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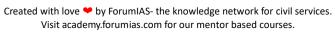# Mains Marathon

2nd Week February, 2025

HISTORY
ECONOMICS
POLITY
SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
GEOGRAPHY AND ENVIRONMENT

INDEX

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Discuss the challenges and opportunities for India in positioning itself as a bridge between the Global North and South. How can India ensure that its leadership role in the Global South is backed by tangible policy actions rather than mere rhetoric?

Introduction: Contextual Introduction
Body: Highlight challenges and opportunities in positioning India as a bridge between North and South
Conclusion: Way forward

India aspires to position itself as a key player in global governance by acting as a bridge between the Global North and South. This is evident from initiatives such as the Voice of the Global South Summits and India's efforts to include the African Union in the G-20.

Challenges in Positioning as a Global Bridge

- **Managing the Geopolitical Competition with China:** India is often seen as countering China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) by increasing investments in Africa and Asia.
- **Balancing Relationships with the Global North and South:** India's growing ties with the U.S., Europe, and Quad nations (U.S., Japan, Australia) create perceptions that it is aligning more with the West than the Global South.
- **Addressing the Disillusionment of the Global South with the Global Economic Order:** Developing countries are frustrated with IMF and World Bank-imposed conditionalities, creating demand for alternative development finance.

Opportunities for India in Strengthening Its Leadership Role

- **Promoting Inclusive Global Governance:** India's success in adding the African Union to the G-20 should be followed by advocating for reforms in the UN Security Council and WTO.
- **Building India-led Global Institutions:** Instead of relying solely on existing global institutions, India must establish its development assistance frameworks. Strengthening South-South cooperation mechanisms, such as IBSA (India-Brazil-South Africa) and BRICS Development Bank, will help India provide an alternative to Western-led financial institutions.
- **Expanding India's Model of Human-Centric Development:** India's Mission LiFE (Lifestyle for Environment) emphasizes sustainable consumption, which aligns with the needs of developing nations. Focusing on digital infrastructure, climate adaptation, energy solutions, and food security will enhance India's role as a problem-solver for the Global South.

How India Can Ensure Tangible Policy Actions Over Rhetoric?

- **Developing a Long-Term Financing Strategy:** Creating an India-led Development Bank focused on infrastructure, education, and health in Global South countries. Expanding credit lines for African and Asian partners to reduce dependency on Western financial institutions.
- **Institutionalizing Capacity-Building Programs:** Expanding ITEC to include longer-term training programs that help countries develop independent expertise. Establishing joint research centers and technology hubs in partner nations to promote self-sufficiency.
- **Ensuring Policy Flexibility and Mutual Learning:** Instead of imposing India-centric models, India should encourage policy exchanges where both India and partner countries learn from each other. Hosting Global South Innovation Summits to share best practices in governance, agriculture, healthcare, and digital transformation.

Conclusion

India's aspiration to be the "Voice of the Global South" must be complemented by listening to partner nations and crafting policies that reflect their needs. If India successfully develops an inclusive, capacity-building, and sustainable development model, it can emerge as a credible global leader—both as a representative of the Global South and as a bridge to the Global North.

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A strong and constructive Opposition is essential for a healthy democracy. However, frequent disruptions in parliamentary proceedings have weakened meaningful debates in India. Discuss the challenges in ensuring constructive engagement between the Government and the Opposition and suggest measures to improve parliamentary functioning.

Introduction: Contextual Introduction
Body: Highlight challenges and measures to improve parliamentary functioning.
Conclusion: Way forward

A healthy democracy relies on constructive engagement between the Government and the Opposition. However, in India, the increasing polarization in parliamentary debates, frequent disruptions, and the dominance of rhetoric over substantive discussions have weakened the quality of legislative deliberations.
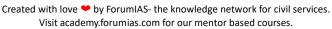
Challenges

- **Prioritization of Rhetoric Over Policy Discourse:** A lack of substantive policy discussions limits meaningful engagement between the Government and the Opposition.
- **Lack of Bipartisan Consensus on Key National Issues:** Critical topics like foreign policy and technological advancements, which require broad-based national consensus, are often treated as partisan matters.
- **Frequent Disruptions and Diminishing Parliamentary Debate:** Political hostility leads to disruptions rather than debates, reducing the effectiveness of parliamentary discussions.
- **Adversarial Politics and Accountability Deficit**: The government's legislative agenda and its reluctance to engage meaningfully with the Opposition indicate a lack of willingness to be accountable.
- **Erosion of Consensus-Building Mechanisms:** Parliamentary proceedings should facilitate dialogue and policy refinement, but increasing partisanship has eroded these mechanisms. There is minimal effort to create pre-legislative consultations or bipartisan discussions on crucial policies.

Measures to Improve Parliamentary Functioning

- **Restoring Focus on Policy Over Political Rhetoric:** Parliamentary debates should prioritize governance challenges rather than historical blame games or electioneering.
- **Institutionalizing Structured Government-Opposition Dialogue:** Regular structured interactions between the ruling party and the Opposition can help preempt conflicts and foster issue-based discussions. Mechanisms like bipartisan parliamentary committees should be strengthened to ensure policy debates remain productive.
- **Ensuring Greater Parliamentary Accountability**: The Prime Minister and key ministers should regularly engage in discussions on pressing national concerns, providing clarity on government actions. Reviving platforms like the Question Hour and structured policy debates can ensure accountability.
- **Promoting Bipartisanship on National and Technological Issues:** Foreign policy, AI development, and economic transformation should be treated as bipartisan issues requiring long-term consensus rather than political divisions.
- **Strengthening Parliamentary Norms and Ethics:** Parliamentary disruptions should be minimized through stronger norms and ethical guidelines for debates. The role of the Speaker and parliamentary committees in maintaining decorum and ensuring fair participation must be enhanced.

Conclusion

Constructive engagement between the Government and the Opposition is essential for effective governance. The government, as the primary governing entity, bears the responsibility to lead consensus-

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building efforts, ensuring that parliamentary debates focus on addressing India's challenges rather than reinforcing political divides.

The ongoing conflict in Gaza and former U.S. President Donald Trump's 'expanding the canvas' strategy have significant implications for the geopolitical reconfiguration of West Asia, particularly with Saudi Arabia playing a key role. Analyze the evolving dynamics and their impact on regional stability and global politics.

> **Introduction:** Contextual Introduction
> **Body:** Highlight evolving dynamics in the ongoing Gaza conflict and its impact on regional stability and global politics.
> **Conclusion:** Way forward

West Asia is undergoing a profound geopolitical reconfiguration following the Gaza conflict. Former U.S. President Donald Trump's "expanding the canvas" strategy—wherein he proposed the depopulation of Gaza and its redevelopment—has added complexity to regional diplomacy.
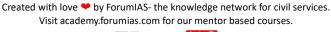
Evolving Dynamics

- **Strengthening U.S.-Israel Ties**: Trump's unwavering support for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, despite global criticism of Israel's actions in Gaza, signals an attempt to solidify the U.S.-Israel alliance. However, this risks alienating Arab states and escalating regional tensions.
- **Balancing Global Alliances:** While maintaining strong U.S. ties, Saudi Arabia has pursued diplomatic engagement with Iran and China, signaling a multipolar strategic approach. The kingdom's role in post-war reconstruction efforts in Gaza, Syria, and Lebanon could further enhance its geopolitical standing.
- **Pragmatic Approach to the Israel-Palestine Conflict:** Saudi Arabia has conditioned normalization with Israel on the establishment of a Palestinian state, a shift from previous tacit understandings under the Abraham Accords. Riyadh has hosted Arab-Islamic summits in Gaza, signaling its intent to lead diplomatic resolutions rather than passively follow U.S. initiatives.

Impact on Regional Stability and Global Politics

- **The Palestine Question as a Sticking Point:** Saudi Arabia's insistence on Palestinian statehood as a precondition for normalization with Israel poses a major roadblock to U.S.-led diplomatic efforts. The Israeli Knesset's rejection of a two-state solution further complicates the situation, creating a policy deadlock.
- **Iran's Response and the 'Axis of Resistance':** Iran's regional influence through proxies in Lebanon, Syria, and Yemen remains a factor in shaping West Asia's security landscape. Any perceived Saudi-Israeli rapprochement without Palestinian concessions could trigger escalations by Hezbollah and Hamas, further destabilizing the region.
- **Economic and Energy Policy Ramifications:** Post-war reconstruction in Gaza is expected to cost over $50 billion, with broader economic instability affecting trade and investment in the region. Trump's energy policies could disrupt global oil markets, potentially leading to tensions between OPEC and Washington.
- **U.S.-Saudi-Israel Coordination Challenges:** Trump's unpredictability and transactional diplomacy raise concerns about the long-term viability of U.S. policies in West Asia. Saudi Arabia's broader strategic vision includes economic diversification and security autonomy, making it less likely to follow U.S. directives without tangible benefits.

Conclusion

While Trump's disruptive approach could force diplomatic recalibration, the path to regional stability remains uncertain. Saudi Arabia's role as a stabilizing force and the necessity of a viable Palestinian solution will determine the long-term success of these geopolitical shifts.

Higher budgetary allocations alone are insufficient to enhance scientific research in India. Critically analyze the structural and systemic challenges that hinder scientific progress and suggest measures to create a more conducive research ecosystem.

Introduction: Contextual Introduction
Body: Highlight Challenges in India's R&D Ecosystem & measures to create a more conducive research ecosystem.
Conclusion: Way forward

The Budget 2025-26 has earmarked significant funds for research and development (R&D), including ₹20,000 crore for small modular reactors and a major boost to the Department of Science and Technology (DST).
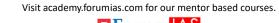
Challenges in India's R&D Ecosystem

- **Low Private Sector Participation**: India's R&D landscape is overwhelmingly driven by government funding, with private sector contributions at just 36%. Despite efforts to incentivize industry participation, business enterprises accounted for only 40% of government R&D expenditure in recent years.
- **Ineffective Utilization of Funds:** The ₹20,000 crore allocation triples last year's DST budget, but absorption capacity remains a concern. The lack of essential infrastructure, such as semiconductor fabs and chipsets, limits the impact of such funding.
- **Weak Intellectual Property (IP) Generation:** Despite strengths in IT, pharmaceuticals, and biotechnology, India lags in core R&D returns and patent filings. Public sector R&D units allocated just 0.30% of their sales turnover to research in 2020-21, compared to 1.46% by private entities.
- **Inadequate Research Infrastructure and Talent Pool:** The success of emerging fields like AI, quantum computing, and semiconductors requires a highly skilled workforce. India lacks a robust research infrastructure to support cutting-edge innovation.
- **Ambiguous Implementation Strategy:** While the budget promotes R&D funding for startups and sunrise sectors, the exact mechanisms for fund disbursement remain unclear. Without a well-defined road map, private sector engagement could remain limited.

Way Forward

- **Strengthening Research Infrastructure:** Investments should focus on setting up semiconductor fabs, AI research hubs, and advanced engineering institutions.
- **Incentivizing Private Sector R&D:** Tax benefits, public-private partnerships, and targeted subsidies can encourage private sector involvement.
- **Enhancing Industry-Academia Collaboration:** Universities should work closely with industries to drive applied research and commercialization of innovations.
- **Streamlining Fund Utilization:** A transparent framework for R&D fund allocation and monitoring should be established.
- **Skilling the Workforce:** Training programs in AI, quantum computing, and semiconductor technology are crucial for long-term sustainability.

Conclusion

Higher allocations in the budget signal intent, but systemic challenges must be addressed for meaningful impact. A clear strategy for infrastructure development, private sector participation, and skill-building is essential for India to emerge as a global research leader.

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The recurring fisheries dispute between India and Sri Lanka has led to economic, environmental, and diplomatic challenges. Analyze the key issues involved and suggest measures to ensure a sustainable and peaceful resolution.

Introduction: Contextual Introduction
Body: Highlight challenges between India and Sri Lanka and measures for peaceful resolution
Conclusion: Way forward

The long-standing fisheries dispute in the Palk Bay region continues to pose economic, environmental, and diplomatic challenges for both India and Sri Lanka.

Economic Challenges

- **Livelihood Concerns**: The arrest of 528 Indian fishermen in 2024, surpassing the 500 mark for the first time in a decade, underscores the economic vulnerability of Tamil Nadu and Puducherry fishermen.
- **Rising Convictions and Fines**: Unlike in the past, Sri Lankan courts are imposing hefty fines and prison sentences, complicating the release of arrested fishermen.

Environmental Challenges

- **Destructive Bottom Trawling:** Sri Lankan Tamil fishermen, still recovering from the civil war, strongly oppose bottom trawling by Indian fishermen, as it destroys marine biodiversity and depletes fish stocks.
- **Overfishing and Resource Depletion**: The continued reliance on trawling threatens long-term fish availability for both Indian and Sri Lankan fishing communities.

Diplomatic and Geopolitical Challenges

- **Escalating Arrests and Tensions**: The Sri Lankan government has shown reluctance to negotiate, delaying much-needed dialogue between both sides.
- **Comparative Severity**: The number of arrests in Sri Lanka is far higher than those in Pakistan, Bangladesh, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar, indicating the urgency of targeted diplomatic intervention.

Measures for a Sustainable and Peaceful Resolution

- **Strengthening Bilateral Mechanisms**: Immediate talks between Indian and Sri Lankan fishing communities should be facilitated, as emphasized in the recent Joint Working Group (JWG) meeting in Colombo.
- **Fast-Tracking Prisoner Repatriation**: A time-bound agreement between both nations is necessary to secure the quick release of detained fishermen.
- **Transitioning to Sustainable Fishing**: The Indian government should introduce financial incentives and low-interest loans to help fishermen shift to deep-sea fishing and mariculture.
- **Cooperative Fishing Arrangements**: Designating shared fishing zones and implementing seasonal fishing bans can help in resource conservation and conflict prevention.
- **Maritime Security Cooperation**: Strengthening coordination between the Indian Coast Guard and the Sri Lankan Navy can prevent hostilities and enable timely communication.

Conclusion

The fisheries dispute requires proactive diplomacy, sustainable fishing policies, and community-led engagement. The current business-as-usual approach is ineffective, and both governments must urgently reinvigorate negotiations, support economic transitions, and prioritize environmental sustainability to achieve a lasting resolution.

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The political instability in Manipur has raised concerns about governance, ethnic tensions, and federal intervention. Critically analyze the factors leading to the crisis and suggest measures to ensure long-term stability and inclusive governance in the state.

> **Introduction:** Contextual Introduction
> **Body**: Factors that led to the crisis in Manipur and measures to ensure long-term stability and inclusive governance in the state.
> **Conclusion:** Way forward

The resignation of N. Biren Singh as Manipur's Chief Minister highlights deep-seated political and ethnic tensions in the state. The prolonged conflict between the Meitei and Kuki-Zo-Hmar communities, alleged partisan governance and the central government's de facto intervention under Article 355 have exacerbated instability.

Factors Leading to the Crisis

- **Ethnic Conflict and Partisan Governance** – Mr. Singh's rhetoric against Kuki-Zo-Hmar communities, branding them as "infiltrators" and "drug traffickers," fueled ethnic hostility. His perceived bias towards one group hindered reconciliation efforts.
- **Political Dissidence and Loss of Public Trust** – Growing dissatisfaction within the BJP-led NDA government and the party's loss in both Lok Sabha seats in 2024 reflected public fatigue with the administration.
- **Breakdown of Law and Order** – Armed groups looted police armories and openly brandished sophisticated weapons, creating a culture of impunity. The Union government effectively assumed control under Article 355 without formally declaring it.
- **Failure to Address Displacement** – Over 60,000 people remain displaced, with little effort towards rehabilitation or confidence-building among affected communities.

Measures for Stability and Inclusive Governance

- **Leadership Change and Reconciliation Efforts** – The BJP must appoint a neutral leader committed to peace and inclusive governance.
- **Engagement with Civil Society** – Grassroots leaders and community representatives should be involved in dialogue to address grievances.
- **Restoration of Law and Order** – Disarming militant groups, strengthening local policing, and ensuring impartial action against violence are crucial.
- **Federal Solutions for Ethnic Harmony** – Implementing constitutional provisions for regional autonomy and power-sharing can address long-standing demands from hill and valley communities.

Conclusion

Mr. Singh's resignation presents an opportunity to reset governance in Manipur. Immediate peace-building efforts, coupled with long-term structural solutions, are essential for restoring stability and trust in the state's administration.

Discuss India's role in South-South climate cooperation and how it can position itself as a leader in the global transition to a low-carbon pathway.

> **Introduction:** Contextual Introduction
> **Body:** Role of India in South-South climate cooperation and how can India transition to low carbon economy
> **Conclusion**: Way forward

Climate cooperation among developing nations, known as South-South climate cooperation, is crucial in addressing climate challenges collectively.

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India's Contributions to South-South Climate Cooperation

- **Participation in International Market Mechanisms**
  - Internationally Transferred Mitigation Outcomes (ITMOs) under Article 6.2 enable India to trade carbon credits with other nations, attracting investment in renewable energy, sustainable infrastructure, and green technologies.
  - India's Carbon Credit Trading Scheme (CCTS) (2023) lays the groundwork for integrating domestic and international carbon markets. India's prior experience with the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM), Energy Saving Certificates (ESCerts), and Renewable Energy Certificates (REC) enhances its engagement with carbon markets.
- **Climate Finance Mobilization**
  - India has consistently advocated for developed nations to mobilize at least $1 trillion annually in climate finance for developing countries.
  - Article 6.2 provides India an opportunity to generate financial resources by selling carbon credits to developed countries while using revenues to support climate-resilient infrastructure domestically and across the Global South. India's renewable energy sector attracted over $10 billion in FDI in 2022, a trend that could be further amplified by ITMO transactions.
- **Technology and Capacity Building in Developing Countries**
  - India has identified 14 key activities for international collaboration under Article 6.2, including Renewable Energy (RE), energy storage, and Carbon Capture, Utilization, and Storage (CCUS).
  - Through partnerships with South Korea, the European Union, and Japan, India seeks investment and expertise in green hydrogen and sustainable aviation fuel.
  - South-South Cooperation with Africa: India, as a partner country, can support African nations (host countries) in solar and wind energy deployment, sustainable agriculture, and climate adaptation.

Way Forward: Strengthening India's Climate Leadership

- Ensure Equitable ITMO Agreements: Safeguards should be in place to ensure fair benefit-sharing and prevent undue exploitation by developed nations.
- Enhance Green Finance through South-South Cooperation: Strengthening partnerships with African, ASEAN, and Latin American nations to create regional climate finance mechanisms.
- Expand Research & Innovation in Clean Technologies: Focus on scaling up green hydrogen, CCUS, and sustainable energy storage to maintain a competitive edge in carbon markets.

Conclusion

India's proactive role in South-South climate cooperation enhances its global stature as a leader in the low-carbon transition. By fostering inclusive and transparent partnerships, India can drive sustainable development while ensuring equity in the global fight against climate change.

Despite various policies and schemes, India continues to face recurrent and severe forest fires. Discuss the key challenges in forest fire management and suggest measures to enhance prevention, detection, and response mechanisms.

> **Introduction:** Contextual Introduction
> **Body**: What are the challenges in forest fire management and measures to deal with this?
> **Conclusion**: Way forward

Forest fires are a recurring environmental crisis in India, exacerbated by climate change and human activities. Despite policies like the National Action Plan on Forest Fires (NAPFF) and the Forest Fire Prevention & Management Scheme (FFPMS), India continues to struggle with effective fire management.

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Key Challenges in Forest Fire Management

- **Budgetary Constraints**: The FFPMS budget fluctuates, with funding reduced from ₹46.40 crore in 2019-20 to ₹28.25 crore in 2022-23, impacting long-term planning. Inconsistent financial support weakens prevention and response mechanisms.
- **Technological Limitations**: The Forest Fire Alert System struggles to distinguish between forest fires and other fires, causing delays. Limited use of predictive modeling, AI-driven risk assessment, and thermal imaging drones.
- **Anthropogenic Causes**: 90% of forest fires are caused by human activities, such as slash-and-burn agriculture, land clearing, and unattended campfires. Weak law enforcement and a lack of alternatives for forest-dependent communities worsen the situation.
- **Environmental and Economic Consequences**: 69 million tonnes of CO_2 emissions annually (World Resources Institute). Destruction of wildlife habitats, soil degradation, and increased human-wildlife conflict.
- **Inadequate Community Involvement:** Lack of formal mechanisms for local reporting of fires using mobile apps or helplines. Community efforts like pine needle collection in Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh remain limited.

Measures to Enhance Prevention, Detection, and Response

- **Enhancing Financial Support and Policy Implementation**: Ensure steady budget allocation for forest fire management. Strengthen the FFPMS and integrate fire management into State Disaster Management Plans.
- **Leveraging Advanced Technology**: Expand AI-driven predictive modeling to identify fire-prone areas. Deploy drones with thermal imaging for real-time fire assessment. Integrate data from FSI, IMD, and ISRO for better forecasting.
- **Community-Based Forest Fire Management**: Expand Self-Help Groups (SHGs) that collect pine needles to reduce fire hazards. Train youth as 'forest fire scouts' for early detection and reporting.
- **Strengthening Early Warning and Response Systems**: Use mobile applications, SMS alerts, and toll-free helplines for rapid fire reporting. Scale successful state initiatives (Tamil Nadu, Odisha) for national implementation.
- **Controlled Burns and Alternative Land Use Practices:** Implement scientifically controlled burns to reduce excess dry vegetation, as done in Australia and the U.S. Provide sustainable livelihood alternatives to reduce human-induced fires.

Conclusion

Forest fires are not just an environmental concern but also a societal and economic issue. India needs a multi-stakeholder approach, integrating policy interventions, technology, community participation, and better coordination to address the crisis effectively. By strengthening financial support, improving detection systems, and empowering local communities, India can significantly mitigate the growing threat of forest fires.

Gender-responsive budgeting can help India's women become key drivers of national growth. Discuss the significance of gender budgeting in achieving the vision of 'Viksit Bharat' and suggest measures to enhance its effectiveness.

> **Introduction:** Contextual Introduction
> **Body:** Significance of gender budgeting and measures to enhance its effectiveness.
> **Conclusion:** Way forward

Gender-responsive budgeting (GRB) is a crucial tool in ensuring that economic policies and fiscal allocations address gender disparities, fostering inclusive growth.

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Significance of Gender Budgeting in Achieving 'Viksit Bharat'

- **Enhancing Female Labour Force Participation (FLFP)**: The FLFP has risen from 33% in 2021-22 to 42% in 2023-24, nearing the global average of 47%. However, a 37% gap remains compared to male participation.
- **Boosting Women Entrepreneurship and Financial Inclusion**: Simplified credit access through collateral-free loans and alternative credit scoring can unlock women-led business potential, with estimates suggesting 30 million additional women-owned enterprises could generate 150-170 million jobs by 2030.
- **Formalizing Women in the Informal Sector & Gig Economy**: With 90% of India's working women in the informal sector, the e-Shram portal's gig worker registration and identity card initiative is a significant step towards formalizing employment, ensuring social security, financial inclusion, and legal protections.
- **Leveraging Technology and AI for Women's Empowerment**: The Centre of Excellence on AI for education and the ₹600 crore gender budget under the India AI Mission highlight efforts to equip women with digital and AI skills.

Measures to Enhance the Effectiveness of Gender Budgeting

- **Institutionalizing Gender Mainstreaming Across All Ministries:** Strengthen gender budget cells and ensure gender-responsive policies in all government programs. Establish gender impact assessments for major infrastructure projects, ensuring inclusivity in transport, housing, and urban planning.
- **Improving Social Protection and Legal Safeguards:** Expand maternity benefits, child-care support, and workplace safety regulations, especially in informal and gig economies. Ensure universal access to healthcare, education, and digital resources to eliminate gender-based disparities.
- **Strengthening Financial and Digital Inclusion:** Promote gender-specific financial literacy programs to enhance women's access to credit, insurance, and banking services. Implement alternative credit scoring models to improve loan accessibility for women entrepreneurs.
- **Enhancing Monitoring & Accountability:** Introduce gender audits and strengthen the monitoring of fund utilization across gender-focused schemes. Establish a centralized dashboard tracking gender-disaggregated data to measure the impact of gender budgeting.

Conclusion

The Union Budget 2025-26 lays a strong foundation for women-led development, aligning with the vision of Viksit Bharat. However, achieving 70% of women's economic participation by 2047 requires sustained investment in gender-responsive policies, legal reforms, and societal transformation. A whole-of-government approach, coupled with enhanced financial inclusion, skilling initiatives, and social security measures, will be key to unlocking women's potential as drivers of India's economic growth.
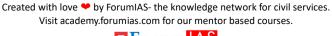
Critically analyze whether the Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Rules exacerbate the weaknesses of India's privacy framework.

> **Introduction:** Contextual Introduction
> **Body:** Analyse how new DPDP Rules exacerbate the weaknesses of India's privacy framework.
> **Conclusion:** Way forward

The landmark *__Justice K.S. Puttaswamy (Retd.) vs Union of India__* (**2017**) judgment upheld the right to privacy as a fundamental right under Article 21 of the Constitution. The ***Digital Personal Data Protection Act (DPDPA), 2023***, and its recently released *DPDP Rules*, instead of strengthening privacy protections, have exacerbated existing weaknesses by prioritizing state surveillance, weakening regulatory oversight, and providing excessive leeway to industries.

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Weaknesses Exacerbated by the DPDP Rules

- **Delayed and Inadequate Implementation:** Despite being enacted in August 2023, the Act remains inoperative due to a delay in notifying the DPDP Rules, which took 16 months for public consultation. This delay has left India without an operational data protection regime, contrary to the Supreme Court's directive in the Puttaswamy judgment.

- **Expansion of Government Surveillance and Exemptions:** The government can exempt its agencies from compliance with the law on broad grounds such as sovereignty, public order, and national security (Section 17 of the DPDPA). The DPDP Rules go further by allowing the central government to demand any information from data fiduciaries under vague justifications.

- **Weak Regulatory Oversight and Lack of Independent Adjudication:** The Data Protection Board of India (DPBI), envisioned as an independent regulatory authority, remains under the direct control of the central government. The B.N. Srikrishna Committee (2018) recommended an independent data protection authority with adjudicatory powers, but the DPDP framework strips it of such autonomy.

- **Dilution of Data Principal Rights:** The right to compensation for data breaches has been removed, leaving individuals without recourse against privacy violations. Unlike GDPR, the DPDP framework lacks robust protections against algorithmic decision-making, allowing unchecked profiling and digital manipulation.

- **Industry-Friendly, Weak Compliance Standards:** The Rules largely codify existing corporate practices, requiring only minimal changes in industry compliance. The classification of Significant Data Fiduciaries (SDFs), which would face stricter compliance obligations, remains ambiguous.

- **Inadequate Protection for Children's Data:** The earlier drafts classified certain entities as Guardian Data Fiduciaries, which were prohibited from profiling and behavioral monitoring of children. However, the final version allows targeted advertising toward children under specific conditions, diluting previous safeguards.

Potential Benefits of DPDP Rules

- The Act introduces data minimization and purpose limitation principles, requiring entities to process only necessary data. It imposes penalties of up to ₹250 crore for violations, which could act as a deterrent. The framework attempts to simplify compliance for small businesses and startups by reducing regulatory burdens.

Conclusion

A stronger, rights-based approach with independent regulatory oversight is essential to ensure meaningful data protection in India.

The recent visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to France has reinforced the India-France strategic partnership across multiple domains. Discuss the key areas of cooperation between the two nations and analyze the broader strategic implications of this visit.

Introduction: Contextual Introduction
Body: Highlight key areas of cooperation between the two nations and analyze the broader strategic implications of this visit.
Conclusion: Way forward

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent visit to France underscored the growing depth of the India-France strategic partnership, with a strong emphasis on defense, energy, trade, and global governance.

Key Areas of Cooperation

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- **Defense and Security:** Discussions on strengthening the defense partnership, including deals on missiles, helicopters, and jet engines. India offered Indian-made rocket launchers, showcasing its defense manufacturing capabilities. Review of existing defense agreements, including the Rafale jets and Scorpene submarines.
- **Nuclear and Energy Collaboration:** Agreement to develop small modular reactors following India's amendments to its nuclear liability laws. Progress on the long-stalled civil nuclear deal, particularly regarding the Jaitapur nuclear power plant.
- **Economic and Technological Cooperation:** Strengthening trade ties amid global economic disruptions, with a focus on shipping, AI, and technology. Co-chairing of the AI Action Summit, reflecting their commitment to shaping global AI governance.
- **Strategic Connectivity and Indo-Pacific Cooperation:** Reaffirmation of support for the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC), crucial for connectivity and trade. Emphasis on West Asian stability, recognizing its impact on global trade and energy security.
- **Multilateral Engagement and Global Governance:** Both leaders reaffirmed their commitment to addressing climate change and trade disruptions. Shared concerns over U.S. unilateralism, particularly regarding tariffs, Russia, China, and conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza.

Broader Strategic Implications

- **Strategic Autonomy in a Multipolar World:** India and France emphasized their independent foreign policies, seeking stronger engagement with the U.S. and China while avoiding over-dependence on any one power.
- **Strengthening Indo-Pacific Cooperation:** France's role as a resident power in the Indo-Pacific aligns with India's efforts to counterbalance Chinese influence in the region.
- **India's Growing Global Leadership:** The visit reinforced India's status as a responsible global player, collaborating with key powers on global issues like AI, nuclear energy, and connectivity.
- **Geopolitical Realignments:** Given Trump's unilateral approach to Russia and China, India and France may deepen their cooperation on multilateral platforms like the G20 and the UN.

Conclusion

The Modi-Macron meeting demonstrated the evolving India-France partnership beyond bilateral issues to global strategic cooperation. As both nations seek greater geopolitical influence and strategic autonomy, their alignment on defense, technology, and multilateral governance will shape global affairs in the years ahead.

The appointment of ad-hoc judges under Article 224A of the Constitution has been suggested as a means to reduce the pendency of cases in Indian courts. Critically examine the viability of this measure in addressing the judicial backlog. What challenges could arise in its implementation?

> **Introduction:** Contextual Introduction
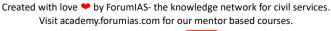> **Body:** Highlight Potential Benefits of Ad-Hoc Appointments & challenges and measures in its implementation
> **Conclusion:** Way forward

The appointment of ad-hoc judges under Article 224A of the Constitution has been suggested as a means to address the rising backlog of cases in Indian High Courts.

Potential Benefits of Ad-Hoc Appointments

- **Immediate Reduction in Pending Cases:** High Courts currently have a backlog of approximately 62 lakh cases. Ad-hoc judges, with their experience, can help expedite hearings, particularly in criminal appeals, reducing undertrial incarceration.

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- **Utilization of Experienced Legal Minds:** Retired judges possess strong technical expertise and judicial acumen. Their prior experience ensures efficiency in decision-making, requiring minimal training.
- **No Impact on Regular Appointments:** The process of appointing ad-hoc judges is independent of regular judicial appointments. Their tenure is limited (2-3 years), preventing interference with the elevation of serving judges.
- **Minimal Political Sensitivity:** As ad-hoc judges are not assigned politically sensitive cases, executive interference in their appointments is expected to be lower.

Challenges in Implementation

- **Cumbersome Appointment Process:** Requires approval from the executive, leading to potential delays. The need for pre-approval from the Centre could create bureaucratic bottlenecks.
- **Reluctance of Retired Judges:** Financially, arbitration and independent legal practice are more lucrative options. Restrictions on post-tenure practice in the same High Court may discourage participation.
- **Potential Strain on Infrastructure:** Lack of essential support staff (stenographers, clerks, researchers) could hinder judicial functioning. Additional budget allocation is necessary, requiring strong executive commitment.
- **Concerns Over Judicial Independence:** Retired judges may still maintain social and professional ties with the legal community. If not chosen carefully, there could be perceived conflicts of interest.

Way Forward

- **Streamlining the Appointment Process**: The Chief Justice of the High Court should directly recommend candidates to the Supreme Court collegium, with minimal bureaucratic hurdles. A fixed timeline (e.g., three months, as suggested in the Lok Prahari judgment) should be enforced for appointments.
- **Ensuring Adequate Support:** Additional personnel and logistical support should be guaranteed to maintain efficiency. The government must allocate a dedicated budget for these appointments.
- **Incentivizing Participation:** Attractive remuneration and flexible tenure terms could encourage more retired judges to return. Post-tenure restrictions on legal practice could be reconsidered.

Conclusion

While appointing ad-hoc judges under Article 224A offers a promising short-term solution to a judicial backlog, its effectiveness depends on streamlining the appointment process, ensuring sufficient support infrastructure, and incentivizing retired judges. However, this measure should complement, rather than replace, broader systemic reforms such as increasing sanctioned judicial strength and improving case management efficiency.

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