of natural resources.