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Mains Marathon

4th Week December, 2024

HISTORY
ECONOMICS
POLITY
SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
GEOGRAPHY AND ENVIRONMENT

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Discuss the significance of India's strategic partnerships in the Gulf region in shaping its energy security and geopolitical interests. (250 Words)

Introduction: Contextual Introduction
Body: Significance of India's strategic partnerships in the Gulf region in shaping its energy security and geopolitical interests.
Conclusion: Way forward

India's partnerships in the Gulf region play a pivotal role in shaping its energy security, economic development, and geopolitical interests. The region, consisting of countries like Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, UAE, Qatar, and others, is critical due to its energy resources, economic opportunities, and strategic location at the crossroads of Asia, Europe, and Africa.

Energy Security

- Reliable Energy Supply: The Gulf region is a cornerstone of India's energy security, providing a substantial portion of its crude oil and natural gas imports. These partnerships ensure a steady flow of energy resources, crucial for India's economic growth and development.
- Diversification of Sources: While dependence on the Gulf remains significant, India is actively diversifying its energy sources through partnerships with other countries and by investing in renewable energy. However, the Gulf continues to play a vital role in meeting India's immediate energy needs.
- Energy Investments: Indian companies are investing in energy infrastructure projects in the Gulf, such as refineries and pipelines, further strengthening these partnerships and enhancing India's access to energy resources.

Geopolitical Interests

- Regional Influence: The Gulf region is volatile and strategically important. India's partnerships provide it with a platform to engage with key regional players, influence regional developments, and play a constructive role in promoting stability and security.
- Counter-terrorism Cooperation: India and Gulf countries share concerns about terrorism and extremism. These partnerships facilitate cooperation in counter-terrorism efforts, intelligence sharing, and capacity building.
- Economic and Trade Relations: The Gulf region is a major trading partner for India. These partnerships foster economic and trade relations, promoting investment, job creation, and economic growth in both regions.
- Diaspora Welfare: Millions of Indian expatriates reside in the Gulf countries. These partnerships ensure the welfare and protection of these expatriates, as well as facilitate their remittances, which contribute significantly to India's economy.

Conclusion

India's strategic partnerships in the Gulf region are multifaceted and essential for its energy security and geopolitical interests. These partnerships provide India with access to critical energy resources, a platform for regional influence, and opportunities for economic and trade cooperation. However, India must navigate the challenges posed by geopolitical competition, regional tensions, and the need for energy diversification to ensure the long-term sustainability of these partnerships.

Analyze the challenges in the implementation of MGNREGS and suggest measures to address governance and transparency issues. (250 Words)

Introduction: Contextual Introduction
Body: Highlight challenges in MGNREGS and measures to address these issues.
Conclusion: Way forward

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) is a critical social safety net aimed at providing 100 days of wage employment to rural households.

Challenges in the Implementation of MGNREGS

- Irregularities in Work Execution: Instances of breaking larger projects into smaller ones to bypass scrutiny and showing existing works as MGNREGS projects have been reported. This undermines the program's objective by diverting funds from genuine beneficiaries and projects.

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- **Non-Adherence to Guidelines:** Tendering norms for procurement and execution are often disregarded, and impermissible works are undertaken under the scheme. Such practices lead to financial leakages and inefficiency in resource utilization.
- **Lack of Timely Fund Allocation:** The withholding of funds by the Centre, as seen in West Bengal, disrupts the flow of wages and project execution. Delayed payments discourage worker participation and erode trust in the scheme.
- **Inadequate Monitoring and Evaluation:** Limited site inspections and inconsistent monitoring lead to unchecked implementation flaws. This diminishes the effectiveness of corrective measures.

Measures to Address Governance and Transparency Issues

- **Strengthening Monitoring Mechanisms:** Increase the frequency and scope of inspections by independent teams, covering more sites across districts. This will help identify irregularities early and ensure adherence to program guidelines.
- **Leveraging Technology for Transparency:** Implement geo-tagging for worksites and utilize digital dashboards for real-time monitoring of project progress. States like Andhra Pradesh have effectively used digital tools for transparent fund disbursement. Technology can minimize manual errors and fraudulent reporting.
- **Capacity Building of Local Administrations:** Train panchayat officials and field workers in record-keeping, procurement norms, and MGNREGS guidelines. This will reduce errors in implementation and enhance local accountability.
- **Social Audits and Community Participation:** Institutionalize regular social audits with active community involvement to ensure accountability at the grassroots level. States like Rajasthan have seen positive outcomes through robust social audit frameworks.

Conclusion

The challenges in MGNREGS implementation, as highlighted by the West Bengal case, underscore the need for robust governance and enhanced transparency. Addressing these issues through technological integration, capacity building, and strict accountability measures will not only restore the scheme's credibility but also ensure its success in alleviating rural distress and promoting equitable development.

Discuss the role of innovation ecosystems, such as the Atal Tinkering Labs, in promoting grassroots creativity and addressing local challenges. How can such ecosystems be scaled across remote regions of India? (250 Words)

Introduction: Contextual Introduction
Body: Highlight the role of ATL in addressing challenges and promoting creativity.
Conclusion: Way forward

Innovation ecosystems like the Atal Tinkering Labs (ATLs) play a pivotal role in fostering grassroots creativity and addressing local challenges. These platforms aim to democratize innovation by providing young minds with the tools, resources, and mentorship necessary to transform ideas into solutions.

Role of Innovation Ecosystems in Promoting Grassroots Creativity

- **Nurturing Creativity and Innovation:** ATLs encourage students to engage in hands-on activities using technologies like 3D printing, robotics, and IoT. This fosters a culture of problem-solving and critical thinking, enabling them to devise solutions for issues specific to their local contexts.
- **Addressing Local Challenges:** By promoting awareness and innovation tailored to community-specific issues, such as water scarcity, waste management, and renewable energy, ATLs empower students to create impactful solutions that address grassroots problems.
- **Building Entrepreneurial Skills:** Exposure to innovation and prototyping instills entrepreneurial skills, preparing students to become job creators rather than job seekers. These skills are critical for addressing regional disparities in employment opportunities.
- **Promoting Inclusivity:** The ATL model emphasizes inclusivity, providing access to innovation tools and training for students from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. This ensures equitable development and fosters participation from underrepresented groups.

Strategies for Scaling Innovation Ecosystems Across Remote Regions

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- Expanding Physical Infrastructure: Setting up ATLs in remote regions with the necessary technological tools, such as low-cost prototyping kits and internet connectivity, can bridge the urban-rural divide. Collaborations with local schools, NGOs, and self-help groups can amplify outreach.
- Leveraging Digital Platforms: Online learning platforms, virtual labs, and digital mentorship programs can overcome geographical constraints. Training resources, webinars, and hackathons can be delivered through mobile-based applications tailored for low-bandwidth areas.
- Localized Curriculum and Challenges: Incorporating local languages and culturally relevant examples into the curriculum ensures better engagement. Organizing innovation challenges specific to local issues, such as water conservation in arid regions or crop productivity in agrarian belts, can enhance relevance.
- Capacity Building for Teachers and Mentors: Training educators and local mentors to guide students in innovation activities is crucial. Partnerships with institutions like IITs, NITs, and local universities can enhance knowledge-sharing.

Conclusion

By fostering creativity, addressing local challenges, and building a foundation for entrepreneurship, innovation ecosystems like ATLs have the potential to drive inclusive growth in India.

Discuss the socio-economic and environmental implications of guaranteeing Minimum Support Price (MSP) through legislation. How can this measure address farmer distress and promote sustainable agriculture? (250 Words)

Introduction: Contextual Introduction
Body: Highlight socio-economic and environmental implications of guaranteeing MSP through legislation & measures to address farmer distress.
Conclusion: Way forward

The Minimum Support Price (MSP) is a price floor set by the government for certain agricultural products. It aims to protect farmers from price fluctuations in the market and ensure a minimum income.

Socio-economic Implications

- Income Support: MSP provides a safety net for farmers, especially small and marginal farmers, by guaranteeing a minimum price for their produce. This helps to reduce poverty and improve their livelihoods.
- Food Security: MSP encourages farmers to produce essential food crops, ensuring food security for the nation.
- Price Stability: MSP helps to stabilize agricultural prices, preventing extreme fluctuations that can harm both farmers and consumers.

Environmental Implications

- Sustainable Agriculture: MSP can promote sustainable agricultural practices by encouraging farmers to adopt eco-friendly methods to increase yields and reduce costs.
- Resource Conservation: MSP can incentivize farmers to conserve natural resources, such as water and soil, to improve productivity and reduce environmental degradation.

Promoting Sustainable Agriculture Through MSP

- Crop Diversification: Expanding MSP coverage to include pulses, oilseeds, and millets can promote diversified farming, reduce environmental stress, and improve soil health. Encouraging sustainable practices through bonuses on MSP for organic and zero-budget natural farming methods.
- Resource-Efficient Practices: Linking MSP incentives to resource-efficient practices, such as reduced water and fertilizer use, can mitigate environmental degradation. Encouraging agroforestry and integrated farming systems alongside MSP to enhance ecosystem services.
- Decentralized Procurement: Strengthening local procurement mechanisms through cooperatives and farmer-producer organizations (FPOs) can ensure better regional coverage and equitable distribution of MSP benefits.
- Technological Integration: Promoting precision farming and climate-resilient technologies can enhance productivity while conserving natural resources, aligning with MSP objectives.

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Conclusion

Legislating MSP is a double-edged sword. While it provides a safety net for farmers by addressing income insecurity and distress, it also carries the potential for environmental harm, market imbalances, and fiscal strain if not implemented thoughtfully. The solution lies in fostering crop diversification, encouraging resource-efficient agriculture, and ensuring regional equity through focused interventions. To maximize the benefits of MSP legislation, it must be complemented by comprehensive agrarian reforms, including enhanced procurement infrastructure, strengthened rural markets, and investments in sustainable farming practices, ensuring enduring advantages for both farmers and the environment.

India's tax structure is often considered regressive, benefiting the wealthy disproportionately while burdening the poor. Critically analyze the feasibility and necessity of implementing a wealth tax in India to address income inequality. (15 Marks, 250 Words)

Introduction: Contextual Introduction
Body: Highlight the necessity and feasibility of wealth tax in India to address income inequality.
Conclusion: Way forward

India's economic growth over the past decades has failed to translate into equitable access to basic needs like nutrition, healthcare, education, and housing.

Necessity of a Wealth Tax in India

- Addressing Extreme Inequality: Researchers at the World Inequality Lab have highlighted that most GDP gains in India have gone to the top 10%, intensifying wealth and income disparities. This inequality has stifled mass consumption demand, deterred private investment, and contributed to social divisions and political tensions. A wealth tax can help redistribute wealth and promote social harmony.
- Enhancing Public Spending Capacity: India's tax-to-GDP ratio is among the lowest in the G20, restricting the government's ability to fund public services. A fair wealth tax on ultra-high-net-worth individuals (UHNWIs) can generate substantial revenues for investments in healthcare, education, climate adaptation, and the green transition.
- International Precedents and Feasibility: A global minimum wealth tax, as proposed by Gabriel Zucman, could ensure that wealthy individuals contribute fairly regardless of asset location. Countries like Colombia, France, and the US have successfully implemented wealth taxes and exit taxes, countering fears of capital flight.

Feasibility of a Wealth Tax in India

- Administrative Feasibility: Advances in digitization and international agreements on financial information exchange have made tracking financial wealth easier. State governments already track real estate ownership, and systems can be extended to other forms of wealth.
- Revenue Potential: A global minimum tax of 2% on billionaires, as proposed by the G20, could yield significant revenue for India. Lowering the threshold to cent millionaires would further increase the tax base.
- Tackling Evasion and Avoidance: Strengthened frameworks for revealing beneficial ownership and international cooperation on tax residence coverage can curb evasion.
- Economic Impact on Investments: Evidence from other countries shows that wealth taxes do not deter investments or productivity. Exit taxes can mitigate risks of asset relocation or emigration.

Conclusion

A wealth tax is both feasible and necessary to address India's rising inequality and generate resources for essential public spending. By ensuring that the super-rich pay their fair share, India can take a significant step toward reducing economic disparities and fostering inclusive growth. The government must act decisively to align fiscal policies with the principles of equity and social justice.

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The legalization of assisted dying in the U.K. has stirred ethical and legal debates. Compare the legal framework and societal attitudes towards euthanasia in India and the U.K. (15 Marks, 250 Words)

Introduction: Contextual Introduction
Body: Highlight differences between legal frameworks & societal standards between UK & India
Conclusion: Way forward

Euthanasia, or assisted dying, is a highly debated ethical and legal issue worldwide, with countries adopting varying stances based on cultural, legal, and societal considerations. India distinguishes itself by recognizing the right to die with dignity under _Article 21 of the Constitution through the Common Cause vs. Union of India (2018) judgment._

Ethical Concerns Raised by Opponents in the U.K.

- Vulnerability of Patients: Severely disabled or terminally ill individuals might feel pressured to end their lives to alleviate the emotional or financial burden on their families.
- Potential Undermining of Care: Legalisation could reduce investments in hospice and palliative care services.
- Ethical Dilemmas: Critics, including the Church of England, stress that easing the path to death might devalue efforts to make life worth living for the disabled and terminally ill.

Legal and Societal Perspectives in India

- Passive Euthanasia Legalisation: Involves withdrawing life support for terminally ill or vegetative patients, enabling a natural death.
- Guidelines for Implementation: Living wills must be executed with judicial oversight, a process further simplified by the Supreme Court in 2023.
- Recent Draft Guidelines (2023): The Health Ministry issued norms to guide healthcare professionals, emphasizing dignity and refraining from unnecessary interventions.

Comparison Between the U.K. and India

Aspect	U.K.	India
Form of Euthanasia	The proposed legalization of active euthanasia for terminally ill individuals.	Only passive euthanasia is legal.
Legislative Process	Requires parliamentary approval; involves significant ethical debate	Legalized through a Supreme Court judgment.
Safeguards	Approval by two doctors and a High Court judge.	Living wills, attestation by Judicial Magistrate.
Cultural Sensitivities	Widespread public support (75%), but ethical concerns remain.	Strong emphasis on dignity and avoiding misuse.

Conclusion

While compassionate arguments exist in favor of assisted dying, its legalization involves complex ethical dilemmas. In the U.K., public support underscores the demand for autonomy in end-of-life decisions. However, in India, passive euthanasia is seen as a balanced approach that respects dignity while addressing societal concerns about misuse. Both frameworks aim to align legal provisions with cultural values and ethical boundaries.

Discuss the socio-economic challenges faced by marginalized communities in accessing higher education in India. How do these challenges impact the overall development and inclusivity of Indian society? (250 Words)

Introduction: Contextual Introduction
Body: What are the challenges faced by marginalized communities and their impact on society?
Conclusion: Way forward

Marginalized communities in India, particularly Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and Other Backward Classes (OBCs), face numerous socio-economic challenges in accessing higher education.

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Key Challenges

- **High Tuition Fees:** Institutions like IITs and IIMs have witnessed steep hikes in tuition fees. For instance, IIT undergraduate fees increased by 200% in 2016, and IIMs recently raised fees by up to 30%. Marginalized students often cannot afford such costs, even with schemes like the Vidyalakshmi initiative, which remain insufficient to address the financial burden.
- **Caste-Based Prejudice:** Marginalized students often face social isolation and discrimination in elite institutions. Judgments based on clothing, language, and caste markers perpetuate exclusion. Instances of caste-based harassment, as seen in suicides at IITs and medical colleges, highlight the emotional toll on students.
- **Faculty Disparities:** A 2019 report revealed that 95% of IIT faculty belonged to upper castes, leaving SC, ST, and OBC groups underrepresented in academic leadership roles. Such disparities create a non-inclusive academic environment.
- **Intergenerational Poverty:** The caste system historically relegated Dalits to degrading jobs, limiting economic opportunities. This perpetuates cycles of poverty, making higher education inaccessible.

Impact on Development and Inclusivity

- **Underutilization of Talent:** The exclusion of marginalized communities results in the loss of potential innovators and leaders.
- **Reinforcement of Inequality:** Persistent caste-based inequalities in education perpetuate socio-economic hierarchies, limiting mobility and reinforcing historical injustices.
- **Economic Implications:** Dropouts and underemployment among marginalized groups diminish workforce productivity. Limited access to quality education stifles the country's ability to leverage its demographic dividend.
- **Social Fragmentation:** Discrimination and exclusion foster resentment and social divides, impeding efforts to create a cohesive and inclusive society.
- **Barriers to National Progress:** A society that marginalizes a significant portion of its population cannot achieve equitable growth. Inclusivity in higher education is essential for realizing the ideals of equality enshrined in the Constitution.

Conclusion

Addressing these barriers is essential not only for individual empowerment but also for fostering a more inclusive and equitable society. Proactive policy measures, coupled with societal efforts to combat caste-based discrimination, can ensure that higher education becomes a tool for empowerment rather than exclusion.

Analyze the implications of the Captive Elephant (Transfer or Transport) Rules, 2024 on wildlife conservation in India. What reforms would you suggest strengthening these rules against exploitation? (250 Words)

Introduction: Contextual Introduction Body: Highlight the implications of Captive Elephant Rules and reforms to strengthen these rules. Conclusion: Way forward

The Captive Elephant (Transfer or Transport) Rules, 2024, aim to regulate the movement of captive elephants and prevent their exploitation.

Positive Implications:

- **Formalization of Transfers:** The rules provide a framework for transferring elephants, potentially reducing undocumented and illegal transfers. Provisions like mandatory documentation and transport guidelines reflect an intent to enhance oversight.
- **Emphasis on Ownership Documentation:** Requiring ownership certificates and digitization of genetic profiles can improve tracking, aiding conservation and monitoring efforts.
- **Acknowledgment of Welfare Needs:** By addressing transportation conditions, the rules attempt to safeguard elephants from undue physical stress during transfers.

Negative Implications

- Ambiguity in Ownership Transfers: Allowing ownership transfer when the original owner cannot maintain the elephant, without specifying that it should be non-commercial, risks commodifying elephants. This facilitates treating them as movable property, undermining their welfare.
- Facilitation of Commercial Exploitation: The absence of restrictions on leasing elephants for events like religious ceremonies, tourism, or political rallies may lead to commodification, increasing their use in exploitative practices.
- Inadequate Monitoring of Microchip Use: Reports of microchips being reused to legalize wild-caught elephants highlight a major loophole. The rules do not mandate the destruction of microchips upon an elephant's death, perpetuating illicit trade.

Reforms to Strengthen the Rules Against Exploitation

- Mandating Non-Commercial Transfers: Prohibit the sale, leasing, or gifting of elephants for commercial purposes, ensuring that ownership transfers are only allowed for welfare or conservation needs.
- Promotion of Non-Invasive Birth Control: Implement humane and non-invasive birth control measures to reduce captive breeding and limit the population of captive elephants.
- Strict Regulation on Cross-State Transfers: Require explicit and verifiable reasons for cross-state transfers, subject to scrutiny by wildlife authorities, to prevent misuse under the guise of religious or cultural purposes.

Conclusion

Strengthening these rules with clear prohibitions on commercial activities, robust monitoring mechanisms, and humane practices is crucial to ensuring that elephants, revered as sacred symbols in India, are not subjected to exploitation but are preserved as an integral part of the country's wildlife heritage.

"Frequent elections, while resource-intensive, enhance electoral accountability in a democracy." Critically analyze this statement in the context of the 'One Nation, One Election' proposal.

Introduction: Contextual Introduction
Body: Analyse the ONOE proposal & challenges it poses to Representative Democracy
Conclusion: Conclude with giving suggestions.

The 'One Nation, One Election' (ONOE) proposal, encapsulated in the Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-Ninth Amendment) Bill, 2024, seeks to synchronize elections for the Lok Sabha, State Assemblies, and Union Territories' Legislative Assemblies.

Challenges Posed by ONOE to Representative Democracy

- Risk of Overlooking State-Specific Issues: Synchronizing elections may lead to national narratives overshadowing local concerns, diluting the federal spirit.
- Erosion of Autonomy: Fixed tenures could limit states' ability to dissolve assemblies independently, reducing flexibility in governance.
- Inadequate Public Consultation: The ONOE process fell short of the 2014 Pre-Legislative Consultation Policy. The limited 10-day feedback period and lack of explanatory material undermined citizens' ability to engage meaningfully.
- Superficial Engagement: Seeking binary 'yes/no' responses on complex issues eroded the quality of democratic deliberation.
- Populism: While ONOE promises cost-efficiency and governance continuity, it may also, encourage populism during synchronized election campaigns & centralize political power, weakening intermediary institutions and grassroots representation, echoing concerns raised by Jayaprakash Narayan about India's parliamentary democracy.

Way Forward

- Enhanced Public Engagement: Adhere to the Pre-Legislative Consultation Policy to foster transparency and inclusivity.
- Phased Implementation: Pilot ONOE in select regions to test its feasibility and address logistical challenges.

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- Institutional Safeguards: Strengthen mechanisms to protect federalism and localized representation.
- Regular Accountability Mechanisms: Explore innovative ways, such as mid-term reviews or enhanced legislative oversight, to maintain accountability between synchronized elections.

Conclusion

The ONOE proposal represents a significant electoral reform aimed at administrative efficiency. However, its potential to centralize power, dilute electoral accountability, and undermine federalism necessitates a cautious and inclusive approach. Strengthening public trust through transparent processes and safeguarding the principles of representative democracy is essential for such a transformative change to succeed. India's democratic fabric must prioritize citizen participation and inclusivity over administrative expediency to remain representative in both letter and spirit.

Analyze the constitutional and procedural challenges involved in holding judges accountable in India, with reference to the Judges (Inquiry) Act, 1968

Introduction: Contextual Introduction
Body: Highlight constitutional and procedural challenges involved in holding judges accountable.
Conclusion: Way forward

The process for holding judges accountable in India is governed by the Judges (Inquiry) Act, of 1968, and constitutional provisions such as Articles 124(4) and 124(5).

Constitutional and procedural challenges

- High Threshold for Impeachment: The requirement of a two-thirds majority in both houses of Parliament makes it extremely difficult to remove a judge, even if there is strong evidence of misconduct. This has led to concerns about the judiciary's accountability.
- Limited Scope of Inquiry: The inquiry committee's mandate is limited to investigating "proved misbehavior or incapacity," which has been interpreted narrowly by courts. This can hinder the investigation of other forms of judicial misconduct, such as bias or corruption.
- Lack of Transparency: The impeachment process is largely opaque, with limited public scrutiny of the inquiry proceedings. This can raise concerns about fairness and impartiality.
- Judicial Scrutiny: The Supreme Court has intervened in the impeachment process on several occasions, raising questions about the appropriate balance between judicial independence and accountability.
- Preliminary Requirement of Parliamentary Approval: The process begins only if a motion for impeachment is admitted in Parliament, creating a political bottleneck. The Speaker or Chairman decides on the admissibility, which can lead to delays or dismissals based on political considerations.
- Long and Complex Proceedings: The three-member inquiry committee operates like a trial court, often prolonging the resolution of cases. Justice V. Ramaswami, for instance, continued in office even after being found guilty by the committee due to Parliament's failure to secure the required majority.

Suggestions for Reform

- Strengthen Accountability Framework: Introduce a judicial oversight body, such as a Judicial Accountability Commission, to address complaints of bias and impropriety.
- Post-Retirement Restrictions: Amend laws to disqualify judges found guilty of misconduct from holding future public office or receiving retirement benefits.
- Continuation of Inquiries Post-Resignation: Ensure inquiries continue irrespective of resignation, as suggested by the Forum for Judicial Accountability, to reinforce the principle of accountability.
- Transparent and Streamlined Processes: Simplify procedures to reduce political interference and delay while ensuring fairness.
- Public Disclosure: Enhance transparency by making inquiry findings public, subject to safeguards to protect judicial independence.

Conclusion

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While the existing framework under the Judges (Inquiry) Act, 1968, and constitutional provisions ensure the independence of the judiciary, the high threshold for impeachment, procedural delays, and structural loopholes impede effective accountability. Reforms to address these challenges are essential to uphold the integrity of the judiciary and maintain public trust in the system.

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