

ForumIAS

F

Mains Marathon

3rd Week December, 2024

HISTORY
ECONOMICS
POLITY
SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
GEOGRAPHY AND ENVIRONMENT

FORUMIAS

INDEX

Discuss the constitutional and judicial perspectives on religion-based OBC reservations in India. How has the Supreme Court clarified the criteria for identifying backward classes? (250 words) ... 2

Critically analyze the challenges posed by India's ageing population with poor health and asset deficiencies. What policy measures are needed to address this looming crisis? (250 words) 2

Evaluate how cultural factors and individual dedication have contributed to India's rise as a powerhouse in the global chess arena. (250 Words) 4

Explain the role of Arctic tundra and permafrost in the global carbon cycle. How has the recent thawing of permafrost impacted greenhouse gas emissions? (250 Words)..... 4

Discuss the significance of a dedicated, Crimes Against Humanity (CAH) treaty in the global fight against impunity. How does India's stance on the treaty reflect its priorities in international relations? (250 words) 5

Explain the significance of the Supreme Court's ruling on the classification of coconut oil under GST norms. How does the "common parlance test" influence taxation policies in India? (250 words) 6

Examine the strategic importance of undersea cables for India's digital connectivity and national security. Discuss the challenges in ensuring their resilience and security. (250 words) 7

Analyze the significance of Kuwait in India's West Asia policy. How can this bilateral relationship be leveraged to enhance India's energy security and economic cooperation? (250 words) 8

Discuss the constitutional and judicial perspectives on religion-based OBC reservations in India. How has the Supreme Court clarified the criteria for identifying backward classes? (250 words)

Introduction: Contextual Introduction

Body: What are constitutional & judicial perspectives on religion-based OBC reservations in India?

Conclusion: Way forward

The relationship between religion and reservation in India has been a contentious issue, particularly concerning Other Backward Classes (OBC) and Scheduled Castes (SC) categories. While there is no explicit bar on identifying religious groups for OBC reservations, the Constitution and the judiciary have maintained that religion cannot be the sole criterion for granting such reservations.

Constitutional Provisions & Judicial Perspectives

- **OBC Reservations under Article 16(4):** Article 16(4) empowers the State to provide reservations for any “backward class of citizens” that is “not adequately represented in the services under the State.” This provision does not prohibit religion-based identification but mandates backwardness as the qualifying criterion.
- **Scheduled Castes under Article 341:** The Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950 explicitly restricts SC status to Hindus, Sikhs (since 1956), and Buddhists (since 1990), excluding Christians and Muslims. Clause 3 of the Order reflects the perception that the caste system primarily affects these religions.
- **Indra Sawhney Case (1992):** The Supreme Court held that backwardness must be determined by social and educational criteria. Religion cannot be the sole basis for identifying backward classes.
- **Calcutta High Court Verdict (May 2024):** The court struck down reservations granted to 77 classes, predominantly from the Muslim community, within the OBC quota. It observed that the reservations were based solely on religion without “objective criteria” to determine backwardness.
- **Soosai v. Union of India (1985):** The Supreme Court held that converting to Christianity does not automatically invalidate caste-based disadvantages. However, individuals must prove that caste-based oppression continues post-conversion.

Criteria for Identifying Backward Classes

- **Social Backwardness:** Measured through caste-based discrimination, lack of social mobility, and exclusion from societal privileges.
- **Educational Backwardness:** Indicators include low literacy rates, poor access to education, and high dropout rates among specific groups.
- **Economic Backwardness:** Factors include low per capita income, unemployment, and lack of assets or land ownership.
- **Empirical Data and Commissions:** Backwardness must be established through detailed surveys and reports, as done by commissions like Justice Chinnappa Reddy Commission (Karnataka) and Justice Sachar Committee. Religion may be relevant but cannot be the sole determinant.

Conclusion

The *Indra Sawhney* judgment serves as a guiding principle, emphasizing that social, educational, and economic backwardness — supported by empirical data — must form the basis for any such policy.

Critically analyze the challenges posed by India’s ageing population with poor health and asset deficiencies. What policy measures are needed to address this looming crisis? (250 words)

Introduction: Contextual Introduction

Body: Highlight challenges posed by India’s ageing population & policy measures to address this.

Conclusion: Way forward

India stands at a critical juncture with its demographic dividend—67.3% of the population is in the working age group (15-59 years), a window of opportunity that will persist for the next three decades. However, whether this large workforce can drive India towards its \$7 trillion GDP target by 2030 depends on its ability to achieve high productivity and wealth creation.

Current Status and Challenges

- **Skill Deficiencies:** A mismatch between educational outcomes and industry needs has led to a paradox where unemployment coexists with a lack of employable skills. The focus on rote learning rather than critical thinking and problem-solving skills further limits the potential for innovation and productivity.
- **Health and Nutrition Deficiencies Start Early:** Cognitive and physical development, which begins at the foetal stage and continues into adolescence, is compromised due to poor maternal nutrition, inadequate child healthcare, and insufficient investment in early childhood education.
- **Poor Health and Nutritional Status:**
 - **Anaemia:** NFHS-5 reports that 57% of women and 25% of men in the 15-49 age group are anaemic. Among adolescents (15-24 years), 59% of girls and 31% of boys suffer from anaemia, which affects cognitive abilities, productivity, and physical development.
 - **Low BMI:** Around 18.7% of women and 16.2% of men in the 15-49 age group have a BMI below normal, while for adolescents, 54.9% of girls and 52.6% of boys have normal BMI. Malnutrition continues to impair overall physical health and workforce efficiency.

Policy Measures to Harness the Demographic Dividend

- **Reforming Education for Foundational and Advanced Learning**
 - **Early Childhood Education:** Strengthen programs under the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 to focus on foundational literacy and numeracy through quality pre-school education.
 - **Enhancing Learning Outcomes:** Implement robust remedial education programs in primary and secondary schools to bridge learning gaps identified in ASER reports.
- **Tackling Health and Nutritional Deficiencies**
 - **Combating Anaemia and Malnutrition:** Expand and strengthen programs like Poshan Abhiyaan and Mid-Day Meal Scheme to improve nutrition outcomes among children, adolescents, and women.
 - **Healthcare Access for Adolescents:** Integrate adolescent health programs under Ayushman Bharat to focus on anaemia screening, mental health support, and preventive care.
- **Bridging Skill Gaps for Employability**
 - **Vocational Training:** Scale up programs like Skill India and PMKVY to impart industry-relevant skills. Integrate skilling with digital literacy and modern technologies.
 - **Apprenticeship Programs:** Promote apprenticeship and on-the-job training in collaboration with industries to ensure practical skill development.

Conclusion

India's demographic dividend presents an unprecedented opportunity, but it remains unrealized due to significant deficiencies in education, health, and skill development. Immediate and targeted policy interventions focusing on foundational learning, nutrition, healthcare, and skilling are imperative to develop a healthy, skilled, and productive workforce. By addressing these gaps, India can unlock its demographic potential and position itself as a global economic powerhouse, achieving its \$7 trillion GDP target by 2030.

Evaluate how cultural factors and individual dedication have contributed to India's rise as a powerhouse in the global chess arena. (250 Words)

Introduction: Contextual Introduction

Body: Highlight cultural factors and individual dedication that have contributed to India's rise as a powerhouse in the global chess arena.

Conclusion: Way forward

India's emergence as a leading force in global chess can be attributed to both cultural factors and individual dedication. These elements have fostered an environment where prodigies like Gukesh Dommaraju have flourished, culminating in his record-breaking achievement of becoming the World Chess Champion at the age of 18.

Cultural Factors

- **Historical Connection with Chess:** Chess, originally known as Chaturanga, has its roots in India, embedding a cultural affinity for the game. This legacy instills pride and motivation in Indian players to excel on the global stage.
- **Competitive Atmosphere and Peer Inspiration:** The rise of players like Viswanathan Anand has inspired a wave of young talent, including Gukesh and Arjun Erigaisi. The fierce competition among Indian prodigies fosters continuous growth and improvement.
- **The Rise of "Fighting Chess":** Modern chess emphasizes aggression and originality, aligning with the energy and mental stamina of India's younger players. Gukesh's ability to avoid simplifications and push for creative solutions reflects this new approach, distinguishing him from earlier styles of play.

Individual Dedication

- **Gukesh Dommaraju: The Prodigy:** Gukesh's creativity and precision define his playing style, making him comparable to Anatoly Karpov in originality and calculation. His ability to resist simplifications and maintain composure in high-pressure situations reflects immense self-confidence without overconfidence.
- **Hard Work and Discipline:** Indian players, including Gukesh, dedicate 10–11 hours daily to rigorous practice, supported by their families. This dedication ensures continuous progress, unlike many international counterparts whose development often plateaus.
- **Resilience Against Barriers:** Despite systemic challenges, such as limited sponsorships and infrastructure, Indian players have thrived due to their commitment and parental support.

Conclusion

India's rise in global chess exemplifies the interplay of cultural heritage and individual dedication. While systemic barriers persist, the determination of players like Gukesh Dommaraju and the competitive spirit within the Indian chess community has positioned India at the forefront of the global chess arena. As the country nurtures more young talents, its dominance in chess is poised to grow, potentially heralding a new era where Indian players define the global chess narrative.

Explain the role of Arctic tundra and permafrost in the global carbon cycle. How has the recent thawing of permafrost impacted greenhouse gas emissions? (250 Words)

Introduction: Contextual Introduction

Body: Highlight the role of tundra and permafrost in the global carbon cycle & impact of the thawing of permafrost impacted greenhouse gas emissions.

Conclusion: Way forward

The Arctic tundra and permafrost play a crucial role in the global carbon cycle, acting as a massive carbon sink.

Role of Arctic Tundra and Permafrost in the Global Carbon Cycle

- **Carbon Sink:** The tundra's vegetation absorbs carbon dioxide (CO₂) through photosynthesis. Due to the extremely cold climate, the decomposition of organic matter is significantly slowed, trapping plant and animal remains in permafrost for thousands of years. This process prevents the release of CO₂ into the atmosphere, thereby acting as a carbon sink.
- **Carbon Reservoir:** Arctic soils store over 1.6 trillion metric tonnes of carbon, approximately double the carbon currently in the atmosphere. This massive storage helps regulate atmospheric carbon levels.
- **Slow Decomposition:** The cold temperatures of the Arctic tundra slow down the process of decomposition. This means that organic matter accumulates in the soil rather than decomposing quickly and releasing carbon dioxide.

Impact of Recent Thawing on Greenhouse Gas Emissions

- **Release of Greenhouse Gases:** As permafrost thaws, the organic matter trapped within it begins to decompose. This decomposition process releases large amounts of carbon dioxide and methane, both potent greenhouse gases, into the atmosphere. Methane, in particular, is a far more potent greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide, contributing significantly to global warming.
- **Positive Feedback Loop:** The release of greenhouse gases from thawing permafrost exacerbates global warming, leading to further thawing and the release of more greenhouse gases. This creates a positive feedback loop that can accelerate climate change.
- **Altered Ecosystem:** Thawing permafrost can also alter the Arctic ecosystem. It can lead to changes in vegetation, soil erosion, and the release of nutrients and pollutants that were previously locked in the frozen ground. These changes can further impact the carbon cycle and have cascading effects on other ecosystems.

Conclusion

The Arctic tundra and permafrost have historically stabilized the global carbon cycle by storing carbon for millennia. However, rising temperatures and increased wildfires have turned this crucial ecosystem into a source of greenhouse gases, intensifying climate change. Immediate global action to reduce emissions is essential to mitigate this alarming trend and restore the Arctic's role as a carbon sink.

Discuss the significance of a dedicated, Crimes Against Humanity (CAH) treaty in the global fight against impunity. How does India's stance on the treaty reflect its priorities in international relations? (250 words)

<p>Introduction: Contextual Introduction</p> <p>Body: Significance of treaty in the fight against impunity & India's stance on treaty.</p> <p>Conclusion: Way forward</p>
--

A dedicated CAH treaty addresses the accountability deficit in international law. Unlike genocide and war crimes, which are governed by the Genocide Convention (1948) and the Geneva Conventions (1949), CAH is only covered under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC).

Significance of a (CAH) Treaty in the Global Fight Against Impunity

- **Clearer Definition and Codification:** A CAH treaty would provide a universally agreed-upon definition of these crimes, ensuring consistent interpretation and application across different jurisdictions. This would reduce ambiguity and strengthen domestic legal frameworks.
- **Strengthened State Obligations:** The treaty would explicitly obligate states to prevent, investigate, and prosecute CAH, regardless of where they are committed. This includes enacting domestic legislation, extraditing suspects, and cooperating with other states in investigations and prosecutions.

- **Improved International Cooperation:** A dedicated treaty would foster greater cooperation among states in the fight against impunity. This could involve sharing evidence, providing mutual legal assistance, and coordinating investigative efforts.
- **Addressing Gaps in the Rome Statute:** While the ICC is a vital institution, it has limitations. A CAH treaty would complement the Rome Statute by extending jurisdiction to states that are not parties to the Statute and by providing a framework for domestic prosecutions.

India's Stance on the CAH Treaty and Its Reflection of International Priorities

- **Concerns about Sovereignty:** India has traditionally been cautious about international interventions that could be seen as infringing on its sovereignty. This concern may extend to the CAH treaty, particularly regarding provisions on universal jurisdiction and extradition.
- **Focus on Domestic Legal Frameworks:** India has a robust domestic legal system and may prefer to address CAH through its laws and institutions. However, a CAH treaty could provide valuable guidance and support in this regard.
- **Balancing Competing Priorities:** India's foreign policy is driven by a range of priorities, including economic development, regional security, and counter-terrorism. While combating impunity for CAH is undoubtedly important, it may need to be balanced against these other priorities.
- **Desire for Consensus:** India often prefers to act in concert with the international community and may be waiting for a broader consensus to emerge on the CAH treaty before taking a firm position.

Conclusion

A dedicated CAH treaty is a vital step toward global accountability for grave crimes. India's cautious stance reflects its priorities of sovereignty, strategic autonomy, and addressing terrorism. However, India can strengthen its leadership by adopting domestic legal frameworks for CAH and actively contributing to treaty negotiations, reaffirming its role as a proponent of justice and human rights on the international stage.

Explain the significance of the Supreme Court's ruling on the classification of coconut oil under GST norms. How does the "common parlance test" influence taxation policies in India? (250 words)

Introduction: Contextual Introduction

Body: Highlight the significance of the ruling on the classification of coconut oil and the influence of the common parlance test.

Conclusion: Way forward

After years of deliberation, the Supreme Court ruled that coconut oil is an edible oil for taxation purposes, regardless of packaging size. It rejected the earlier notion that small packages of coconut oil should be classified as hair oil. This landmark decision has clarified the tax treatment of coconut oil under the Goods and Services Tax (GST) regime and established important principles for classification disputes.

Significance of the Ruling

- **Clarity and Consistency:** The ruling provides much-needed clarity on the taxation of coconut oil, reducing ambiguity and potential disputes.
- **Benefit to Consumers:** The lower GST rate on edible oils will likely benefit consumers, as it may lead to lower prices for coconut oil used for cooking.
- **Impact on Industry:** The ruling provides certainty to the coconut oil industry, allowing businesses to operate with a clear understanding of the tax implications.

Role of the Common Parlance Test

- **Definition:** The common parlance test examines how a product is generally understood and used by consumers and market participants to resolve classification ambiguities.

- **Interpreting Tax Laws:** Tax laws often use terms that are not precisely defined. The "common parlance test" helps interpret these terms in a way that aligns with common understanding.
- **Determining Classification of Goods:** As seen in the coconut oil case, the "common parlance test" can be used to determine the appropriate classification of goods for taxation purposes based on their common usage.
- **Ensuring Fairness and Predictability:** By relying on common understanding, the "common parlance test" promotes fairness and predictability in taxation, reducing the scope for arbitrary interpretations.
- **Limitations:** The "common parlance test" is not always definitive, as some terms may have different meanings in different contexts or among different groups of people.
- **Balance with Technical Definitions:** While common parlance is important, it needs to be balanced with technical or legal definitions, especially in cases where specific technical meanings exist.

Conclusion

The Supreme Court's ruling firmly establishes coconut oil as an edible oil for taxation, providing clarity to an issue that spanned over 15 years. By rejecting the common parlance test, the Court underscored the primacy of legal and international standards in tax classifications. This decision not only benefits consumers and businesses but also strengthens the robustness of India's GST framework by promoting consistency and reducing litigation.

Examine the strategic importance of undersea cables for India's digital connectivity and national security. Discuss the challenges in ensuring their resilience and security. (250 words)

Introduction: Contextual Introduction

Body: Highlight the importance of undersea cables and challenges in ensuring resilience & security

Conclusion: Way forward

India is witnessing rapid growth in its undersea cable network, with the launch of two new cable systems—India Asia Xpress (IAX) and India Europe Xpress (IEX). These cables bolster India's digital connectivity and play a vital role in national security.

Digital Connectivity

- **Increased Bandwidth:** The IAX and IEX systems, spanning over 15,000 km, connect India to Asia and Europe, ensuring additional bandwidth to handle growing data consumption.
- **Global Integration:** These cables enhance India's connectivity with strategic hubs like Singapore, France, and Greece, strengthening India's integration into global digital networks.
- **Resilience in Connectivity:** Recent disruptions to cables in March highlighted the importance of robust networks. The new systems provide redundancy and ensure smoother data flows in case of future disruptions.

National Security

- **Geopolitical Significance:** The expansion of submarine cables reflects India's increased maritime ambitions, particularly in the Bay of Bengal and South China Sea regions.
- **Cybersecurity Measures:** Enhanced cable systems help mitigate risks of cyberattacks and disruptions from state and non-state actors.
- **Strategic Role:** India's proactive role in submarine cable discussions, as seen in its participation in the International Advisory Body for Submarine Cable Resilience, underscores its commitment to safeguarding critical infrastructure.

Challenges in Ensuring Resilience and Security

- **Physical and Cyber Vulnerabilities:** Natural disasters, accidents, or intentional sabotage can disrupt cables, as evidenced by the March 2024 incidents impacting connectivity to West Asia and Europe. Increased reliance on undersea cables exposes India to potential espionage or data breaches, particularly given strategic investments by entities like China Mobile in cable projects.
- **Geopolitical Constraints:** The presence of foreign investments in Indian cable systems can lead to strategic vulnerabilities. Issues like Bangladesh's suspension of bandwidth sales to Northeast India reflect the challenges of cross-border collaborations.
- **Infrastructure Limitations:** Redundancy and Domestic Stability: Despite progress, India must ensure that services remain stable within its borders even in the event of external disruptions, as highlighted by IT Secretary S. Krishnan.

Conclusion

By addressing these challenges, India can position itself as a global leader in digital connectivity while safeguarding its strategic interests.

Analyze the significance of Kuwait in India's West Asia policy. How can this bilateral relationship be leveraged to enhance India's energy security and economic cooperation? (250 words)

Introduction: Contextual Introduction

Body: Highlight the significance of Kuwait in India's West Asia policy and how the can relationship be leveraged to enhance India's energy security and economic cooperation.

Conclusion: Way forward

Kuwait holds immense strategic importance in India's West Asia policy due to its geographical, economic, and geopolitical relevance. The first Indian Prime Ministerial visit in 43 years highlights the urgency to rejuvenate ties with this Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) member.

Strategic Importance

- **Geopolitical Role:** Kuwait's neutral stance and active mediation in regional conflicts make it a reliable partner for India in navigating West Asia's complex geopolitics. Hosting significant U.S. military bases enhances Kuwait's strategic value.
- **Energy Security:** Kuwait supplies approximately 3% of India's crude oil, vital for energy security. Its vast sovereign wealth fund, valued at \$924 billion, offers potential for investments in India's energy and infrastructure sectors.
- **Diaspora and Cultural Bonds:** Over 1 million Indians form the largest expatriate community in Kuwait, contributing significantly to remittances. Shared cultural initiatives, such as Hindi radio programs and CBSE-affiliated schools, foster people-to-people ties.
- **Economic Partnership:** The bilateral trade between India and Kuwait has been on a positive trajectory, with both nations engaging in diverse sectors such as trade, investment, and infrastructure. Kuwait's investments in India and the presence of a large Indian expatriate community in Kuwait further solidify their economic ties.

Leveraging the Relationship for Energy Security and Economic Cooperation

- **Energy Partnerships:** Kuwait can partner with India in storing strategic oil reserves and expanding energy trade. Joint ventures in green energy and renewable projects under the International Solar Alliance (ISA) could diversify energy ties.
- **Economic Collaboration:** Strengthening the Kuwait Investment Authority's (KIA) collaboration with India's National Investment and Infrastructure Fund (NIIF) can boost infrastructure development. Indian involvement in Kuwait's 'Vision 2035' infrastructure projects, including technology and education institutions, can deepen economic engagement.

- **Aviation and Space Cooperation:** Expanding aviation agreements and offering Kuwait access to India's space launch services could strengthen bilateral ties.
- **Regional Security and Stability:** India and Kuwait can collaborate on counter-terrorism efforts, sharing intelligence and best practices to combat regional security threats. Promoting Dialogue and Diplomacy: Both nations can work together to promote dialogue and peaceful resolution of conflicts in the West Asia region.

Conclusiona

Kuwait is a critical player in India's West Asia policy, offering opportunities for energy security, investment, and economic cooperation. Prime Minister Modi's visit provides an ideal platform to elevate this bilateral relationship into a comprehensive strategic partnership, ensuring mutual growth and stability in the region.