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Features :

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The U.S. Ends Russia Oil Waiver, Implications for India

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 3- Indian economy and Infrastructure

Introduction

The United States has tightened restrictions on Russian seaborne oil at a time when global energy markets are already under pressure from geopolitical tensions and maritime disruptions. The issue now goes beyond the Russia-Ukraine conflict and raises concerns over inflation, supply insecurity and economic instability across Asia. For India, which imports nearly **90% of its crude oil**, the development has major implications for energy affordability, economic stability and long-term energy security.

Why this Development Matters for India

- 1. India's Rising Energy Dependence:** India is the world's third-largest oil importer and one of the fastest-growing energy consumers. Its energy demand will continue to rise because of industrialisation, urbanisation and expanding mobility.
- 2. Russian Oil as an Economic Stabiliser:** Russian crude helped India during global market volatility after 2022. It moderated inflationary pressures, improved refinery economics and reduced dependence on any single supply region.
- 3. Energy Prices Directly Affect the Economy:** Energy affordability affects transport costs, food inflation, fertilizer subsidies, manufacturing competitiveness and household spending. A sustained rise in crude prices spreads quickly across the wider economy.
- 4. Global Energy Markets Are Becoming Fragile:** The world has tried to balance sanctions on one of the largest oil exporters while keeping energy prices stable. That balance is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain.

Sanctions, Market Volatility and Contradictions in Western Policy

- 1. Geopolitical Tensions Are Increasing Market Pressure:** Oil markets are already affected by conflict in West Asia, disruptions in maritime trade routes, attacks on shipping infrastructure and tensions involving Iran.
- 2. Shipping and Insurance Costs Are Rising:** Tighter tanker availability and higher war-risk insurance premiums have increased market uncertainty. Even policy signals from USA can rapidly change freight rates and crude price expectations.
- 3. Fear of Shortages Can Raise Prices:** Oil markets react not only to actual shortages but also to fears of supply disruptions. Even limited supply concerns can sharply increase crude prices.
- 4. Western Sanctions Face Internal Contradictions:** The U.S. and Europe want to reduce Russia's oil revenues while also maintaining low inflation, stable fuel prices and uninterrupted energy flows. These goals increasingly conflict with each other.

5. **Higher Prices Can Offset Sanctions:** When oil prices rise significantly, Russia can continue earning large revenues despite lower export volumes. Higher global prices can partly weaken the impact of sanctions.
6. **Energy Markets Force Policy Flexibility:** Temporary waivers and carve-outs reflected energy-market realities rather than policy inconsistency. The global economy still depends heavily on hydrocarbons despite growth in renewable energy.
7. **Oil Remains Central to the Global Economy:** Oil continues to support transport, aviation, petrochemicals, agriculture and global trade logistics. The energy transition is growing, but the world still runs mainly on hydrocarbons.

India's Strategic Vulnerabilities in a Fragmented Energy Order

1. **Strait of Hormuz Remains a Major Risk:** The Strait of Hormuz carries nearly one-fifth of global oil trade. A large share of India's crude oil and LPG imports moves through this route.
2. **Regional Escalation Can Disrupt Supplies:** Any escalation in West Asia can increase shipping costs, delay deliveries and disrupt energy supplies reaching India.
3. **Russian Crude Became a Diversification Mechanism:** Russian oil became more than a discounted supply source for Asia. It helped diversify energy imports during growing instability in West Asia.
4. **Energy Security Is No Longer Limited to Physical Supply:** Earlier, countries mainly focused on securing oil supplies. Today, energy flows can also be disrupted through shipping restrictions, financial sanctions and payment barriers.
5. **Financial and Maritime Risks Are Increasing:** Insurance controls, tanker blacklisting and maritime security risks now strongly influence global energy trade. Energy systems are increasingly linked with geopolitical and financial structures.
6. **Global Energy Trade Is Becoming Fragmented:** Energy trade is no longer shaped only by economics. Sanctions regimes, strategic rivalries and competing geopolitical blocs now play a major role.
7. **Excessive Dependence Creates Long-Term Risks:** Dependence on any single geopolitical camp can increase strategic vulnerabilities for importing countries. India's energy approach is therefore based on realism and strategic flexibility.

India's Long-Term Energy Strategy

1. **Need for a More Resilient Energy Framework:** India cannot rely only on opportunistic crude sourcing during crises. It needs a broader and more stable long-term energy strategy.
2. **Expand Strategic Petroleum Reserves:** India should fast-track Strategic Petroleum Reserves Phase II by 6.5 MMT, including new sites in Odisha and Karnataka. This can help move toward the 90-day IEA benchmark from the present 9–10 days.

3. **Diversify Energy Sources and Supply Regions:** India should reduce dependence on any single supplier by expanding sourcing from Russia, Africa, the U.S. and Latin America. It should also promote hydrogen, geothermal and tidal energy.
4. **Strengthen Domestic Energy Capabilities:** India should improve domestic exploration, refinery flexibility and gas infrastructure. Expanding alternative energy pathways can reduce long-term vulnerabilities.
5. **Invest in Energy Storage Solutions:** Battery Energy Storage Systems and Pumped Hydro Storage can balance renewable energy supply and demand. Better storage capacity can ensure reliable clean energy availability throughout the day.
6. **Focus on Energy Efficiency and Smart Grids:** Energy-efficient technologies, retrofitting and smart grids can reduce energy demand and import dependence. The Draft National Electricity Policy 2026 supports AI-driven grid management for handling demand fluctuations.
7. **Expand Alternative Fuel Infrastructure:** India should strengthen infrastructure for CNG, LNG and biofuels through pipelines, processing facilities and fueling stations.
8. **Biofuels Can Reduce Import Dependence:** The ethanol blending programme has reduced crude imports and transferred over ₹92,000 crore to farmers while generating foreign exchange savings.
9. **Strengthen Nuclear Energy Capacity:** India should revive its thorium roadmap, secure uranium partnerships and localise Small Modular Reactor technologies. Nuclear energy can provide stable zero-carbon power.
10. **Improve International Energy Cooperation:** India should deepen partnerships through global energy cooperation, technology sharing and joint projects. Platforms like the International Solar Alliance, BRICS and SCO can strengthen energy resilience.
11. **Strengthen Institutional Coordination:** A whole-of-government approach with stronger inter-ministerial coordination and resilient supply-chain planning is necessary for long-term energy security.

Conclusion

The world is entering a phase where sanctions, wars, maritime insecurity and supply-chain disruptions may become recurring realities. In such conditions, energy resilience becomes more important than ideology. India's long-term economic stability will depend on diversified energy sources, stronger storage capacity, strategic autonomy and resilient supply chains. Countries that fail to build flexible and secure energy systems may face growing risks in an increasingly fragmented global energy order.

Question for practice:

Examine the implications of the U.S. decision to end the Russia oil waiver on India's energy security, economic stability and long-term energy strategy.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

India's Green Transition Still Runs on Coal

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 3- Infrastructure

Introduction

The recent rise in global energy prices due to tensions in West Asia has exposed India's continued dependence on fossil fuels despite rapid renewable energy expansion. India has achieved major growth in solar and wind capacity and crossed important non-fossil milestones. However, coal still dominates actual electricity generation and remains essential for grid stability and rising power demand. This shows that India's energy transition is progressing in installed capacity, but the electricity system still relies heavily on coal for reliable and continuous power supply.

India's Renewable Energy Progress

1. Major Rise in Non-Fossil Energy Share:

- Renewable energy accounted for 42.4% of installed power capacity by March 2026, compared to only 0.72% in March 2005.
- During the same period, coal's share in installed capacity declined from 58.7% to 42.2%.

2. Strong Capacity Expansion in Recent Years:

- India's total installed power generation capacity reached 520.51 GW by January 2026.
- Non-fossil fuel capacity crossed the historic 50% mark in June 2025 and further increased to 52.3% or 271.97 GW by January 2026.

3. Solar, Wind and Hydro Expansion:

- Solar energy emerged as the largest contributor among renewables with 140.60 GW capacity, forming 27% of installed power capacity.
- Wind power stood at 54.65 GW, while hydro power contributed 51.16 GW.

4. India's Global Renewable Position:

- India maintained its global standing as 3rd in solar capacity, 4th in wind capacity, and 4th in total renewable energy capacity.
- FY 2025-26 also witnessed the highest annual capacity addition, with 52,537 MW added by January 2026.

The Gap Between Installed Capacity and Actual Electricity Generation

1. **Installed Capacity Does Not Reflect Actual Power Supply:** Although renewables account for over two-fifths of installed capacity, they generated only 15.8% of electricity in April 2026. Coal still generated 71.8% of electricity, only slightly lower than 76.2% in March 2019.
2. **Renewable Energy Added Alongside Coal:** India has expanded renewable infrastructure, but coal has not been replaced in the electricity mix. Renewable energy is being added on top of coal instead of displacing it from the system.
3. **Limited Decline in Fossil Fuel Dependence:** India added almost no new fossil fuel capacity after 2018, but it also retired very few old coal plants. Gas-based power capacity also declined, making coal the main balancing and backup source in the grid.
4. **Wrong Benchmark in Energy Transition Debate:** The public discussion mainly focuses on installed renewable capacity because it shows visible progress. However, electricity systems depend more on actual generation and the ability to provide uninterrupted power supply.

Reasons Behind Continued Coal Dependence

1. **Coal Provides Reliable Baseload Power:** Solar and wind energy are intermittent and depend on weather and sunlight conditions. Coal provides stable 24-hour electricity supply needed for grid stability and heavy industries.
2. **Lack of Storage and Grid Infrastructure:** India still lacks large-scale battery storage, flexible grids, and balancing systems. Coal therefore continues to perform the stabilising role in the power system.
3. **Abundance of Domestic Coal Reserves:** India possesses some of the world's largest coal reserves. Domestic coal improves energy security and reduces dependence on imported fuels.
4. **Protection from Global Fuel Volatility:** Using indigenous coal reduces exposure to international fuel price shocks and geopolitical disruptions affecting imported oil and gas supplies.
5. **Coal Remains Economically Viable:** Coal continues to be the cheapest option for large-scale electricity generation. Renewable energy also requires expensive storage systems and grid upgrades for reliable supply.
6. **Limited Retirement of Coal Plants:** India added almost no new fossil fuel capacity after 2018, but very few old coal plants were retired. This has kept coal central to electricity generation.
7. **Massive Employment Dependence on Coal:** The coal sector supports over 10 million people, including around 4 million direct jobs. Many communities in central and eastern India depend heavily on coal-based livelihoods.
8. **Coal Generates Major Government Revenue:** Coal provides large revenue through taxes, royalties, and dividends for both central and state governments. Indian Railways also depends heavily on coal freight revenue.

- 9. Rising Power Demand Sustains Coal Use:** India's electricity demand is expected to increase sharply because of urbanisation and industrial growth. Current renewable capacity alone cannot meet this rapidly rising demand.
- 10. Fossil Fuels Still Influence Electricity Prices:** Indian electricity prices continue to move with global fossil fuel markets because fossil fuels still determine the marginal cost of power generation.

International Comparisons Highlight India's Challenges:

- 1. China Has Lower Fossil Fuel Dependence in Power Mix:** Oil and gas account for only 4% of China's power mix. This reduces China's exposure to global fossil fuel price shocks.
- 2. Electric Vehicles Have Reduced China's Oil Demand:** Electric vehicles and hybrid vehicles now form more than half of new car sales in China. This has reduced oil demand by over one million barrels per day.
- 3. Spain Reduced the Gas-Electricity Link:** Spain has weakened the direct connection between gas prices and electricity prices through stronger renewable integration. This has reduced vulnerability to global fuel market volatility.
- 4. India Remains More Exposed to Global Energy Shocks:** India's electricity prices still move closely with global fossil fuel markets because coal and imported fuels continue to dominate actual electricity generation.
- 5. India's Transition Is Progressing but Still Incomplete:** India has achieved major renewable capacity expansion, but coal continues to remain the backbone of actual electricity generation and grid stability.

Way Forward

- 1. Shift from Capacity Addition to System Transformation:** India's energy transition must move beyond headline renewable capacity growth. The focus should now be on creating a power system where renewables can reliably replace fossil fuels in actual electricity generation.
- 2. Expand Battery Storage Infrastructure:** Large-scale battery storage systems are necessary to manage the intermittent nature of solar and wind power. Storage can help provide electricity even when renewable generation falls.
- 3. Modernise and Strengthen Electricity Grids:** India needs flexible grids, better balancing systems, and modern transmission networks. These reforms are essential for integrating renewable energy at a larger scale.
- 4. Improve Transmission Connectivity:** Stronger transmission infrastructure can connect renewable-rich regions with high-demand areas. This will improve power distribution and reduce dependence on coal-based balancing.

5. **Promote Round-The-Clock Renewable Energy:** Round-The-Clock renewable contracts combining solar, wind, and battery storage can provide stable electricity supply similar to coal-based power generation.
6. **Develop Better Renewable Integration Mechanisms:** Electricity markets and grid management systems must be redesigned to handle fluctuating renewable energy generation more efficiently.
7. **Expand Coal Gasification Projects:** India launched a ₹37,500 crore coal gasification initiative to convert 100 million tonnes of coal into synthetic gas by 2030. This can reduce dependence on conventional coal burning.
8. **Encourage Carbon Capture and Biomass Co-firing:** Carbon Capture and Storage technologies and biomass co-firing of up to 20% can reduce emissions from existing thermal power plants.
9. **Improve Efficiency of Existing Coal Plants:** Modernising older thermal plants and improving coal transport logistics through initiatives like Gati Shakti can lower economic and environmental costs.
10. **Ensure Just Transition for Coal-Dependent Regions:** Millions of people depend on coal mining and related industries for employment. Just Transition policies are necessary to protect livelihoods in coal-dependent regions like Jharkhand and Odisha.

Conclusion

India's renewable energy transition has achieved significant progress in capacity expansion and non-fossil growth. However, coal still remains central to actual electricity generation, grid stability, employment, and energy security. India's key challenge is to build a power system where renewables can reliably replace fossil fuels. Until then, global energy shocks will continue to expose India's continued dependence on coal.

Question for practice:

Examine why India's renewable energy transition still remains dependent on coal despite rapid growth in non-fossil energy capacity.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

India and Australia – bridging the trade and trust barrier

Source: The post “India and Australia – bridging the trade and trust barrier” has been created, based on “India and Australia – bridging the trade and trust barrier” published in “The Hindu” on 26th May 2026.

UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper-2- International Relations

Context: India and Australia have strengthened bilateral ties through the **Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (ECTA)** and ongoing negotiations for the **Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA)**. However, trade imbalance, agricultural sensitivity, and trust barriers continue to limit deeper economic integration.

Importance of India-Australia Trade Relations

- India and Australia are trying to strengthen economic cooperation through CECA after ECTA.

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- ECTA opened 100% of the Australian market to India, while India provided access to nearly 70% of its domestic market.
- Both countries see this partnership as strategically important in the context of global geopolitical and supply-chain changes.

Major Challenges in India-Australia Trade Relations

1. Trade Imbalance and Parity Issues

- a. Bilateral merchandise trade increased from **\$12.2 billion in FY 2020-21 to \$24.1 billion in FY 2024-25**.
- b. However, Australian exports account for nearly two-thirds of total bilateral trade.
- c. This has created concerns regarding imbalance and parity in market access.

2. Uneven Investment Relations

- a. Bilateral services trade has crossed **\$10 billion**. India's investment in Australia has reached nearly **\$32 billion**.
- b. In contrast, Australia's cumulative FDI in India is only around **\$18 billion**. This reflects an uneven investment relationship.

3. Agricultural Market Access Issues

- a. Agriculture remains the most sensitive issue in CECA negotiations.
- b. Australia seeks greater access to India's agricultural markets.
- c. India is cautious because agriculture supports the livelihood of millions of small farmers.

4. Structural Differences in Agriculture

- a. The average Indian farm size is about **0.73 hectares**, while Australian farms exceed **1,400 hectares**.
- b. Agriculture contributes around **16% to India's GDP**, while it contributes only **2.5% to Australia's GDP**.
- c. These differences make equal market opening difficult.

5. Fear of Cheap Imports

- a. Indian farmers already face low income, climate risks, and productivity issues.
- b. Cheap agricultural imports may harm domestic producers.
- c. Therefore, India views agriculture as both an economic and political issue.

Opportunities for Stronger Cooperation

1. Broadening Beyond Tariff Reduction

- a. CECA should not remain limited to tariff negotiations.
- b. It can become a larger platform for trade, investment, and strategic cooperation.

2. Agricultural Technology Partnership

- a. India can benefit from Australia's expertise in precision farming.
- b. Cooperation in cold storage, water management, drought resilience, and pest control can improve productivity.

3. Reducing Post-Harvest Losses

- a. India loses around **15% to 35% of agricultural output** due to poor storage and logistics.
- b. Australian technology can reduce these losses and improve efficiency.

4. Agri-Infrastructure Investment

- a. Australian capital can help develop storage facilities, logistics networks, and farm tools.
- b. This can modernise India's agricultural ecosystem.

5. Research and Institutional Cooperation

- a. Universities, industries, and local governments can collaborate in innovation and skill development.
- b. The **India-Australia Smart Farm Network Initiative** highlights this cooperation.

6. Biosecurity and Standards Alignment

- a. Mutual recognition of biosecurity and phytosanitary standards can improve agricultural trade.
- b. Regulatory alignment can build trust between producers and regulators.

Need for Complementarity Instead of Pure Parity

1. Agriculture is a livelihood-sensitive sector in India.
2. Therefore, negotiations should focus on complementarity rather than absolute parity.
3. Both countries should leverage their comparative strengths for mutual benefit.

Way Forward

1. Finalize a Balanced CECA

- a. India and Australia should conclude CECA with balanced market access.
- b. Sensitive sectors like agriculture should be protected while expanding cooperation in non-sensitive sectors.

2. Promote Sectoral Complementarity

- a. India can focus on labour-intensive exports, pharmaceuticals, and services.
- b. Australia can contribute to minerals, education, clean energy, and agri-technology.

3. Increase Investment Flows

- a. Australia should increase FDI in India's infrastructure, logistics, and manufacturing sectors.
- b. This will reduce investment asymmetry and deepen economic integration.

4. Strengthen Supply Chain Cooperation

- a. Both countries should collaborate in resilient supply chains for critical minerals, food security, and clean energy.
- b. This can reduce overdependence on other global players.

5. Enhance Farmer Protection with Reform

- a. India should gradually open agricultural trade with safeguards for small farmers.
- b. Productivity improvement and technology transfer should accompany liberalisation.

6. Build Strategic Trust

- a. Stronger people-to-people ties, academic exchanges, and institutional dialogue can reduce trust barriers.
- b. Economic cooperation should complement the broader Indo-Pacific strategic partnership.

Conclusion: India-Australia trade relations have strong long-term potential. A balanced CECA, greater investment, agricultural modernisation, and strategic trust-building can transform the partnership into a comprehensive economic and strategic alliance.

Question: India-Australia economic relations hold significant opportunities, but trade imbalance and agricultural concerns remain major barriers. Examine the challenges, opportunities, and way forward in strengthening bilateral trade ties.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Why is the Indian rupee falling?

Source: The post “Why is the Indian rupee falling?” has been created, based on “Why is the Indian rupee falling?” published in “The Hindu” on 26th May 2026.

UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper-2- Indian Economy

Context: The Indian rupee has weakened significantly against the U.S. dollar and crossed **₹96 per dollar**, showing a decline in its exchange value. A currency’s value depends on demand and supply in foreign exchange markets. The rupee’s depreciation is closely linked to India’s balance of payments, capital flows, global uncertainty, and RBI interventions.

Causes Behind the Fall of Indian Rupee

1) Trade Deficit and Current Account Pressure

- a. The demand for rupees depends on India’s exports and imports.
- b. When exports increase, foreign buyers exchange dollars for rupees, increasing demand for the rupee.
- c. However, when imports rise more than exports, demand for dollars increases.
- d. India has consistently faced a **merchandise trade deficit**, especially due to high oil imports.
- e. This weakens the rupee because more foreign currency payments go out than come in.

2) Current Account Deficit (CAD)

- a. India's current account includes trade in goods, services, and remittances.
- b. Although service exports and remittances partly offset trade losses, the overall current account often remains under pressure.
- c. A larger current account deficit creates downward pressure on the rupee.

3) Capital Outflows and Foreign Portfolio Investment (FPI)

- a. Foreign Portfolio Investment is volatile and driven by speculation and returns.
- b. When foreign investors withdraw money from Indian stocks and bonds, they sell rupees and buy dollars.
- c. This reduces rupee demand and increases pressure on depreciation.
- d. Recent rupee losses were largely linked to foreign investor withdrawals.

4) Global Geopolitical Tensions

- a. Global uncertainty and geopolitical tensions have strengthened the U.S. dollar.
- b. Investors shift capital to safer assets in advanced economies during instability.
- c. This results in capital outflows from emerging markets like India.

5) High Import Costs

- a. India is heavily dependent on crude oil imports.
- b. A weaker rupee makes imports more expensive.
- c. Rising import bills increase demand for dollars and further weaken the rupee.

Impact of Rupee Depreciation on Indian Economy

1) Costlier Imports: A weaker rupee increases the cost of importing crude oil, machinery, and raw materials. This raises production costs for Indian industries.

2) Imported Inflation: Higher import prices increase inflation in the domestic economy. Consumers may face higher fuel and commodity prices.

3) Pressure on Manufacturing Sector: Rising input costs reduce the profit margins of industries. This can affect manufacturing competitiveness and growth.

4) Balance of Payment Stress: Persistent depreciation can worsen external payment pressures. It can reduce macroeconomic stability.

5) Some Export Advantage: Rupee depreciation can make Indian exports cheaper in international markets. This may help exporters, but gains remain limited if import costs also rise.

Role of RBI in Preventing Rupee Depreciation

1) Forex Market Intervention: RBI intervenes by selling U.S. dollars from foreign exchange reserves. This increases the supply of dollars and supports rupee demand.

2) Managing Speculative Pressure: RBI acts to reduce excessive volatility and speculative attacks on the rupee. This prevents sudden exchange-rate shocks.

3) Use of Foreign Exchange Reserves: India's forex reserves act as a buffer during external shocks. RBI uses reserves to stabilize the currency market when needed.

4) Maintaining Financial Stability: RBI intervention ensures orderly market functioning. It helps maintain investor confidence and macroeconomic stability.

Concerns and Limitations

1. Continuous intervention can reduce forex reserves over time.
2. RBI can slow depreciation, but it cannot permanently control market-driven exchange rates.
3. External shocks such as oil prices and global tensions may still weaken the rupee.

Way Forward

1. Reduce Dependence on Oil Imports

- a. India should reduce dependence on imported crude oil.
- b. Renewable energy and domestic energy security should be strengthened.

2. Strengthen Exports

- a. India should increase high-value exports in manufacturing and services.
- b. A stronger export base will improve rupee demand.

3. Manage Capital Flow Stability

- a. Policies should encourage stable long-term FDI instead of volatile short-term FPI.
- b. This can reduce sudden currency pressure.

4. Improve Current Account Position

- a. India should reduce trade imbalances by promoting domestic production and import substitution.
- b. A healthier current account will support exchange-rate stability.

5. Maintain Adequate Forex Reserves

- a. RBI should continue prudent reserve management.
- b. Strong reserves provide protection against speculative attacks and external shocks.

6. Control Speculative Outflows

- a. India should regulate excessive speculative capital movements.
- b. This can reduce unnecessary volatility in the rupee.

Conclusion: The depreciation of the Indian rupee is mainly driven by trade deficits, current account pressures, capital outflows, global uncertainty, and high import dependence. RBI plays an important stabilizing role

through forex intervention and reserve management. In the long run, stronger exports, lower oil dependence, stable capital inflows, and macroeconomic resilience are essential for maintaining rupee stability.

Question: Why is the Indian rupee depreciating? Examine the causes, impact on the Indian economy, role of RBI, and suggest the way forward.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Finance Commission Transfers and Equity Issue

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 2- issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure, devolution of powers and finances up to local levels and challenges therein.

Introduction

The Finance Commission decides the distribution of Union tax revenues between the Centre and the States and among the States themselves. The 16th Finance Commission retained the States' **41% share** in divisible taxes and continued to prioritise equity-based transfers. However, concerns have increased over declining fiscal autonomy of States, rising cesses and surcharges, unequal devolution outcomes, and limited weight to fiscal performance and economic contribution.

Constitutional Framework and Criteria of the 16th Finance Commission

- 1. Constitutional Role of Finance Commission:** Articles 270 and 280 create the framework for fiscal federalism in India. The Finance Commission is constituted every five years to recommend tax devolution and grants between the Centre and the States.
- 2. Shift in Vertical Devolution:** The States' share increased from 32% to 42% after the Fourteenth Finance Commission because State plan grants were removed. It was later reduced to 41% after the reorganisation of Jammu and Kashmir, and the 16th FC retained this level.
- 3. Income Distance and Population Criteria:** Income distance received the highest weight of **42.5%** to support poorer States. Population based on the **2011 Census** received **17.5% weight** to reflect expenditure needs.
- 4. Demographic, Forest and Area Criteria:** Demographic performance received 10% weight and used population growth instead of fertility rate changes. Forest cover and area also received 10% weight each, and open forests were included in the calculation.
- 5. GDP Contribution Criterion:**
 - The 16th FC introduced States' contribution to national GDP with 10% weight, replacing tax effort. The square-root formula reduced the advantage of larger industrial States and increased the share of several smaller States.
 - The formula also created internal tension because lower income increases share under income distance, while higher GDP contribution also increases share.

Major Recommendations and Devolution Outcomes

- 1. Retention of Equity-Based Transfers:** The 16th FC retained the 41% vertical devolution share despite demands from States for an increase to 50%. Equity continued to dominate the formula, with 70% weight for equity criteria and only 30% for efficiency-related criteria.
- 2. Position on Cesses and Surcharges:** The Commission accepted the Centre's view that cesses and surcharges should remain outside the divisible pool. It argued that these funds support welfare and infrastructure programmes that indirectly benefit States.
- 3. Fiscal Discipline Measures:** The FC abolished revenue-deficit grants and discontinued sector-specific and State-specific grants. It also asked States to stop off-budget borrowings and keep fiscal deficits below 3%.
- 4. Changes in State Shares:** Karnataka recorded the highest gain of 0.484 percentage points, followed by Kerala and Gujarat. Tamil Nadu's share increased only marginally from 4.079% to 4.097%, while Madhya Pradesh recorded the largest decline.
- 5. Long-Term Distribution Pattern:** The combined share of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and West Bengal increased from 42.5% during the Sixth FC to 51% under the 15th FC. In contrast, the share of southern States declined from 24.8% to 15.8%.

Major Concerns in Fiscal Transfers and Equity

- 1. Shrinking Fiscal Space of States:** States face fiscal pressure due to COVID-19 debt, GST-related changes, and slower tax buoyancy. The growing role of Centrally Sponsored Schemes has also reduced fiscal autonomy.
 - **Effective transfers as a share of the Centre's pre-transfer revenue receipts declined from 35.6% under the 14th FC to an estimated 32.7% in 2026-27.**
- 2. Rising Cesses and Surcharges:** Cesses and surcharges exceeded 15% of gross tax revenues, reducing the divisible pool available to States. Several States demanded that these should either be included in the divisible pool or capped at 8%-10%.
- 3. Declining Incentives for Fiscal Discipline:** Continuous equalisation transfers may weaken incentives for revenue mobilisation in weaker States. The replacement of the tax effort criterion with GDP contribution reduced direct emphasis on fiscal discipline and revenue mobilisation.
- 4. Limited Improvement in Public Services:** Higher transfers have not fully reduced social sector disparities. In 2022-23, Bihar spent ₹937 per person on health, while Arunachal Pradesh spent ₹10,148.
- 5. Concerns of Southern and Better-Performing States:** Southern States argued that successful population control and stronger economic contribution are not adequately rewarded. Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Maharashtra continued to receive lower shares than several poorer States.

6. **Political Economy Concerns:** Economically stronger States are not always politically dominant in Parliament. Future delimitation may further increase pressure to favour population-rich States in fiscal transfers.

Way Forward

1. **Balance Equity and Efficiency:** Future Finance Commissions should balance equalisation with fiscal performance. Poorer States need support, but economically stronger States should also receive fair recognition for revenue generation and governance outcomes.
2. **Limit Cesses and Surcharges:** Cesses and surcharges should be capped at around 8%-10% of gross tax revenue or gradually merged into the divisible pool. This will increase untied resources available to States.
3. **Restore Revenue Gap and State-Specific Grants:** Revenue-gap grants and State-specific grants should continue for States facing structural and geographical disadvantages. This can reduce regional disparities in health, education and infrastructure.
4. **Use Better Fiscal Indicators:** Future devolution formulas should give greater weight to fiscal capacity, tax effort and governance outcomes. Reliance only on non-fiscal indicators can weaken incentives for fiscal discipline.
5. **Adopt Data-Driven Weighting Methods:** Finance Commissions should use objective methods such as principal component analysis while assigning weights to criteria. This can improve transparency and predictability in transfers.
6. **Strengthen Cooperative Federalism:** Frequent meetings of the Inter-State Council and stronger State Finance Commissions can improve Centre-State coordination. Greater consultation can reduce tensions over devolution and fiscal autonomy.
7. **Protect States' Fiscal Space:** The growing dominance of Centrally Sponsored Schemes should be reduced. States should have greater flexibility in spending according to local development needs and priorities.

Conclusion

The 16th Finance Commission continued India's equity-oriented fiscal transfer system but made only limited changes towards efficiency and fiscal performance. Concerns over declining State autonomy, rising cesses, unequal transfers and weak incentives for fiscal discipline remain strong. Future Finance Commissions should create a better balance between equalisation, economic contribution, fiscal efficiency and development needs to strengthen cooperative and stable fiscal federalism in India.

Question for practice:

Evaluate the recommendations and devolution criteria of the 16th Finance Commission in balancing equity, fiscal efficiency, and cooperative federalism in India.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Water Governance in Peri-Urban Areas

UPSC Syllabus: GS paper1: Issues related to water resources And Gs Paper 3- Infrastructure

Introduction

India has expanded rural tap water access through the Jal Jeevan Mission, with nearly **8 out of 10 rural households** receiving connections. Yet a major governance gap exists in peri-urban areas, where villages are rapidly transforming into urban settlements without adequate infrastructure or institutions. These regions face irregular water supply, groundwater pollution, poor sanitation, and weak accountability. As India urbanises rapidly, peri-urban areas have become the “missing middle” that will shape the country’s future water security and urban sustainability.

Understanding the Rise of Peri-Urban India

- 1. Growth of transitional settlements:** Peri-urban areas are spaces where farmland and scattered villages gradually turn into industrial zones and dense settlements. Between 2001 and 2011, the number of Census towns in India increased from 1,362 to 3,784, reflecting rapid peri-urban expansion.
- 2. Neither fully rural nor urban:** These settlements are no longer villages, but they are also not fully recognised as cities. This creates an institutional gap where proper water and sanitation services remain weak.
- 3. Blurring rural-urban boundaries:** Rural and urban activities now exist together in the same space. Agricultural land, village ponds, malls, gated colonies, and industries often coexist within the same settlement.
- 4. Peri-urban spaces as ecosystems:** Peri-urban areas are not only land around cities. Wetlands, coastal belts, mangroves, estuaries, and mountain regions facing urban pressure also experience similar water insecurity and resource stress.
- 5. Rapid urban expansion pressure:** By 2047, India will require 230 million new housing units and nearly 500 new cities. Today’s peri-urban fringe will become tomorrow’s urban centre.

Major Water and Sanitation Challenges

- 1. Irregular and unequal water supply:** Many peri-urban households receive water only at limited hours or on alternate days. People often depend on private water vendors because public supply remains unreliable.
- 2. Governance vacuum and weak accountability:** Peri-urban regions fall between rural and urban administrations. In many places, residents pay urban-level costs but still do not receive proper urban services.

3. **Pollution and groundwater contamination:** Waste dumping and untreated sewage contaminate groundwater in peri-urban regions. Toxic leachate from waste sites damages local water sources and public health.
4. **Rural water diverted toward cities:** Cities increasingly draw water from nearby rural areas and dams. This reduces water availability for farmers and creates unequal sharing of water resources.
5. **Poor septage and sanitation management:** Nearly 40 million households in urban and peri-urban areas depend on septic tanks and onsite sanitation systems. Irregular desludging and illegal dumping of septage into rivers and open land continue on a large scale.
6. **Encroachment of water commons:** Urban expansion often takes over ponds, tanks, lakes, and local water bodies. Groundwater extraction for urban use further weakens peri-urban water security.
7. **Diverse and changing water access systems:** People access water through many formal and informal systems such as tankers, ponds, groundwater, and wastewater reuse. These changing arrangements make water access unequal and unstable.

Long-Term Risks of Neglecting Peri-Urban Areas

1. **Future urban crisis zones:** Unplanned peri-urban growth can create long-term water shortages, flooding, pollution, and sanitation problems. Weak planning today may create permanent urban stress later.
2. **Loss of local ecosystems:** Continuous land conversion damages wetlands, recharge zones, ponds, and grazing lands. This reduces natural water storage and increases environmental vulnerability.
3. **Growing social and economic inequality:** Poor communities suffer the most from irregular water access and pollution. Farmers and rural households often lose water resources to expanding urban demand.
4. **Increasing climate and flood risks:** Rapid construction reduces natural drainage systems. Heavy rainfall then leads to flash floods and declining groundwater recharge.
5. **Dynamic nature of peri-urban water access:** Water sources in peri-urban regions constantly change because of urban expansion, tanker supply, groundwater extraction, and wastewater reuse. This makes water governance difficult and uneven.

Measures Needed for Effective Water Governance

1. **Stronger local governance structures:** State governments should establish Nagar Panchayats for Census towns under the 74th Constitutional Amendment. Governance reforms should improve coordination, accountability, and administrative capacity.

2. **Limits of formal urban governance:** Simply bringing peri-urban areas under urban authorities may not solve water problems. Existing informal systems and local governance arrangements also play an important role in water access.
3. **Network-based governance approach:** Water governance should involve local communities, civil society groups, engineers, and non-state actors along with governments. Existing local water systems should not be ignored.
4. **Protection of water sources:** Catchments, ponds, recharge areas, and local water bodies must be protected from encroachment and waste dumping. Community-led sanitary inspections can improve source sustainability.
5. **Swachh Bharat Mission 3.0 for peri-urban sanitation:** A dedicated peri-urban sanitation strategy should focus on faecal sludge and septage management. GPS-equipped desludging trucks and faecal sludge treatment plants can reduce illegal dumping.
6. **Decentralised wastewater treatment systems:** Start-ups such as Indra Water and Tigreen have developed modular systems that recover over 95% of wastewater using limited land and energy.
7. **Support for green technologies and financing:** Government support, public procurement, and policy clearances are needed to scale decentralised treatment technologies. Blended finance models like the Uttarakhand approach can support peri-urban infrastructure.
8. **Nature-Based Solutions for water security:** Deep retention ponds, bioswales, and rainfall parks can reduce flash floods and recharge groundwater. Long-term legal clarity is needed for ownership, funding, and maintenance of these eco-corridors.
9. **Dynamic assessment of water security:** Peri-urban water conditions change rapidly because water sources constantly shift or disappear. Water governance should therefore focus on people's lived experiences and changing access patterns instead of only numerical indicators.

Conclusion

Peri-urban India stands at the centre of the country's emerging water crisis. Rapid urban expansion, weak institutions, pollution, and unequal access are increasing pressure on these transitional regions. Better local governance, protection of water ecosystems, improved sanitation systems, decentralised treatment technologies, and community participation are necessary to prevent peri-urban spaces from becoming long-term zones of water insecurity.

Question for practice:

Examine the major water governance challenges in peri-urban areas and discuss the measures needed to ensure sustainable water security in these regions.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

QUAD: Objectives, Significance and Role in the Indo-Pacific

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 2 - International Relation

Introduction

The Quad is a strategic grouping of **India, the United States, Japan, and Australia** that emerged from cooperation after the **2004 Indian Ocean tsunami**. It later evolved into the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue in 2007 and was revived in 2017 amid growing Indo-Pacific security concerns. Over time, the grouping expanded beyond maritime security to include **critical technologies, supply chains, energy security, climate resilience, and regional partnerships**. Recent Quad discussions have focused on **maritime security, energy resilience, freedom of navigation, and maritime surveillance initiatives** in response to tensions in the Persian Gulf and South China Sea.

Evolution of the Quad

1. **Origin after the 2004 tsunami:** The four countries (Australia, the United States, Japan and India) coordinated disaster relief operations after the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. This cooperation created the basis for future strategic coordination among them.
2. **Political shape in 2007:** Former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe gave political direction to the grouping through the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue. The first informal meeting took place in Manila on the sidelines of the ASEAN Regional Forum.
3. **Decline during the early phase:** The grouping lost momentum because members had different strategic priorities and foreign policy goals. Concerns also grew that the Quad was mainly an anti-China grouping.
4. **Revival in 2017:** The Quad returned in 2017 due to growing concerns over China's rise and Indo-Pacific security challenges. The four countries also expanded cooperation into economic and technological areas.
5. **Growing institutional importance:** Since 2021, the Heads of Government of the Quad countries have met regularly. This shows the increasing importance of the Quad in the policymaking of member countries.

Nature and Structure of the Quad

1. **Informal and flexible grouping:** The Quad is not a formal organisation like the UN or EU. It does not have a permanent secretariat or decision-making body.
2. **Different from NATO:** The grouping does not include a collective defence clause like NATO. Member countries rely on dialogue, coordination, and joint military exercises instead of formal military commitments.
3. **Focus on shared values:** The Quad works through existing agreements and partnerships among member countries. It focuses on a free, open, secure, and prosperous Indo-Pacific.

4. **Flexible agenda-building:** The informal nature of the grouping allows members to cooperate on different issues with different partners. This flexibility has helped the Quad expand its agenda smoothly.
5. **Importance of regional inclusiveness:** The Quad supports ASEAN centrality and promotes an inclusive Indo-Pacific approach. Its flexible structure allows cooperation with different regional and international partners.

Objectives of the Quad

1. **Maritime security cooperation:** Maritime security remains central to the Quad because of tensions in the Indo-Pacific and concerns over freedom of navigation. The grouping also focuses on maritime law and regional stability.
2. **Expansion of the Malabar exercise:** In 2020, Australia joined the India-US-Japan Malabar naval exercise. This marked the first joint military exercise among the four countries in more than a decade.
3. **Strategic vision through 'Spirit of the Quad':** In 2021, Quad leaders released the joint statement called 'The Spirit of the Quad'. It outlined the grouping's objectives and broader regional approach.
4. **Technology and supply chain cooperation:** The Quad expanded cooperation into **critical technologies, semiconductors, cybersecurity, AI, OpenRAN, and resilient supply chains**. The Covid pandemic and global conflicts increased focus on economic resilience.
5. **Energy and critical minerals focus:** Recent discussions have focused on critical minerals, energy security, and regional energy resilience. Tensions in the Persian Gulf and West Asia have increased concerns over maritime trade routes, energy supplies, and emergency response cooperation.
6. **Humanitarian and disaster relief efforts:** The grouping conducts Quad HADR exercises and works on disaster preparedness. It also supports early warning systems and coordinated relief mechanisms across the Indo-Pacific.
7. **Maritime domain awareness initiatives:** The Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness (IPMDA) and the new Indo-Pacific Maritime Surveillance Collaboration initiative improve maritime monitoring, information sharing, humanitarian response, and surveillance cooperation across the Indo-Pacific.
8. **Health and climate cooperation:** The Quad cooperates on **health security, climate resilience, and cancer care initiatives**. The grouping also launched the **Quad Cancer Moonshot** with regional partners.
9. **Infrastructure and connectivity initiatives:** The Quad works on **green shipping, port development, resilient infrastructure, and communication cable connectivity** in the Indo-Pacific region.

10. **People-to-people partnerships:** The grouping promotes youth exchanges, cyber training, and STEM research partnerships. Fellowship programmes also encourage women's participation in **science and technology**.

Significance of the Quad

1. **Strengthening Indo-Pacific stability:** The Quad has become an important pillar of the Indo-Pacific regional architecture. It supports a free, open, secure, and prosperous Indo-Pacific.
2. **Promoting maritime security:** The grouping focuses on **freedom of navigation, maritime cooperation, maritime surveillance, and rules-based maritime order**. It has also emphasised safe and unimpeded maritime commerce in regions such as the **Strait of Hormuz and South China Sea**.
3. **Expanding economic resilience:** The Quad works on **resilient supply chains, semiconductor cooperation, critical minerals, cybersecurity, and energy security**. Global disruptions increased the need for such coordination.
4. **Supporting regional development:** The grouping promotes cooperation in **infrastructure, green shipping, communication connectivity, climate resilience, and health security** across the Indo-Pacific.
5. **Building issue-based partnerships:** The Quad works with organisations such as ASEAN, Pacific Islands Forum, and IORA on regional connectivity, maritime cooperation, and development initiatives.
6. **Increasing strategic coordination:** Regular meetings among leaders and ministers, along with joint exercises such as the Malabar exercise, have improved coordination among member countries.
7. **Providing an alternative regional platform:** The Quad has expanded beyond security concerns to support growth, technology partnerships, and regional cooperation. This has increased its acceptance across the Indo-Pacific.

Challenges and Limitations of the Quad

1. **Lack of formal institutional structure:** The Quad does not have a permanent secretariat or formal decision-making body. This may create difficulties in policy implementation and long-term coordination.
2. **Differences in national priorities:** The member countries have different strategic interests and foreign policy approaches. These differences can affect policy alignment within the grouping.
3. **Dependence on political continuity:** Changes in political leadership and debates over burden-sharing have periodically created uncertainty about the Quad's future direction.
4. **Coordination and resource constraints:** The member countries have varying levels of institutional capacity, staff, and resources. Managing a widening agenda may become difficult over time.

5. **Concerns over China-related perceptions:** China views the Quad as an exclusive grouping aimed at countering its influence. At the same time, many regional countries want balanced relations with both China and the United States.
6. **Risk of rising geopolitical tensions:** The strengthening of the Quad may increase strategic competition in the Indo-Pacific. This could also increase concerns over military tensions and regional instability.

Future of the Quad

1. **Expansion through Quad Plus:** The grouping has shown willingness to expand cooperation through the Quad Plus framework. Countries such as South Korea, New Zealand, and Vietnam may become important partners.
2. **Greater engagement with regional partners:** The Quad is likely to deepen cooperation with organisations such as ASEAN, Pacific Islands Forum, and IORA. This may strengthen regional connectivity and diplomacy.
3. **Wider cooperation in emerging technologies:** The grouping is expected to increase cooperation in AI, drones, cybersecurity, semiconductors, and critical technologies. These areas are becoming important in the changing security environment.
4. **Expansion of maritime initiatives:** The Quad is likely to strengthen initiatives such as **IPMDA, maritime surveillance cooperation, Quad-at-Sea missions, and maritime legal cooperation** in the Indo-Pacific.
5. **Focus on disaster preparedness and public goods:** The grouping may expand work on **humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, health security, climate resilience, and resilient infrastructure** in the region.
6. **Need for stronger implementation mechanisms:** As the Quad agenda becomes broader, the grouping will need better coordination and policy implementation. Its future effectiveness will depend on delivering practical outcomes in the Indo-Pacific.

Conclusion

The Quad has evolved from a disaster relief arrangement into an important Indo-Pacific partnership. Its agenda now includes maritime security, technology cooperation, supply chains, climate resilience, and regional development. The grouping's flexible and inclusive structure has increased its regional relevance. Its future effectiveness will depend on stronger coordination, practical implementation, and sustained cooperation among member countries and regional partners.

Question for practice:

Evaluate the significance of the Quad in promoting security, economic resilience, and strategic cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region.

Source: [Indian Express](#)

Rajya Sabha Defections, Constitutional Questions

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 2- Indian Polity

Introduction

The decision of **seven out of 10 AAP Rajya Sabha MPs** to merge with the BJP under the **10th Schedule** has raised major constitutional questions. The issue goes beyond party politics and focuses on the interpretation of the **merger exception** under the anti-defection law. It has revived debate on the relationship between the legislature party and the original political party, and its impact on parliamentary democracy and the role of opposition.

Evolution of the Anti-Defection Framework

- 1. Constitutional basis of disqualification:** The Constitution originally dealt with disqualification of MPs under Article 103. The President decided such matters based on the opinion of the Election Commission of India.
- 2. Introduction of the 10th Schedule:** The 52nd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1985 introduced the 10th Schedule to address political defections. It aimed to stop elected members from changing parties for political benefit.
- 3. Grounds of disqualification:** An MP or MLA can be disqualified if they voluntarily leave their party or vote against the party whip without permission. Independent members cannot join a political party after election, while nominated members cannot join a party after six months.
- 4. Original exceptions under the law:** The anti-defection law originally recognised two exceptions under the 10th Schedule — split under Paragraph 3 and merger under Paragraph 4. These exceptions protected certain forms of group defections.
- 5. Removal of the split provision:** The 91st Constitutional Amendment Act, 2003 removed the split provision. The change followed recommendations of the Dinesh Goswami Committee and the 170th Law Commission Report.
- 6. Objective behind deleting split:** The split provision earlier protected one-third legislators forming a separate faction. Its removal showed Parliament's intention to discourage internal factionalism within legislature parties.
- 7. Judicial review of Speaker's decision:** Initially, the decision of the Speaker or Chairman was treated as final. In the Kihoto Hollohan case, the Supreme Court held that such decisions are subject to judicial review.
- 8. Time limit concerns in disqualification cases:** In *Keisham Meghachandra Singh v. Speaker, Manipur and Padi Kaushik Reddy v. Telangana*, the Supreme Court directed Speakers to decide disqualification petitions within a reasonable period and referred to a three-month timeline.

Primacy of Political Party under the Anti-Defection Framework

1. **Political party as the core democratic unit:** The removal of the split provision restored the importance of political parties within parliamentary democracy. Political parties became the central unit of democratic accountability.
2. **Constitutional recognition to political parties:** Before the 10th Schedule, political parties had no formal constitutional recognition. The anti-defection law formally acknowledged their constitutional role.
3. **Legislature party not fully autonomous:** The law does not treat legislature parties as completely independent from the parent political party. Internal dissent cannot automatically override party identity.
4. **Supreme Court's interpretation:** In *Subhash Desai vs Principal Secretary, Governor of Maharashtra*, the Supreme Court rejected an interpretation that separates legislators from their parent political party.
5. **Continuing authority of political parties:** The Court stated that political parties continue to guide elected representatives even after elections. This strengthened party discipline within the constitutional framework.
6. **Role of whip in party cohesion:** The whip system ensures that legislators vote together on important matters. It helps political parties maintain unity and legislative stability.

Constitutional Debate over the Merger Exception

1. **Core constitutional issue:** The present controversy focuses on whether two-thirds legislators alone can claim merger protection or whether the original political party must first merge with another party.
2. **Meaning of Paragraph 4:** Paragraph 4 protects legislators from disqualification during merger. However, the provision mainly refers to merger of the "original political party."
3. **Limits of numerical majority:** A two-thirds numerical majority within the legislature party may not automatically justify merger protection. Otherwise, legislators may effectively control the fate of the political party itself.
4. **Conflict with constitutional design:** Allowing legislature factions to dominate party identity may indirectly revive the earlier split culture. This would weaken Parliament's decision to abolish the split exception.
5. **Merger and democratic accountability:** The constitutional framework seeks to preserve continuity of political parties. Internal factional strength alone cannot replace the identity of the parent political organisation.
6. **Constitutional scrutiny of merger disputes:** The Supreme Court in the *Kihoto Hollohan* case held that decisions of the Presiding Officer remain subject to judicial review. This allows constitutional courts to examine disputes arising under the merger provision.

Implications for Parliamentary Democracy

1. **Ensuring political stability:** The anti-defection law aimed to reduce instability caused by repeated defections. Stable governments can focus on governance instead of constant survival battles.
2. **Preventing horse-trading:** Defections were often linked to money, political bargaining, and ministerial rewards rather than ideology. The law sought to reduce political corruption during floor tests.
3. **Protecting voters' mandate:** Voters usually support a candidate based on the party's ideology and manifesto. Defections weaken the trust between voters and elected representatives.
4. **Strengthening party discipline:** The law gives legal force to party discipline through the whip mechanism. This reduces internal sabotage and supports implementation of legislative agendas.
5. **Safeguarding opposition politics:** The issue directly affects the strength and continuity of opposition parties. A functioning opposition remains necessary for democratic accountability.
6. **Preserving the party system:** The anti-defection framework protects organised political competition. Frequent defections can weaken political parties and destabilise parliamentary democracy.
7. **Reducing financial burden:** Frequent defections earlier caused repeated elections and President's Rule in several States. Preventing instability also reduces public expenditure.
8. **Need for constitutional discipline:** The law does not completely prohibit political realignments. However, it places such actions within constitutional limits and procedures.
9. **Constitutional challenge before Rajya Sabha Chairman:** AAP has approached the Chairman of the Rajya Sabha under Paragraph 6 of the 10th Schedule. The matter challenges the validity of the claimed merger by seven MPs.

Way Forward

1. **Need for judicial clarity:** The controversy requires a clear interpretation of Paragraph 4 by the Supreme Court. Judicial clarity is necessary to settle the relationship between political parties and legislature parties.
2. **Stronger and neutral adjudication:** Several reforms suggest shifting disqualification powers from the Speaker to independent authorities. The Election Commission or an independent tribunal has been suggested for impartial decision-making.
3. **Time-bound decisions:** In *Keisham Meghachandra Singh v. Speaker, Manipur* and *Padi Kaushik Reddy v. Telangana*, the Supreme Court supported disposal of disqualification petitions within a reasonable period, preferably three months.

4. **Preserving constitutional discipline:** The anti-defection framework must balance political realignments with constitutional stability. The interpretation of merger provisions should not weaken the central role of political parties.
5. **Strengthening parliamentary democracy:** The constitutional framework should continue to protect the role of opposition parties. This is important for maintaining democratic accountability within Parliament.
6. **Reforming merger provisions:** Concerns remain that the present two-thirds merger rule may legalise mass defections. Suggestions include raising the threshold, removing the merger exception, or requiring defectors to resign and seek re-election.
7. **Limiting misuse of whip:** The Dinesh Goswami Committee recommended restricting the whip only to confidence motions and other survival votes. This would protect legitimate legislative dissent.

Conclusion

The AAP Rajya Sabha controversy has revived important constitutional questions regarding the merger exception under the anti-defection law. The central issue is whether legislature strength can override the identity of the original political party. Judicial clarity and institutional reforms will be important for protecting party discipline, parliamentary opposition, democratic accountability, and constitutional stability within India's parliamentary democracy.

Question for practice:

Examine the constitutional issues raised by the merger exception under the Anti-Defection Law in the context of recent Rajya Sabha defections.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

How safe is India's critical national infrastructure?

Source: The post "How safe is India's critical national infrastructure?" has been created, based on "How safe is India's critical national infrastructure?" published in "The Hindu" on 27th May 2026.

UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper 3: Science & Technology

Context: India's critical infrastructure, including power grids, banking systems, transport networks and communication systems, has rapidly expanded through automation, Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the Internet of Things (IoT). While digitalisation has improved efficiency and connectivity, it has also increased vulnerability to cyberattacks and disruptions, making infrastructure security a major national concern.

About Critical Infrastructure

- Critical infrastructure refers to systems and assets essential for national security, economic stability and public welfare.
- Examples include:
 - Power and energy networks
 - Banking and financial systems
 - Railways, airports and transport systems

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- Telecommunications and internet infrastructure
- Healthcare systems
- Water supply and public utilities

Major Threats to Critical Infrastructure

1. Vulnerability Due to Digitalisation

- Increased dependence on IoT devices and automation has widened the attack surface.
- Connected systems are more exposed to hacking and malware attacks.

2. Cyberattacks on Essential Services

- Power grids, pipelines and communication systems can be targeted by hostile actors.
- A successful attack can disrupt essential services and create panic.

3. Weak Security in IoT Devices

- Many IoT devices lack strong security protocols and regular software updates.
- Poorly secured devices become easy entry points for hackers.

4. Interconnected Nature of Systems

- Modern infrastructure systems are highly interconnected.
- Failure in one system can trigger cascading failures across sectors.

5. Threat from GPS and Communication Disruptions

- Transport and logistics systems depend heavily on GPS and digital communication.
- Jamming or spoofing can disrupt navigation and supply chains.

6. Increasing Sophistication of Cyber Threats

- Cyberattacks are becoming more advanced with the use of AI and automated tools.
- State-sponsored cyber warfare is also emerging as a serious threat.

Key Concerns

1. Lack of Robust Cybersecurity Standards: Many systems do not have adequate cybersecurity safeguards. Cybersecurity is often treated as a secondary requirement.

2. Dependence on Foreign Technologies: Imported digital equipment may create strategic vulnerabilities. Risks increase when security verification mechanisms are weak.

3. Inadequate Protection of Operational Technology (OT): Industrial control systems managing power plants and utilities remain vulnerable. OT systems that were previously isolated are now connected to digital networks.

4. Limited Indigenous Certification Mechanisms: India needs stronger domestic testing and certification systems for critical devices and infrastructure.

Steps Taken by India

1. National Critical Information Infrastructure Protection Centre (NCIIPC): NCIIPC has been established to protect critical information infrastructure.

2. CERT-In Initiatives: Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In) monitors and responds to cybersecurity incidents.

3. Cybersecurity Policies and Guidelines: The government has introduced cybersecurity frameworks and advisories for organisations.

4. Promotion of Trusted and Indigenous Technologies: Efforts are being made to promote domestic manufacturing of telecom and digital equipment.

Measures Required

1. Strengthening Cybersecurity Frameworks: Strong cybersecurity standards should be mandatory for all critical sectors.

2. Indigenous Testing and Certification: India should develop domestic certification systems for hardware and software security verification.

3. Protection of Operational Technology Systems: Critical industrial systems should be separated from vulnerable public networks wherever possible.

4. Regular Security Audits: Continuous vulnerability assessments and penetration testing should be conducted.

5. Capacity Building and Skilled Workforce: Cybersecurity training and specialised manpower must be strengthened.

6. Public-Private Cooperation: Government and private sector coordination is essential because much infrastructure is privately operated.

7. Development of Indigenous Technologies: India should reduce dependence on foreign technologies in strategic sectors.

Conclusion: India's growing dependence on digital infrastructure has increased both efficiency and vulnerability. Cyberattacks on critical infrastructure can severely affect national security, economic stability and public safety. Therefore, India must adopt a comprehensive strategy involving strong cybersecurity standards, indigenous technology development, continuous monitoring and institutional coordination to secure its critical national infrastructure.

Question: "Rapid digitalisation has increased the vulnerability of India's critical infrastructure to cyberattacks." Discuss the major threats and suggest measures required to strengthen critical infrastructure security in India.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

India's energy strategy needs price correction

Source: The post "India's energy strategy needs price correction" has been created, based on "India's energy strategy needs price correction" published in "The Hindu" on 27th May 2026.

UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper-2- Indian Economy

Context: The Strait of Hormuz crisis has highlighted India's vulnerability to global crude oil price fluctuations. India imports nearly 85% of its crude oil requirements, making energy security highly dependent on international markets. Despite geopolitical tensions and rising freight costs, domestic fuel prices have remained largely stable due to government intervention and absorption of costs by oil marketing companies (OMCs). This has revived the debate on whether India needs price correction instead of prolonged price suppression.

Why India's Energy Security Is Under Pressure

- 1. High Dependence on Crude Oil Imports:** India imports around 85% of its crude oil needs. Any disruption in global supply chains directly impacts domestic energy prices.
- 2. Geopolitical Risks:** Conflicts around the Strait of Hormuz and West Asia threaten shipping routes. Shipping and insurance costs have increased significantly due to instability.
- 3. Rising Domestic Demand:** India's energy demand is continuously increasing because of economic growth and urbanisation. Demand for LPG and petroleum products is expected to rise further.
- 4. Fiscal Burden of Subsidies:** Artificially suppressing fuel prices increases fiscal pressure on the government and OMCs. Persistent subsidies distort market signals and reduce efficiency.

Measures Taken by India

- 1. Diversification of Oil Sources:** India has expanded crude imports from Russia, the United States, West Africa and Latin America. This reduces overdependence on West Asian suppliers.
- 2. Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPR):** India is strengthening strategic reserves to handle supply disruptions. Additional storage agreements have been signed with the UAE.
- 3. Expansion of LPG Infrastructure:** LPG connections under schemes such as Ujjwala have expanded rapidly. Domestic LPG consumption has increased substantially.
- 4. Temporary Fiscal Interventions:** The government has reduced excise duties during periods of high crude prices. OMCs absorbed part of the losses to prevent sudden inflationary shocks.

Problems with Price Suppression

- 1. Financial Stress on OMCs:** OMCs face under-recoveries when retail fuel prices are not aligned with global crude prices. This affects their investment capacity and financial stability.

2. Distortion of Market Signals: Artificially low fuel prices encourage excessive consumption. Consumers do not receive accurate price signals regarding energy scarcity.

3. Burden on Public Finances: Large subsidies increase fiscal deficits and reduce resources for social and capital expenditure.

4. Delay in Energy Transition: Cheap fossil fuels discourage investment in renewable energy and energy efficiency.

Why Price Correction Is Necessary

1. Encourages Efficient Energy Use: Rational fuel prices promote conservation and responsible consumption.

2. Reduces Fiscal Pressure: Gradual price increases reduce subsidy burdens on the government and OMCs.

3. Supports Energy Transition: Market-linked pricing encourages adoption of electric vehicles, renewables and clean energy technologies.

4. Improves Long-Term Energy Security: Sustainable pricing mechanisms make the energy sector financially viable and resilient.

Suggested Way Forward

1. Gradual and Calibrated Price Revision: Fuel prices should reflect global crude trends in a phased manner to avoid inflationary shocks.

2. Targeted Subsidies: Support should be limited to vulnerable groups instead of universal price suppression.

3. Strengthening Renewable Energy: India should accelerate solar, wind, green hydrogen and biofuel development.

4. Enhancing Strategic Reserves: Expanding petroleum reserves can reduce vulnerability during crises.

5. Promoting Energy Efficiency: Public transport, fuel-efficient vehicles and energy conservation measures should be encouraged.

Conclusion: India has demonstrated resilience in handling global energy disruptions through diversification and strategic planning. However, prolonged suppression of fuel prices is fiscally unsustainable and distorts market efficiency. A calibrated price correction combined with targeted welfare support and accelerated clean energy transition is essential for ensuring long-term energy security and economic stability.

Question: “India’s energy strategy requires a price correction rather than excessive subsidies.” Discuss in the context of global crude oil volatility and India’s energy security.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

India's West Asia challenge: Stay agile, stay connected

Source: The post “India's West Asia challenge: Stay agile, stay connected” has been created based on “India's West Asia challenge: Stay agile, stay connected” published in “Indian Express” on 29th May 2026.

UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper 2 – International Relations

Context: West Asia has become an important region in India's foreign policy because of ongoing conflicts involving Gaza, Iran, Israel and maritime security. India faces a complex challenge because it has strategic, economic and geopolitical interests with multiple countries in the region simultaneously.

Importance of West Asia for India

1. Security and Strategic Interests

- a. Israel is an important partner for India in defence procurement, intelligence sharing and counter-terrorism cooperation.
- b. India depends on Israel for advanced defence technology and operational security support.
- c. Strong ties with Israel help India strengthen its national security capabilities.

2. Economic and Human Interests

- a. Gulf countries are important for India's energy security because India imports large quantities of oil and gas from the region.
- b. Millions of Indian workers live and work in Gulf countries and send remittances back to India.
- c. Countries like Saudi Arabia and the UAE are also major investors and trade partners of India.
- d. Stability in the Gulf region is therefore directly linked to India's economic interests.

3. Connectivity and Geopolitical Interests

- a. Iran is strategically important for India because of the Chabahar Port project.
- b. Iran provides India with access to Afghanistan and Central Asia.
- c. India cannot completely isolate Iran because geography makes Iran an important regional partner.

Challenges Faced by India in West Asia

1. Balancing Relations with Rival Powers

- a. India's close defence ties with Israel can create concerns among Gulf countries and Iran.
- b. India's engagement with Iran can create pressure from the United States and some Gulf partners.
- c. India therefore, has to carefully balance its relations without appearing to support one side completely.

2. Absence of a Unified Gulf Position

- a. Gulf countries do not always follow a common strategic approach.
- b. Saudi Arabia focuses on oil markets, regional influence and Islamic leadership.
- c. The UAE follows a more commercially driven and flexible foreign policy.
- d. India cannot treat the Gulf as a single political bloc.

3. Complex and Interconnected Conflicts

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- a. The current crisis includes the Gaza conflict, US-Iran tensions, militia activities in Lebanon and threats to maritime trade routes.
- b. Different conflicts in the region are interconnected and affect each other.
- c. India must therefore handle multiple diplomatic pressures at the same time.

4. Economic Risks for India

- a. Instability in West Asia increases global oil and fertiliser prices.
- b. Rising prices can increase inflation and pressure India's foreign exchange reserves.
- c. Regional instability can also weaken the rupee and affect economic growth.
- d. Families of Indian workers in the Gulf also face uncertainty during crises.

5. Diplomatic and Public Pressure

- a. Some observers believe India is moving closer to Israel and the United States.
- b. Others demand that India adopt a stronger moral position on humanitarian issues.
- c. India must balance ethical concerns with practical national interests and long-term strategic goals.

India's Approach Towards West Asia

1. India is Following Strategic Autonomy

- India has avoided formally aligning with any one regional camp.
- India is trying to maintain working relations with Israel, Gulf countries and Iran simultaneously.

2. India is Keeping Diplomatic Channels Open

- India believes that maintaining communication with all sides is important during conflicts.
- India prefers preserving diplomatic access rather than making aggressive public statements.

3. India is Adopting an Interest-Based Policy

- India's policy is based on national interests such as energy security, defence cooperation and connectivity.
- India is trying to remain flexible and pragmatic in a rapidly changing regional environment.

Conclusion: India recognises that West Asia is a complex region with multiple rivalries and competing interests. Therefore, India's success will depend on its ability to remain agile, maintain balanced relations and protect its strategic and economic interests while keeping communication channels open with all major actors in the region.

Question: "For India, West Asia is not a straight line but a Rubik's Cube." Examine India's challenges in balancing relations with Israel, the Gulf countries and Iran amid the ongoing West Asian crisis.

Source: [Indian Express](#)

Will increasing the strength of the SC solve the pendency problem?

Source: The post “Will increasing the strength of the SC solve the pendency problem?” has been created, based on “Will increasing the strength of the SC solve the pendency problem?” published in “The Hindu” on 29th May 2026.

UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper 2 – Governance

Context: The Supreme Court of India is facing a serious pendency crisis due to the rising number of Special Leave Petitions (SLPs) and expanding judicial responsibilities. Recently, the government approved an increase in the sanctioned strength of Supreme Court judges from 34 to 38. However, merely increasing the number of judges may not completely solve the problem of pendency.

How Increasing the Strength of the Supreme Court Can Help

1. It Can Reduce Judicial Workload

- a. Increasing the number of judges can distribute the growing workload more evenly among benches.
- b. More judges can help the Court hear and dispose of a larger number of cases.

2. It Can Improve Disposal of Cases

- a. Additional judges may speed up hearings and reduce delays in pending matters.
- b. Faster disposal can improve public confidence in the justice delivery system.

3. It Can Address Immediate Capacity Constraints

- a. The Supreme Court is handling a large number of constitutional, civil and criminal appeals.
- b. Increasing judicial strength can provide temporary relief from excessive pressure on existing benches.

4. It Can Strengthen Access to Justice

- a. Faster hearings and reduced delays can improve citizens’ access to timely justice.
- b. Litigants may not have to wait for several years for final decisions.

Why Increasing Strength Alone Will Not Solve Pendency

1. Excessive Filing of Special Leave Petitions

- a. A major reason for pendency is the large number of SLPs filed under Article 136.
- b. The Supreme Court was originally intended to handle matters of constitutional importance, but it is increasingly functioning as a regular appellate court.
- c. Many routine matters reach the Supreme Court unnecessarily.

2. The Supreme Court is Overburdened

- a. The Court performs multiple functions such as constitutional interpretation, appeals, protection of fundamental rights and public interest litigation.

- b. This expanding jurisdiction has increased institutional pressure.

3. More Judges May Create Coordination Problems

- a. Increasing the number of benches can sometimes lead to inconsistent judicial rulings.
- b. Different benches may interpret laws differently, creating confusion and uncertainty.

4. Government Litigation Adds to Pendency

- a. The government is one of the largest litigants in India.
- b. Poor decision-making and unnecessary appeals by government departments increase the burden on courts.

5. Procedural Delays Continue

- a. Cases often face delays due to adjournments, repeated hearings and inefficient court procedures.
- b. Merely appointing more judges cannot solve structural inefficiencies in the judicial system.

6. Pendency in High Courts Also Affects the Supreme Court

- a. Large numbers of cases remain pending in High Courts for many years.
- b. Delays in High Courts eventually increase the burden on the Supreme Court through appeals.

Measures Needed Beyond Increasing Judicial Strength

1. The Supreme Court Must Filter Frivolous Litigation

- a. The Court should develop stricter mechanisms to limit unnecessary SLPs.
- b. Only cases involving substantial constitutional or legal questions should be admitted.

2. Government Litigation Must Be Reduced

- a. Government departments should avoid filing routine and unnecessary appeals.
- b. Better administrative decision-making can reduce avoidable litigation.

3. Judicial Reforms Should Be Introduced

- a. Greater use of technology and case management systems can improve efficiency.
- b. Timelines for hearings and judgments should be enforced more effectively.

4. High Courts Need Strengthening

- a. Vacancies in High Courts should be filled quickly.
- b. Strengthening lower courts and High Courts can reduce pressure on the Supreme Court.

5. Greater Diversity in Appointments is Needed

- a. Judicial appointments should include more women and underrepresented groups.

- b. A more representative judiciary can strengthen institutional legitimacy.

Conclusion: Increasing the sanctioned strength of the Supreme Court can provide temporary relief and improve case disposal rates. However, pendency is primarily a structural and institutional problem caused by excessive appeals, procedural inefficiencies and rising government litigation. Therefore, comprehensive judicial reforms along with stricter case filtering and strengthening of lower courts are necessary for a long-term solution to judicial pendency.

Question: “Will increasing the sanctioned strength of the Supreme Court solve the pendency problem?” Critically examine.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

SC Verdict on Retrospective GST Levy and India's Online Gaming Industry

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 3- Indian economy

Introduction

The Supreme Court upheld the constitutional validity of the **retrospective 28% GST levy on online gaming companies**, dismissing challenges filed by gaming firms and industry bodies. The ruling revives tax demands of nearly **₹2.5 lakh crore** against gaming companies, fantasy sports platforms and casinos. The Court also supported the government's interpretation of the GST framework on online gaming. The judgment comes when the sector is already facing restrictions under the **Promotion and Regulation of Online Gaming (PROG) Act, 2025**.

Background of the GST Dispute

- 1. GST Amendments and Tax Notices:** The GST Council approved a 28% GST rate on online gaming in 2023. After this decision, the Directorate General of GST Intelligence (DGGI) issued tax demand notices to several gaming companies.
- 2. Industry's Objection to Retrospective Taxation:** Gaming companies argued that the new GST regime should apply only from 1 October 2023, when the amendments came into effect. They opposed tax demands on revenues earned before that date.
- 3. Large Tax Demands on Major Companies:** Several firms received massive tax notices. Gameskraft challenged a demand of ₹21,000 crore, Dream11 faced a notice of ₹40,000 crore, while Delta Corp received notices worth ₹23,204 crore.

Key Issues and Supreme Court's Ruling

- 1. Retrospective Application of GST:** The industry argued that the 28% GST should apply only from 1 October 2023, when the GST Council's amendments came into force. The Court held that the **2023 amendments were clarificatory in nature rather than creating a new tax liability**, allowing their application to earlier periods.

2. **Tax Base for GST Calculation:** Gaming companies argued that GST should be imposed only on their platform fee or commission, known as Gross Gaming Revenue (GGR). The Court upheld GST on the full face value of bets and contest entry amounts deposited by users.
3. **Skill Versus Gambling Debate:** The industry maintained that many online games involved skill and should receive different treatment. The Court held that real-money gaming involving uncertain outcomes amounts to betting and gambling for GST purposes, regardless of any skill element.
4. **Impact on Earlier Judicial Relief:** The ruling overturned the relief earlier granted by the Karnataka High Court to Gameskraft. It strengthened the legal position of the tax authorities in ongoing disputes.

Implications of the Verdict for the Online Gaming Industry

1. **Revival of Massive Tax Liability:** The judgment revives tax demands of nearly ₹2.5 lakh crore against gaming firms, fantasy sports platforms and casinos.
2. **Increased Financial Burden:** The retrospective levy creates an immediate and steep financial burden that companies cannot easily pass on to consumers. It is expected to increase liquidity pressures across the sector.
3. **Industry Consolidation and Business Adaptation:** The sector is expected to face consolidation and liquidity pressures. Companies may need to adapt their business models, reduce costs and align closely with regulatory requirements.
4. **Survival Challenges for Companies:** The verdict comes when the sector is already facing restrictions under the PROG Act, 2025. Experts believe many companies may struggle to survive or re-establish themselves through other business activities.
5. **Settlement of a Long-Running Tax Dispute:** The judgment settles the dispute over the taxation of real-money gaming and supports the government's approach towards stronger regulation of the sector.

India's Evolving Regulatory Approach to Online Gaming

1. **Shift Towards Strict Regulation:** The government moved from regulating online gaming to imposing a broad prohibition on online money gaming platforms. This marked a major policy shift for the sector.
2. **National Security and Financial Concerns:** The ban was justified on concerns relating to money laundering, illicit fund transfers and the use of digital wallets and cryptocurrencies. The government also cited possible misuse by terror organisations and offshore entities.
3. **Provisions of the Promotion and Regulation of Online Gaming (PROG) Act, 2025:** The Act prohibits offering online money gaming in India. Violators can face imprisonment of up to **three years** and a penalty of ₹1 crore.
4. **Liability of Promoters and Influencers:** Individuals promoting such platforms can face imprisonment of up to **two years** and a penalty of ₹50 lakh.

5. **Restrictions on Financial Transactions:** Banks and financial institutions are prohibited from facilitating transactions on such platforms. The Act applies to all online money gaming platforms irrespective of whether they involve skill or chance.
6. **Impact on Sector Growth:** The law dealt a major blow to a sector that was projected to become a \$9 billion market by 2029.

Challenges in Recovering Tax Dues

1. **Industry Slowdown After the Ban:** The complete ban on online money gaming has significantly reduced industry activity. Many companies have either shut down or shifted to other businesses.
2. **Practical Difficulties in Recovery:** Experts believe recovery of the assessed dues may be difficult because many companies have either shut down or shifted to other businesses after the ban.
3. **Tax Demands Exceed Industry Capacity:** The GST demands are reported to be several times higher than the cumulative revenues earned by many companies. This raises questions about the practical feasibility of recovery.
4. **Limited Revenue Realisation:** The judgment may increase the tax base on paper. However, collecting the assessed amounts may prove difficult because many affected firms no longer operate in their earlier form.

Conclusion

The Supreme Court's ruling upholds the retrospective application of the **28% GST levy** and settles key disputes relating to the taxation of real-money gaming. Along with the **PROG Act, 2025**, it marks a stricter regulatory approach towards the sector. While the judgment revives substantial tax demands, experts have also highlighted challenges in recovering those dues.

Question for practice:

Evaluate the significance of the Supreme Court's decision to uphold the retrospective 28% GST levy on online gaming companies and its implications for India's online gaming industry.

Source: [Indian Express](#)

Brinkmanship in the Age of Growing Conflicts

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 2 - International Relation

Introduction

Brinkmanship has become an important feature of contemporary conflicts. Originating during the Cold War, it refers to deliberate actions that raise the risk of escalation to force an adversary to concede, negotiate, or alter its behaviour. Although the Cold War ended, nuclear risks and geopolitical rivalries continue to persist. Today, states, proxy groups, and non-state actors increasingly employ brinkmanship in different forms, creating conditions where miscalculation, loss of control, and unintended escalation can become serious concerns.

Evolution and Changing Nature of Brinkmanship

1. **Meaning and Core Logic:** Brinkmanship involves taking a conflict to a dangerous level of escalation to force the opponent to back down, make concessions, negotiate, or act irrationally.
2. **Cold War Origins:** The concept emerged during the 1950s and 1960s while analysing crises such as the Berlin Blockade (1948-49) and the Cuban Missile Crisis (1962). It highlighted the danger of escalation spiralling out of control, especially in a nuclear environment.
3. **Return in the Post-Cold War Era:** The spectrum of conflict has expanded after the Cold War, but the nuclear overhang has not disappeared. As a result, brinkmanship has returned in more dangerous and diverse forms.
4. **Brinkmanship as Risk Creation:** Brinkmanship is a competition in risk-taking. It deliberately creates conditions where loss of control and mutual disaster become possible in the hope that the other side will step back first.

Major Manifestations of Contemporary Brinkmanship

1. **Terrorism as a Tool of Brinkmanship:** Non-state actors frequently use terrorism to provoke disproportionate state responses and attract international attention. While groups such as al Qaeda and the Islamic State largely failed to achieve their objectives, some organisations such as the IRA (Irish Republican Army) and FLN (National Liberation Front) succeeded in extracting concessions.
2. **Proxy Brinkmanship:** States have increasingly used proxy groups to weaken stronger adversaries. Pakistan and Iran have employed such asymmetric strategies to erode the resolve of stronger powers and seek concessions on issues related to sovereignty and statehood.
3. **Hamas-Israel Escalation:** The October 2023 Hamas attack on Israel reflected proxy brinkmanship. Israel's large-scale response in Gaza demonstrated how deterrence can break down and rapidly push conflicts up the escalation ladder.
4. **U.S.-Iran Confrontation:** The United States imposed a blockade on Iran to increase economic pressure and force negotiations. Iran responded by blocking the Strait of Hormuz, showing how counter-brinkmanship can create disproportionate strategic effects.
5. **Russia's Escalatory Strategy:** Russia's efforts to resist NATO's eastward expansion and secure victory in Ukraine have resulted in a prolonged war. Nuclear signalling and the use of hypersonic and area weapons have further increased escalation risks.
6. **China's Controlled Brinkmanship:** Since 2006, China has used controlled brinkmanship in the South China Sea and East China Sea. It has sought maritime dominance by challenging weaker neighbours and discouraging resistance to its territorial claims.
7. **North Korea's Model:** North Korea has developed brinkmanship into a central strategy. Its missile capabilities, nuclear weapons, and proliferation activities have enabled it to resist external pressure while keeping regional tensions high.

8. **South Asian Nuclear Brinkmanship:** Since the overt nuclearisation of South Asia in 1998, major India-Pakistan crises have carried the risk of rapid and uncontrolled escalation. The 2019 Pulwama-Balakot crisis and the May 2025 crisis both contained elements of brinkmanship.

Implications of Growing Brinkmanship

1. **Escalation Beyond Control:** Brinkmanship deliberately creates uncertainty and raises the risk of accidental escalation. Miscalculation, technical failures, and loss of control can transform limited crises into larger confrontations.
2. **Breakdown of Deterrence:** Escalatory actions often weaken restraint mechanisms. The pursuit of difficult strategic objectives encourages both sides to climb the escalation ladder more rapidly.
3. **Marginalisation of Diplomacy:** Diplomacy is increasingly losing ground as a preferred method of conflict resolution. Coercion, brinkmanship, and force are becoming more common instruments for pursuing political goals.
4. **Weakening of Global Institutions:** Institutions such as the United Nations are becoming increasingly marginalised. Their reduced influence has limited their ability to manage conflicts and promote peaceful settlements.
5. **Rising Nuclear Risks:** Brinkmanship remains closely linked to nuclear dangers. The possibility of escalation spiralling beyond control continues to be a major concern in crises involving nuclear-armed states.
6. **Emerging Technology Risks:** Future crises may involve artificial intelligence-enabled weapon systems and other disruptive technologies. These technologies can affect how signals are sent and interpreted, making escalation risks harder to assess and crisis management more difficult.

South Asian Dimensions of Brinkmanship

1. **Strategic Restraint:** India's strategic culture is rooted in restraint and responsibility. Even under severe provocation, it avoids adopting brinkmanship as a preferred strategy.
2. **India-Pakistan Crisis Dynamics:** The May 2025 crisis displayed features of brinkmanship, including low crisis controllability and risks arising from miscalculation.
3. **Absence of Crisis Management Mechanisms:** The lack of sustained dialogue and bilateral crisis-management arrangements can increase misunderstandings during crises.
4. **Divergent Lessons from Crises:** India and Pakistan have drawn different conclusions from recent crises. These contrasting perceptions may make future de-escalation more difficult.
5. **Geographic Reality:** India and Pakistan's geographic proximity shortens decision-making timelines and increases the danger of loss of control during crises.

Conclusion

Brinkmanship is increasingly shaping contemporary conflicts across different regions and actors. While it seeks to compel adversaries through risk creation, it also raises the chances of miscalculation, loss of control, and uncontrolled escalation. As coercion and force gain prominence over dialogue, greater emphasis on diplomacy, crisis prevention, restraint, and de-escalation remains essential for maintaining stability.

Question for practice:

Discuss the changing nature of brinkmanship in contemporary international relations and examine its implications for global peace and stability.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Concrete fever: On India and heat management

Source: The post “Concrete fever: On India and heat management” has been created based on “Concrete fever: On India and heat management” published in “The Hindu” on 30th May 2026.

UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper 2: Governance

Context: Urban heat islands (UHIs) refer to urban areas experiencing significantly higher temperatures than surrounding rural regions due to human activities and built-up infrastructure. Climate change has intensified this phenomenon, making Indian cities increasingly vulnerable to extreme heat events.

Causes of Urban Heat Islands and Rising Urban Heat Stress

1. Climate Change-Induced Temperature Rise

- a. Climate change has increased the frequency and intensity of heatwaves across India.
- b. Heatwave zones covering central, northwestern, and eastern coastal regions have expanded.
- c. The number of heatwave days has increased significantly over the decades.

2. Loss of Green Cover: Rapid urbanization has reduced vegetation and tree cover in cities. The absence of greenery decreases natural cooling through shade and evapotranspiration.

3. Expansion of Concrete Surfaces: Roads, buildings, and other impervious surfaces absorb and retain heat. Concrete-dominated landscapes increase ambient temperatures.

4. Use of Heat-Absorbing Construction Materials: Conventional building materials trap and radiate heat. Dark surfaces contribute to higher surface and air temperatures.

5. Waste Heat from Human Activities: Air conditioners release heat into the surrounding environment. Industrial and commercial activities add to urban heat accumulation.

6. Unequal Exposure to Heat: Urban heat islands can be 2°C to 10°C hotter than nearby rural areas. While affluent populations use cooling devices, outdoor workers, vendors, and vulnerable groups face greater exposure to extreme heat.

Measures to Mitigate Urban Heat Stress

1. Mandate Green Cover

- a. Cities should increase urban forests, parks, roadside plantations, and green belts.
- b. Green spaces help lower temperatures and improve microclimates.

2. Promote Reflective and Cool Materials

- a. Reflective roofs, cool pavements, and heat-resistant construction materials should be adopted.
- b. Such materials reduce heat absorption and surface temperatures.

3. Climate-Sensitive Urban Planning

- a. Urban planning should integrate heat mitigation strategies into master plans.
- b. Building designs should improve ventilation and reduce heat retention.

4. Protect Existing Labour Force

- a. Governments should enforce heat action plans for outdoor workers.
- b. Work-hour adjustments, hydration facilities, and shaded rest areas should be provided during extreme heat conditions.

5. Mainstream Heat Management in Governance

- a. Heat resilience should become a regular component of urban governance and budgeting.
- b. Dedicated financial allocations are required for long-term heat adaptation measures.

6. Reduce Dependence on Energy-Intensive Cooling

- a. Sustainable cooling solutions and energy-efficient technologies should be promoted.
- b. This can reduce the cycle of increasing air-conditioner use and waste heat generation.

Conclusion: Urban heat islands represent the interaction of climate change and unplanned urbanization. India must mandate green cover, adopt reflective materials, and integrate heat management into urban planning to build climate-resilient and equitable cities while protecting vulnerable populations from rising heat stress.

Question: Climate change and rapid urbanization have intensified the Urban Heat Island effect in India. Examine its causes and impacts on vulnerable populations. Suggest suitable mitigation strategies.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Women's Political Empowerment and Delimitation

Source: The post "Women's Political Empowerment and Delimitation" has been created based on "Delimitation can bring more female-urban participation" published in "Indian Express" on 30th May 2026.

UPSC Syllabus: GS Paper 2: Governance

Context: Delimitation refers to the redrawing of parliamentary and assembly constituency boundaries based on population changes. The next delimitation exercise is expected after the 2026 Census and may increase the strength of the Lok Sabha from 543 to 816 seats. The delimitation process will also trigger the implementation of the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam, 2023, which provides for one-third reservation for women in the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies.

How Delimitation Can Increase Female-Urban Participation

1. It can address the problem of low urban voter turnout.

- a. Urban constituencies such as Mumbai, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, and the National Capital Region have consistently recorded voter turnout levels between 55 and 60 per cent, which are lower than the national average.
- b. The gap between rural and urban voter turnout has widened significantly from 4.4 percentage points in 2009 to 11.6 percentage points in 2024.
- c. Smaller urban constituencies created through delimitation can improve voter accessibility and participation.

2. It can reduce the burden of oversized urban constituencies.

- a. Several urban parliamentary constituencies are approaching electorates of nearly three million voters.
- b. Research suggests that a two-million-electoral urban constituency records around 65 per cent turnout, whereas a one-million-electoral constituency records nearly 74 per cent turnout.
- c. Therefore, dividing large urban constituencies into smaller units can substantially improve electoral participation.

3. It can particularly benefit urban women voters.

- a. Rural women have emerged as the most politically active voter group, with turnout levels reaching nearly 75 per cent.
- b. In contrast, urban women in large constituencies remain the least engaged category of voters, with turnout around 64 per cent.
- c. Delimitation can help reduce barriers to participation by making constituencies more manageable and accessible.

4. It can strengthen women's political representation.

- a. The Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam will reserve one-third of Lok Sabha seats for women after delimitation.
- b. Greater representation of women candidates can encourage higher political awareness and participation among women voters.
- c. The presence of more women representatives can also make electoral campaigns more inclusive and responsive to women's concerns.

Challenges That Need Attention

1. Polling booth crowding remains a major obstacle.

- a. Urban constituencies continue to face greater polling booth congestion than rural constituencies.
- b. In 2024, highly urban constituencies had around 1,054 voters per polling booth compared to 836 voters in the least urban constituencies.
- c. Excessive crowding discourages participation and contributes to lower turnout levels.

2. Urban areas lack strong mobilisation networks for women.

- a. Rural women benefit from mobilisation through panchayats, anganwadis, and self-help groups.
- b. Similar community-based networks are relatively weak in urban areas.
- c. As a result, urban women often receive less institutional support for electoral participation.

Way Forward

1. New constituencies should be created primarily in rapidly urbanising regions.

- a. Delimitation should focus on cities such as Mumbai, Bengaluru, Delhi-NCR, Hyderabad, Pune, Ahmedabad, and Chennai, where constituencies have experienced rapid population growth.
- b. This approach will maximise gains in voter turnout and representation.

2. Polling infrastructure should be expanded simultaneously.

- a. The Election Commission should ensure that the voter-to-booth ratio remains below 900 voters per booth.
- b. Additional polling stations should be established in newly created urban constituencies.

3. Urban-specific mechanisms should be developed to mobilise women voters.

- a. Urban self-help groups under the National Urban Livelihoods Mission should be strengthened.
- b. Women's canteen schemes and female-only polling booths should be promoted in metropolitan areas.
- c. Women councillors elected in urban local bodies should be actively involved in voter awareness campaigns.

4. Women's reservation should be used as a tool for deeper democratic participation.

- a. Political parties should encourage meaningful participation of women candidates rather than symbolic representation.
- b. Women representatives should be supported through leadership and capacity-building initiatives.

Conclusion: The upcoming delimitation exercise provides a historic opportunity to improve electoral participation in India's growing urban centres. When combined with the implementation of the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhinyam, it can significantly enhance the political participation of urban women. A strategy that combines smaller urban constituencies, better polling infrastructure, and targeted mobilisation efforts can help bridge the widening female-urban turnout gap and strengthen India's democratic foundations.

Question: The upcoming delimitation exercise, along with the implementation of the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhinyam, presents an opportunity to enhance democratic participation in urban India, particularly among women. Discuss.

Source: [Indian Express](#)

International Law, 'Optional' for Powerful States

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 2- International Relations

Introduction

International law was developed through treaties, conventions, and institutions to replace power politics with a rules-based international order. Its effectiveness, however, depends on state consent and the ability to enforce legal obligations. In recent years, repeated violations of international norms, weak accountability, and ineffective enforcement have reduced its credibility. As powerful states increasingly ignore legal restraints without consequences, concerns are growing that power rather than principle is shaping international relations and weakening the global legal order.

Manifestations of the Erosion of International Law

- 1. Violation of Sovereignty and Territorial Integrity:** The UN Charter prohibits the use of force against sovereign states. Russia's invasion of Ukraine (2022) and the U.S.-Israeli war on Iran (2026) showed that powerful states can disregard this principle.
- 2. Growing Use of Unilateral Military Force:** The 2003 Iraq invasion was conducted without Security Council authorization and later proved to be based on incorrect claims. More recent strikes against Iran have further weakened restrictions on unilateral use of force.
- 3. Violations of International Humanitarian Law:** Military operations in Gaza and Lebanon have led to allegations of disproportionate force and large civilian casualties. Similar concerns have emerged in several conflict zones across the world.
- 4. Regional Breaches of International Norms:** Türkiye's actions in northern Syria, Azerbaijan's use of force in Nagorno-Karabakh, and Ethiopia's conduct in the Tigray conflict have raised questions about compliance with international rules.
- 5. Disregard for Maritime Law:** The South China Sea has witnessed challenges to UNCLOS. China continues to enforce its "nine-dash line" claim despite its rejection by the Permanent Court of Arbitration in 2016.
- 6. Threats to Freedom of Navigation:** Repeated tanker seizures, blockades, and restrictions in the Strait of Hormuz have undermined the principle of free navigation, which is vital for global trade and maritime stability.
- 7. Atrocities in Armed Conflicts:** In Syria, chemical weapons, indiscriminate bombing, and siege tactics have been widely documented. In Yemen and Tigray, attacks on civilians and serious humanitarian abuses have also been reported.
- 8. Human Rights Treaty Violations:** Allegations of crimes against humanity have emerged regarding civilian killings in Gaza and the treatment of Uyghurs in Xinjiang. Myanmar's actions against the Rohingya have also led to genocide allegations.

9. **Human Rights Concerns in Different Political Systems:** The suppression of protests in Iran, torture during the U.S. “war on terror,” Australia’s offshore detention policies, and migrant pushbacks in Europe have raised legal and moral concerns.
10. **Weakening Arms-Control Regimes:** The collapse of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, erosion of the Open Skies Treaty, and uncertainty surrounding New START have revived fears of a new arms race.
11. **Challenges to Nuclear Restraint:** North Korea continues missile tests and nuclear development despite UN resolutions. Iran’s nuclear programme has reportedly accelerated after the weakening of the (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action) JCPOA.
12. **Failures in Environmental Governance:** States have struggled to meet commitments under the Paris Agreement. Rising emissions and missed climate targets have weakened confidence in international environmental law.
13. **Environmental Norm Violations:** Illegal deforestation in the Amazon and poorly regulated deep-sea mining threaten biodiversity and fragile marine ecosystems.

The Rise of Impunity in International Relations

1. **Power Determines Legality:** International law increasingly appears effective only when powerful states choose to follow it. Outcomes are often shaped by power rather than legal principles.
2. **Impunity as a Common Pattern:** The major concern is not only repeated violations but also the absence of consequences for those violations.
3. **Powerful States Set the Wrong Example:** When influential countries ignore legal obligations without punishment, they encourage similar behaviour by other states.
4. **Norms Become Optional:** International rules lose authority when states believe compliance is a matter of choice rather than obligation.
5. **Decline of Collective Restraint:** The post-war effort to restrain state behaviour through common rules is weakening as unilateral actions increase.
6. **Revival of ‘Might is Right’ Thinking:** The belief that strength determines outcomes is replacing the idea that disputes should be governed by law.
7. **Return Towards International Anarchy:** The weakening of legal restraints risks reversing progress made in creating a rules-based international order.

Why is International Law Losing Its Effectiveness?

1. **Security Council Paralysis:** Geopolitical rivalries have reduced the ability of the UN Security Council to respond collectively to major violations.

2. **Limitations of the International Criminal Court (ICC) :** The ICC faces accusations of bias and lacks jurisdiction over several major powers.
3. **Weakness of Treaty Monitoring Bodies:** Many treaty institutions depend largely on voluntary compliance rather than compulsory enforcement.
4. **Gap Between Law and Power:** States can often avoid legal consequences when they possess sufficient military, economic, or political influence.
5. **Declining Credibility of Institutions:** Repeated violations without accountability weaken confidence in international institutions and legal frameworks.
6. **Erosion of Reciprocity:** International law depends on mutual respect for rules. When some states ignore obligations, others become less willing to comply.

Consequences for Global Order and Human Security

1. **Harder Resolution of Conflicts:** Disputes become more difficult to settle when legal norms lose authority and trust declines.
2. **Increased Civilian Suffering:** Civilians bear the greatest burden when humanitarian rules are ignored during conflicts.
3. **Weakening of Global Peace and Stability:** Repeated violations undermine the stability that international law was designed to protect.
4. **Degradation of Global Commons:** Environmental damage and challenges to maritime rules threaten resources shared by all nations.
5. **Loss of Trust Between States:** Countries become less willing to cooperate when legal commitments are regularly ignored.
6. **Growing Uncertainty in International Relations:** States face greater insecurity when common rules no longer provide predictable behaviour.
7. **Risk of a Law of the Jungle:** The international system moves closer to one where power, rather than law, determines outcomes.
8. **Costs for Both Weak and Strong States:** The consequences of a weakened legal order ultimately affect all countries, not only weaker ones.

Conclusion

International law remains an important safeguard against conflict, instability, and disorder. Strengthening multilateral institutions, improving accountability, and ensuring greater respect for international norms are essential for preserving its credibility. Without effective enforcement and collective commitment, the

international system risks moving away from a rules-based order towards one increasingly shaped by power and impunity.

Question for practice:

Discuss the major challenges facing international law in the contemporary world and their implications for the rules-based international order.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Supreme Court Clarification on Sedition: Implications of the Consent Requirement

UPSC Syllabus: Gs Paper 2- Polity

Introduction

The Supreme Court's **21 May 2026 clarification** allows courts to proceed with pending sedition cases under **Section 124A of the IPC** if the accused has no objection. The decision modifies the protective freeze imposed in **2022** when the constitutional validity of the provision came under scrutiny. While the clarification aims to prevent accused persons from remaining trapped in prolonged trials and appeals, it has also reopened debates on meaningful consent, personal liberty, free speech, and the future of sedition law in India.

Evolution of the Sedition Debate in India

- 1. Colonial Origin of Sedition Law:** Section 124A was introduced in 1898 during colonial rule and existed even before the Constitution came into force. The provision has long been criticised for its colonial character.
- 2. Use Against Dissent:** The sedition law has often been used by the State to suppress dissent and criticism. This led to concerns about its compatibility with democratic values.
- 3. Recognition of Misuse:** In May 2022, the Supreme Court acknowledged the widespread misuse of Section 124A. The Court observed that the provision had become a source of unnecessary hardship for citizens.
- 4. Government's Reconsideration Promise:** The Union government informed the Court that it would re-examine and reconsider the provision. The move was linked to efforts to remove outdated colonial laws and practices.
- 5. Impact on Free Speech:** The Court accepted that Section 124A had a "chilling effect" on free speech. The possibility of life imprisonment under the provision increased concerns about restrictions on expression.
- 6. Need for Laws to Evolve:** The Supreme Court linked its 2022 position on Section 124A to its judgment in *I.R. Coelho v. State of Tamil Nadu*, which held that law must keep pace with the "march of time." This reinforced the view that a colonial-era provision like sedition requires fresh constitutional scrutiny in contemporary India.

7. **Shift to Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita:** With the implementation of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) in 2024, Parliament replaced Section 124A with Section 152, creating a new debate on state security and free speech.

Supreme Court's 2026 Clarification

1. **Consent-Based Continuation of Cases:** The Court clarified that pending sedition proceedings can continue if the accused has no objection. Courts can decide such cases on merits and according to law.
2. **Modification of the 2022 Freeze:** The 2022 order had kept all pending trials, appeals, and proceedings under Section 124A in abeyance. The clarification creates an exception based on the accused's consent.
3. **No General Revival of Sedition Cases:** The order does not restart all sedition prosecutions. Proceedings can move forward only when the accused agrees.
4. **Retention of Existing Protections:** If an accused refuses consent, the safeguards granted under the 2022 order continue to operate. The State cannot force proceedings to resume.
5. **Application to Pending Trials and Appeals:** The clarification covers both trial-stage and appellate-stage proceedings. It allows courts to hear matters that were stalled because of the stay.
6. **Response to Cases Stuck in Limbo:** The Court acted in a situation where accused persons were unable to obtain decisions on their pending cases because of the blanket freeze.
7. **Accused's Choice Made Central:** The continuation of proceedings now depends on the wishes of the accused. Consent has become the key condition for moving forward.

Arguments Supporting the Clarification

1. **Protection of Speedy Trial Rights:** The clarification seeks to prevent accused persons from remaining stuck in legal limbo. It allows them to pursue timely adjudication.
2. **Opportunity to Seek Acquittal:** Some accused persons may prefer a trial to continue so that they can obtain an acquittal rather than wait indefinitely.
3. **Access to Appellate Remedies:** Convicted persons can now pursue appeals and seek judicial review of convictions without prolonged delay.
4. **Reduction of Liberty Deprivation:** Long delays in hearings can extend the loss of personal liberty. Continuing proceedings may help reduce this burden.
5. **Benefit in Multi-Charge Cases:** Many cases involve offences under laws such as the UAPA, the Arms Act, or public-order provisions. A complete freeze could delay adjudication of all charges.
6. **Prevention of Procedural Hardship:** A protective order can become burdensome when it delays adjudication for years. The clarification addresses this unintended consequence.

7. **Restoration of Agency to the Accused:** The decision allows accused persons to decide whether waiting or proceeding better serves their interests

Concerns Regarding the Consent Requirement

1. **Possibility of Coerced Consent:** An accused person may agree to proceedings because the alternative is indefinite delay. Such consent may not always be genuinely voluntary.
2. **Impact on Prisoners in Long Custody:** Individuals who have spent years in prison may feel compelled to accept a trial simply to obtain a verdict.
3. **Unequal Access to Justice:** Wealthier accused persons may secure bail and wait outside prison. Poorer prisoners may face greater pressure to consent.
4. **Conflict with Bail-Oriented Approach:** Critics argue that restoring proceedings without a stronger presumption of bail may weaken protection of personal liberty.
5. **Burden Shifted to Accused Persons:** The constitutional uncertainty surrounding sedition remains unresolved. The practical burden of dealing with that uncertainty now falls on accused persons.
6. **Risk of Prolonged Constitutional Ambiguity:** If pending cases can continue, pressure to resolve the constitutional validity of sedition may decrease.
7. **Effect on Free Speech Concerns:** Critics argue that allowing proceedings to continue may weaken the protection that the 2022 stay provided against the chilling effect of sedition charges.

Continuing Constitutional and Legal Uncertainty

1. **Challenge to Section 124A Remains Pending:** The constitutional validity of Section 124A is still under challenge in *S.G. Vombatkere v. Union of India*.
2. **Fundamental Rights Questions:** Petitioners argue that the provision violates rights relating to free speech, personal liberty, life, and equality before law.
3. **Unresolved Position of Kedar Nath Judgment:** The Court has not yet reconsidered the continued relevance of *Kedar Nath Singh (1962)*, which upheld sedition as a reasonable restriction on speech.
4. **Reference to a Larger Bench:** In September 2023, the constitutional challenge was referred to a larger Bench. A seven-judge Bench is yet to be constituted.
5. **Judicial Review of Section 152 BNS:** The Court has also agreed to examine challenges to Section 152 of the BNS, which critics view as a broader version of sedition.
6. **Parliament's Independent Legislative Power:** The Court observed that the government's promise to reconsider Section 124A cannot prevent Parliament from enacting a new law.

7. **Sedition's Continuing Afterlife:** Although Section 124A no longer applies to fresh offences, older prosecutions remain active and require judicial resolution.

Conclusion

The Supreme Court's clarification provides a way out of prolonged procedural delays and restores choice to accused persons. However, **meaningful consent, personal liberty, and equality before law** remain major concerns. The constitutional validity of **Section 124A** and the scrutiny of **Section 152 BNS** are still pending. Until these questions are finally resolved, the debate over sedition, dissent, and free speech will continue.

Question for practice:

Examine the Supreme Court's 2026 clarification on pending sedition cases and discuss its implications for personal liberty, free speech, and the constitutional future of sedition law in India.

Source: [The Hindu](#)