

ForumIAS

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Mains Marathon

December, 2024

*HISTORY
ECONOMICS
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SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
GEOGRAPHY AND ENVIRONMENT*

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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.

Discuss how food insecurity and energy poverty are interconnected challenges in the 21st century. Evaluate the implications of addressing these issues independently versus a holistic approach. (250 words)

Introduction: Contextual Introduction

Body: Highlight the interconnection between Food insecurity and energy poverty.

Conclusion: Way forward

The intertwined crises of food and energy insecurity define the trajectory of the 21st century. Agriculture, which relies heavily on carbon-intensive energy, is not only a critical sector for global sustenance but also a major contributor to climate change, creating a vicious cycle of environmental degradation and resource insecurity.

Interconnection between Food Insecurity and Energy Poverty

- **Interdependence of Food and Energy Systems:** Modern agricultural practices are energy-intensive, relying on electricity, fossil fuels, and energy-dependent irrigation systems. Energy poverty restricts access to these resources, thereby reducing agricultural productivity.
- **Climate Change and Resource Constraints:** Rising temperatures and erratic weather patterns directly impact crop yields and water availability, further exacerbating food insecurity. These same challenges disrupt energy supply, particularly in renewable energy sources like hydropower. Energy poverty limits the adoption of sustainable farming practices, such as precision agriculture and cold storage for perishables, worsening food waste and insecurity.
- **Poverty and Vulnerability:** Households facing food insecurity often allocate a substantial portion of their income to meet basic energy needs, leaving little for nutritious food. Similarly, a lack of affordable energy leads to inefficient cooking methods, contributing to deforestation and health issues.

Implications of Addressing Food Insecurity and Energy Poverty Independently

- **Inefficiency and Overlap:** Addressing food insecurity without tackling energy poverty leads to unsustainable agricultural practices, and worsening environmental degradation. Independent energy-focused interventions, such as renewable energy investments, may bypass vulnerable rural areas, leaving agricultural systems energy-deprived.
- **Missed Synergies:** Energy innovations like solar-powered irrigation and biomass solutions remain underutilized due to a lack of integrated planning. Exclusive focus on biofuels risks undermining food security, intensifying land and water resource conflicts.
- **Exacerbation of Inequalities:** High-income countries dominate renewable energy capacity building, leaving low-income nations reliant on outdated, carbon-intensive systems. This disparity deepens global inequities in food and energy security.

Conclusion

A holistic approach that reimagines agriculture as a cornerstone of sustainable development, integrating renewable energy solutions with climate-resilient practices, offers the most viable path forward. The cost of inaction is too high, risking millions of lives and undermining global climate goals. To meet the moment, global collaboration and inclusive policies must align to tackle these interconnected crises comprehensively.

Evaluate the significance of the “right to disconnect” as a legal safeguard against workplace stress. How can its implementation improve work-life balance and productivity in India? (250 words)

Introduction: Contextual Introduction

Body: Highlight the significance of the “right to disconnect” and its impact on India

Conclusion: Way forward

The tragic death of an employee at EY, reportedly due to work pressure, highlighted the urgent need for legal safeguards against workplace stress. The right to disconnect, a concept already recognized in countries like France, Portugal, and Spain, is gaining traction as a critical measure to protect employees from overwork and its detrimental effects on mental and physical health.

Significance of the Right to Disconnect

- **Mitigating Workplace Stress:** Constant work-related communication can lead to burnout, anxiety, and decreased productivity. The right to disconnect can help mitigate these issues by providing employees with a clear boundary between work and personal time.
- **Preventing Health Issues:** Prolonged exposure to work-related stress can contribute to various health problems, including cardiovascular diseases, mental health disorders, and sleep disturbances. By enforcing the right to disconnect, employers can indirectly promote employee health.
- **Improving Employee Morale:** When employees feel respected and valued, their morale and job satisfaction increase. The right to disconnect can contribute to a positive work environment by fostering a sense of trust and respect between employers and employees.
- **Enhancing Productivity:** Ironically, constant work-related communication can hinder productivity. By allowing employees to rest and recharge, the right to disconnect can lead to increased focus, creativity, and overall job performance.

Impact of the Right to Disconnect on Work-Life Balance and Productivity in India

- **Enhancing Work-Life Balance:** With the global economy pushing for higher productivity, India’s workforce often faces overwhelming pressure, especially in high-demand sectors. The introduction of the right to disconnect can help reverse this trend by ensuring that workers have protected time off. By legally requiring employers to respect non-working hours, the policy would improve employees’ quality of life, reduce stress, and promote healthier lifestyles.
- **Increased Productivity:** Contrary to the belief that overworking leads to better productivity, studies show that well-rested and mentally healthy employees are more productive. When employees are allowed to disconnect, they can recharge and return to work with renewed energy and focus, enhancing efficiency.
- **Legal Framework and Employee Empowerment:** India’s Constitution and Directive Principles of State Policy emphasize the importance of a conducive and healthy work environment. While the country has made strides in addressing workplace dignity, such as in the Vishakha judgment on sexual harassment, there is still a gap when it comes to overwork. This empowerment would lead to a more positive work culture, where employers respect employees’ time off, fostering trust and loyalty.

Conclusion

While challenges related to cultural resistance, enforcement, and technological changes exist, India must recognize the importance of this right as it progresses toward becoming the third-largest economy by 2030. Legal recognition of the right to disconnect would lead to a healthier, happier, and more productive workforce, benefiting both employees and employers.

Discuss the socio-political significance of the Vaikom Struggle in shaping the temple entry reforms in pre-independent India. (250 words)

Introduction: Contextual Introduction

Body: Highlight the socio-political significance of the Vaikom Struggle.

Conclusion: Way forward

The Vaikom Struggle (1924–25), a pivotal socio-political movement in the Travancore princely state, marked a turning point in India's fight against caste-based discrimination and was instrumental in shaping the trajectory of temple entry reforms.

Socio-Political Significance

- **Foundation for Temple Entry Reforms:** The Vaikom Struggle began as an agitation against the prohibition of backward caste Hindus from walking on streets near the Vaikom Mahadeva Temple. It culminated in lifting these restrictions in 1925, paving the way for subsequent reforms such as the Travancore Temple Entry Proclamation (1936) and the Madras Temple Entry Authorization Act (1947), which allowed backward castes equal access to temples.
- **Integration of Religious Reform with Politics:** The movement brought political attention to religious reform, integrating it into the broader nationalist struggle for equality. Leaders like Periyar E.V. Ramasamy championed the cause, influencing the Dravidian Movement and advocating for self-respect principles that challenged Brahmanical hegemony.
- **Constitutional and Legal Implications:** The struggle underscored the need for state intervention in religious matters to ensure equality. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's insertion of the phrase "subject to public order, morality, and health" in Article 25 of the Indian Constitution legitimized state regulation of religion and empowered courts to resolve conflicts between equality and religious freedom.
- **Catalyst for Broader Social Reforms:** Beyond temple entry, the movement inspired other agitations, including B.R. Ambedkar's campaigns for Dalit temple access in Maharashtra. It also strengthened legislative efforts to regulate temples as public spaces, as seen in the Madras Hindu Religious Endowments Act (1927) and subsequent laws.

Conclusion

The Vaikom Struggle symbolizes a collaboration between leaders like Periyar and Ambedkar, demonstrating how regional movements could influence national reform. Its centenary celebrations in 2024 reaffirm the enduring relevance of its principles in shaping an egalitarian society. This socio-political milestone continues to inspire efforts to dismantle caste barriers and promote inclusivity in religious practices.

Analyze the ethical and judicial challenges in framing a law on assisted dying, drawing lessons from global practices. (250 words)

Introduction: Contextual Introduction

Body: What are the ethical and judicial challenges in framing a law on assisted dying?

Conclusion: Way forward

Framing a law on assisted dying involves navigating ethical dilemmas, safeguarding individual autonomy, and addressing judicial concerns. The debates surrounding the Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill 2024-25 in the United Kingdom offer valuable insights into these challenges and provide a framework for evaluating global practices.

Ethical Challenges

- **Slippery Slope Argument:** In Canada, the initial law permitting assisted dying for terminally ill patients expanded through judicial interpretation to include those with "grievous and irremediable" conditions. The fear is that the boundaries of eligibility may blur, putting vulnerable groups like the elderly or disabled at risk of coercion.
- **Conflict Between Autonomy and Vulnerability:** Proponents argue that respecting individual autonomy, including the right to end suffering, is central to human dignity. Detractors worry that societal or familial pressures might compel individuals to choose death out of a misplaced sense of being a burden.

- **Philosophical and Religious Opposition:** Assisted dying challenges the sanctity of life, a principle upheld by many religions. Critics contend that permitting it undermines the inviolability of life and risks normalizing avoidable deaths.

Judicial Challenges

- **Defining Clear Legal Boundaries:** The UK's draft law attempts to address this by limiting eligibility to terminally ill adults with less than six months to live, requiring approval from two doctors and a High Court judge. However, experiences from countries like Canada show that judicial interpretation can inadvertently expand the law's scope, raising questions about enforceability.
- **Safeguarding Against Abuse:** Legal frameworks must include stringent safeguards to ensure decisions are free from coercion and based on informed consent. The UK's 14-day reflection period and High Court oversight are examples of such measures.
- **Cultural and Social Sensitivities:** Judicial frameworks must account for societal attitudes. For instance, the deep-rooted familial structures in India might make implementing assisted dying laws more complex compared to Western nations.

Lessons from Global Practices

- **Tightly Worded Legislation:** Laws like the UK's proposed Bill illustrate the importance of precise language to prevent judicial overreach. Specific criteria for eligibility and procedural safeguards are crucial.
- **Public and Parliamentary Debate:** The open debates in Britain's Parliament, allowing conscience voting, underscore the importance of deliberative processes in addressing diverse perspectives.
- **Respecting Individual Dignity:** The foundation of assisted dying laws is the recognition of dignity and alleviation of suffering as central to human existence. Policymakers must frame laws that prioritize these values while mitigating risks.

Conclusion

Stringent safeguards, clear legal boundaries, and robust public debates can create a framework that upholds individual dignity while addressing societal concerns. For countries like India, integrating these lessons into policy-making will be crucial to ensuring that the right to die is aligned with the values of autonomy, compassion, and justice.

Critically analyze the implications of Donald Trump's return to power on India-U.S. relations. What opportunities and challenges does this pose for South Asia? (250 words)

Introduction: Contextual Introduction

Body: Highlight implications for India-US relations and opportunities and challenges for South Asia

Conclusion: Way forward

The re-election of Donald Trump as the President of the United States in 2025 is likely to have significant implications for India-U.S. relations and broader South Asian geopolitics.

Implications for India-U.S. Relations

- **Countering China:** Trump's confrontational approach towards China aligns with India's regional goals, fostering deeper cooperation in the Indo-Pacific strategy.
- **Focus on Reciprocity and Burden Sharing:** Trump's emphasis on burden-sharing aligns with India's aspiration to be a regional leader. Increased U.S. capacity-building and defense assistance to India will help enhance its strategic capabilities.
- **Pressure on Regional Alliances:** India may face increased pressure to align unequivocally with U.S. goals in South Asia, potentially limiting its strategic autonomy vis-à-vis Russia and regional actors like Iran.
- **Reduced Friction on Values-Based Issues:** Unlike the Biden administration, Trump is expected to deprioritize issues of democracy and human rights. This may alleviate U.S. scrutiny over India's internal policies and pragmatic regional engagements, e.g., support for Bangladesh's Sheikh Hasina government and Myanmar's junta.

Opportunities and Challenges for South Asia

- **Economic Assistance:** Trump's focus on development assistance, infrastructure, and defense agreements (similar to his first term) could benefit countries like Sri Lanka, struggling to recover from economic crises. This would reduce their dependence on Chinese financing.
- **Reduced Pressure on Domestic Politics:** South Asian countries with authoritarian tendencies, such as Myanmar's junta and the Taliban in Afghanistan, may face less scrutiny under Trump, creating opportunities for economic and strategic re-engagement.
- **Balancing China and the U.S.:** Trump's confrontational stance towards China will pressure South Asian nations to choose sides. Countries like Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka, which often leverage great power competition for economic and strategic benefits, may face reduced diplomatic flexibility.
- **Pressure on Smaller Nations:** Trump's emphasis on reciprocity may push smaller South Asian nations to offer more in trade, defense, or policy alignment, which could strain their economies and domestic politics.

Conclusion

For India, the challenge lies in balancing its strategic autonomy while playing a leadership role in the region. South Asia, therefore, must adapt to Trump's leadership style while managing the broader geopolitical shifts in great power politics.

Explain the significance of the Most-Favored Nation (MFN) clause in international tax treaties. Discuss the implications of Switzerland's decision to suspend MFN status for Indian companies. (250 words)

Introduction: Contextual Introduction

Body: Highlight the significance of MFN & implication of Switzerland's decision to suspend MFN status for Indian companies

Conclusion: Way forward

The Most-Favored Nation (MFN) clause in international tax treaties ensures that a country extends to its treaty partner the same beneficial tax treatment it offers to other nations under comparable agreements. Switzerland's recent decision to suspend MFN status for India, effective January 1, 2025, stems from a Supreme Court of India ruling in the Nestlé case.

Significance of the MFN Clause in Tax Treaties

- **Equal Tax Treatment:** The MFN clause prevents discriminatory tax practices by mandating that favorable terms offered to third-party nations are extended to treaty partners. For instance, if a 5% dividend tax rate is offered to OECD countries, the same rate applies to MFN partners.
- **Promotes Investment:** By ensuring lower withholding tax rates, MFN clauses incentivize cross-border investments and economic cooperation. Companies gain predictability and competitiveness in foreign markets.
- **Legal Certainty:** The clause provides businesses with a stable framework for taxation, ensuring fairness and reducing the risk of unilateral or arbitrary changes.
- **Strengthens Bilateral Relations:** MFN clauses encourage trust and reciprocity between nations, fostering long-term diplomatic and economic ties.

Implications of Switzerland's Decision

- **Increased Tax Liabilities for Indian Businesses:** Indian companies operating in Switzerland will face a 10% withholding tax on dividends, up from the current 5%. This increases operational costs and reduces profitability, especially for companies in sectors like IT, pharmaceuticals, and manufacturing.
- **Impact on Overseas Direct Investments (ODI):** Indian companies with subsidiaries in Switzerland will see higher tax outflows on dividends paid back to parent entities in India. The additional tax burden may discourage Indian businesses from maintaining investment structures in Switzerland.
- **Reduced Swiss Investments in India:** Higher withholding taxes on dividends earned by Swiss investors in India may make Indian markets less attractive. This could affect FDI inflows from Switzerland, which has historically been a significant investor in India.

- **Bilateral Strain:** Switzerland's unilateral suspension undermines the spirit of reciprocity in the DTAA, potentially straining bilateral economic and diplomatic ties. India may need to renegotiate the treaty to restore favorable terms and maintain investor confidence.
- **Uncertainty in Tax Framework:** The decision highlights complexities in interpreting international tax treaties, creating legal uncertainty for businesses. Companies may face challenges in navigating evolving tax policies and aligning their international investment strategies.

Conclusion

India must focus on renegotiating the DTAA, providing legal clarity, and fostering investor confidence to maintain robust economic ties with Switzerland.

Critically analyze the 'One Nation, One Election' proposal with respect to its impact on federalism, regional representation, and logistical challenges. Does it promote democratic efficiency or weaken the federal structure?

Introduction: Contextual Introduction

Body: Impact of ONOE on federalism and regional representation and logistical challenges.

Conclusion: Way forward

The 'One Nation, One Election' proposal aims to synchronize elections for the Lok Sabha, and State Legislative Assemblies to reduce costs, administrative burden, and frequent disruptions to governance.

Impact On Federalism, Regional Representation, And Logistical Challenges

- **Undermining State Autonomy:** The Constitution grants states the flexibility to dissolve their assemblies or call for fresh elections based on political needs (Articles 172, 174). The proposed Article 82A, mandating fixed tenures, curtails this flexibility, weakening the federal structure. States may be forced to align their election cycles with national elections, reducing their ability to address regional issues promptly.
- **Marginalization of Regional Parties:** Simultaneous elections favor national parties due to greater resources and media influence. Regional parties, which rely on localized issues and limited outreach, may struggle to maintain their electoral relevance. The dominance of national parties could lead to a presidential-style polity, undermining India's parliamentary system.
- **Massive Resource Mobilization:** The proposal requires over 15 million polling personnel, including redeployment of security forces, within a short timeframe. Conducting elections at all three tiers is a herculean logistical task that could overwhelm the Election Commission of India (ECI).

Does It Promote Democratic Efficiency?

- **Arguments in Favor:**
 - **Cost Efficiency:** Reduces financial costs of frequent elections for the exchequer and political parties.
 - **Policy Continuity:** Frequent enforcement of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) disrupts governance. Simultaneous elections could ensure policy stability.
 - **Voter Fatigue:** Reduces repeated electoral fatigue, ensuring higher participation rates.
- **Arguments Against:**
 - **Accountability Gap:** Regular elections serve as a check on government performance. Simultaneous polls would deny voters frequent opportunities to hold governments accountable.
 - **Focus on National Issues:** State-specific issues and concerns of marginalized regions risk being overlooked during combined campaigns.

Conclusion

The proposal requires a national consensus and broader deliberation, ideally through a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC), to balance efficiency with democratic inclusivity.

Discuss the strategic importance of quantum computing and artificial intelligence in the global technology race. How can India position itself as a leader in frontier technologies?

Introduction: Contextual Introduction

Body: Highlight the Strategic Importance of Quantum Computing and AI and how India can be a leader in this.

Conclusion: Way forward

Quantum computing and artificial intelligence (AI) are poised to revolutionize industries and reshape the global technological landscape.

Strategic Importance of Quantum Computing and AI

- **Solve Complex Problems:** Quantum computers, with their ability to process information in quantum bits (qubits), can tackle complex problems that are intractable for classical computers. This could lead to breakthroughs in fields like materials science, drug discovery, and climate modeling.
- **Enhance AI Capabilities:** Integrating quantum computing with AI can significantly boost the power of AI algorithms. Quantum machine learning could enable more accurate predictions, faster training times, and the development of more sophisticated AI models.
- **Drive Economic Growth:** These technologies have the potential to create new industries, jobs, and economic opportunities. Nations that lead in these fields will have a competitive advantage in the global economy.
- **Strengthen National Security:** Quantum computing can be used to develop advanced encryption techniques and break existing encryption methods. It can also be used to simulate complex systems for military and intelligence purposes.

Positioning India as a Leader in Frontier Technologies

- **Investment in Research and Development:** Increased government and private sector investment in research and development is crucial. This will foster innovation and attract top talent.
- **Building a Strong Ecosystem:** Creating a robust ecosystem of universities, research institutions, and startups is essential. This will facilitate collaboration and knowledge sharing.
- **Skilling the Workforce:** Investing in education and training programs to equip the workforce with the necessary skills in quantum computing, AI, and related fields is vital.
- **Collaboration with International Partners:** Collaborating with leading countries in these fields can accelerate progress and access cutting-edge technologies.
- **Ethical Considerations:** Developing a strong ethical framework for the development and deployment of these technologies is crucial to address potential societal and security implications.

Conclusion

If India bridges the current gaps in funding, research, and infrastructure, it can join the elite group of nations leading the world in quantum computing, AI, and other frontier technologies. The path forward demands recognizing that the real infrastructure spending of the 21st century lies in technological capabilities, not just physical assets.

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)

Introduction: Contextual Introduction

Body: Significance of treaty in the fight against impunity & India's stance on treaty.

Conclusion: Way forward

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.

Conclusion

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.

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

- 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.

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.

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.

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.

- **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.

