



PSIR

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NEWS LETTER

GEOPOLITICS AT GLANCE

Finland Joins Nato

Relevance

☐ Syllabus:

- **PSIR:** Recent Developments in India's Foreign Policy.
- **GS2:** Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora.

Context: Russia-Ukraine War and East West Rivalry.

In News: Finland joined NATO on April 4, marking a definitive shift in Europe's post World War II alignment and isolating Russia further.

Finland joined NATO on April 4, marking a definitive shift in Europe's post World War II alignment and isolating Russia further. With this geopolitical development the following questions emerges:

WHAT DOES THE END OF 'FINLANDISATION' MEAN FOR RUSSIA, WEST?

What has pushed Finland to give up its neutrality, what were its relations with Russia before this, and what is the move likely to mean for NATO, Russia, and Finland? We will try to answer some of these questions.

To join the **US-led North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO)**, the small Nordic country, which shares a 1,340-km border with Russia, has ended more than 70 years of military non-alignment — in fact, in the Cold War years, a policy of neutrality between the Soviet Union and the West was known as '**Finlandisation**', and Finlandisation had been one of the options discussed for Ukraine before Russia invaded it.

WHY HAS FINLAND JOINED NATO?

The answer to this is simple — Russia going to war against **Ukraine** has made its smaller neighbours crave the powerful military backing the NATO offers, under whose charter, every member has to defend if any one member is being attacked.

Finland and its neighbour Sweden applied for NATO membership soon after the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Any new applicant has to be approved by all existing members of the alliance, and while Finland is now the 31st NATO member, Sweden's bid is being held up by Turkey and Hungary.

NATO was set up after World War II with the express purpose of containing the Soviet Union. The members of the alliance include: since 1949, the 12 founding countries of Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, the United Kingdom and the United States; Greece and Turkey joined in 1952; Germany in 1955; Spain in 1982; Czechia, Hungary and Poland in 1999; Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia joined in 2004; Albania and Croatia in 2009; Montenegro in 2017; North Macedonia in 2020; and finally, Finland.

FINLAND-RUSSIA TIES

When the Soviet Union was a formidable force, Finland had taken care to not undertake any action that could antagonise its bigger neighbour.

This system was put in place after the Winter War of 1939-40. The Soviets had invaded Finland to keep Leningrad (now Saint Petersburg), which was very close to the Finnish border, safe during World War II. However, the small and poorly equipped Finland army gave a tough fight, inflicting damages on both the Soviet army and its reputation. The war ended with the Moscow Peace Treaty, where Finland was forced to cede territories to the Soviet Union.

After the World War ended, the Finns stayed away from Western military alliances and respected the Soviet Union's security interests. Even after the Soviet Union collapsed and Finland built closer ties with the West, it stayed out of NATO, which would have been a definite provocation to Russia.

But despite years of peace, Finland has kept itself prepared for an invasion. The country has compulsory military service and imparts regular disaster training. According to The New York Times, its defence spending is 2 per cent of GDP, the target figure demanded by NATO which even member countries like Germany have not reached.

SIGNIFICANCE OF FINLAND JOINING NATO

For Finland, while the country is in a better position in terms of security, it is losing out on the significant trade and tourist revenue it was making from Russia, and from its position as the West's gateway to the East.

Russia has said, as reported by Reuters, that Finland has committed "a dangerous historical mistake that would fray relations with Moscow and undo its status as a confidence-building presence in the Baltic Sea and Europe at large". "This is now a thing of the past. Finland has become one of the small members of (NATO) that doesn't decide anything, losing its special voice in international affairs. We are sure that history will judge this hasty step," a ministry statement said, as quoted by Reuters.

For NATO, the addition of Finland brings in a military trained to repel an attack from Russia, and, by doubling its border with the country, brings it in a better position to station weapons, including missile launchpads, closer to Russia.

For Russia, Finland's move has brought NATO closer to its doors, the very thing it most strenuously opposes, and the prevention of which it had cited as one of the reasons to invade Ukraine.

RELATED ISSUE

TURKEY BLOCKING THE SWEDEN'S NATO ENTRY

IN NEWS: Sweden's path to NATO membership remains blocked by Turkey and Hungary as neighbour Finland officially joined the 30-member alliance on 4th April after its application was ratified in record time.

Analysts do not expect Turkey to ratify Sweden's application until after Turkey's May 14 election at the earliest. Even then, it is unclear what would trigger a change of heart by President Tayyip Erdogan. Hungary is seen following Ankara's lead.

BACKGROUND

Russia's invasion of **Ukraine** in February last year convinced Sweden and Finland to ditch long-held policies of military non-alignment.

Both countries see **NATO**, with its collective defence clause, as the best way to ensure their security.

The majority of NATO members have quickly ratified their applications, arguing that Finland – which shares a 1,300-km (810-mile) border with Russia – and Sweden would strengthen the alliance in the Baltic.

After initial objections, the Turkish parliament gave its approval for Finnish membership.

But Turkey has dragged its heels over Sweden saying it does not take Ankara's security concerns seriously and has not lived up to its side of a bargain, struck in Madrid last year, that laid out a number of issues Stockholm needed to address.

Hungary has followed Turkey's lead in delaying ratification, which must be unanimous.

WHY DOES TURKEY OBJECT TO SWEDISH NATO MEMBERSHIP?

Sweden has criticised Turkey for human rights abuses and over democratic standards, irking politicians in Ankara.

Turkey says Stockholm harbours members of what it considers terrorist groups – a charge Sweden denies – and has demanded their extradition as a step toward ratifying Swedish membership.

Sweden's courts have blocked some expulsions.

In recent weeks, Turkey has objected to protests in Stockholm during which the Muslim holy book, the Koran, was burned and, on a separate occasion, an effigy of Erdogan was hanged upside down. Ankara says these are hate crimes. Sweden says they are covered by freedom of speech laws.

Turkey holds an election on May 14, presenting Erdogan with his biggest political challenge during two decades in power. The NATO issue may help divert voters' attention away from a cost-of-living crisis.

An opposition win – a real possibility – would boost Sweden's chances of a quick accession.

WHY HAS HUNGARY NOT RATIFIED MEMBERSHIP?

Hungary says Sweden has had a hostile attitude to Budapest for years. It is angry about Swedish criticism of Prime Minister Viktor Orban over the perceived erosion of rule of law. Orban denies such erosion. Unlike Turkey, Hungary does not have a list of demands, but says grievances need to be addressed before it can ratify Sweden's accession to NATO.

WHEN WILL TURKEY AGREE TO SWEDISH NATO MEMBERSHIP?

Once the election is out of the way, Sweden's path may be clearer. But there is no time-table and approval is not guaranteed.

Sweden says it has implemented the Madrid agreement – including tougher anti-terrorism laws – and that some of Ankara's other demands are impossible to meet.

Turkey has had previous run-ins with NATO allies and backed down.

"Looking at those earlier incidents, they were resolved by pressure from allies, negotiations and some concessions from allies. My expectation is that the same could be achieved here," Paul Levin, director at the Institute for Turkish Studies at Stockholm University, said.

A shift could come after the election, or Erdogan may want to see further evidence from Sweden that it has listened to Ankara's security concerns. "In that case we are talking perhaps another few months after summer," Levin said. "But it is hard to predict."

IS SWEDEN'S SECURITY THREATENED BY THE DELAY?

Sweden has said its security position is better now than prior to its application to NATO. Sweden has received assurances of support from countries including the United States, Britain and Germany.

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg has said it would be inconceivable that the alliance would not support Sweden if it were threatened.

Sweden already cooperates closely with NATO and integration measures are moving forward. Sweden has a strong air force and a submarine fleet tailored to Baltic Sea conditions – a boost for NATO in the region.

International Monetary Fund (IMF) Bailout

Relevance

☐ Syllabus:

- PSIR: Evolution of International Economic System.

Context: SRI LANKAN Economic Crisis.

In News: Sri Lanka secured a \$3 billion bailout from the International Monetary Fund amid the worst economic crisis the island nation has faced since independence.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) executive board approved a nearly \$3 billion bailout plan for Sri Lanka in third week of March 2023, of which about \$333 million was to be disbursed immediately to alleviate the country's humanitarian crisis.

Meanwhile, **Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif** said the IMF wants his country to fulfil commitments from friendly countries on external financing to release bailout funds. The lender has been negotiating with Islamabad since early February to resume \$1.1 billion funding held since November, which is part of a \$6.5 billion bailout agreed in 2019.

In this context we will try to understand What is an IMF bailout, when is it provided to a country, and what are the lending conditions?

WHAT ARE IMF BAILOUTS?

In a general sense, a bailout means extending support to an entity facing a threat of bankruptcy. Countries seek IMF bailouts when they are facing macroeconomic risks, currency crises and need assistance to meet external debt obligations, to buy essential imports and push the exchange value of their currencies.

According to the IMF website, inappropriate fiscal and monetary policies, which can lead to large current account and fiscal deficits and high public debt levels; an exchange rate fixed at an inappropriate level, which can erode competitiveness and result in the loss of official reserves, and a weak financial system, which can create economic booms and busts are among factors that lead to economic crises. Political instability and weak institutions also can trigger crises, as can insolvent financial institutions.

Both Sri Lanka and **Pakistan** witnessed a sharp rise in domestic prices and the exchange value of their currencies plunged. Currency crises are usually the result of mismanagement of the currency by its central bank. Sri Lanka's economic crisis can also be partly contributed to bad timing, as it saw a fall in the flow of US dollars into the country due a decline of foreign tourists during the **Covid-19** pandemic.

The IMF was set up in 1945 with the aim to bring about international economic coordination to prevent competing currency devaluation by countries trying to promote their own exports. It later went on to become a last resort lender for countries facing severe economic crises.

HOW IS AN IMF BAILOUT PROVIDED?

The IMF lends money to the economies in peril in the form of Special Drawing Rights (SDRs), which is a basket of five currencies — US dollar, Euro, Chinese Yuan, Japanese Yen and British Pound. It can be executed in the form of loans, cash, bonds, or stock purchases.

The lending is done through programs designed according to purpose. According to the IMF, these include standby arrangement, standby credit facility, extended fund facility, extended credit facility, rapid financing instrument, rapid credit facility, flexible credit line, short term liquidity line, precaution and liquidity line, resilience and sustainability facility, staff monitored program, policy support instrument and policy coordination instrument.

FIVE STEPS OF IMF LENDING

1. First, a member country in need of financial support makes a request to the IMF.

2. Then, the country's government and IMF staff discuss the economic and financial situation and financing needs.
3. Typically, a country's government and the IMF agree on a program of economic policies before the IMF lends to the country. In most cases, a country's commitments to undertake certain policy actions, known as policy conditionality, are an integral part of IMF lending.
4. Once the terms are agreed upon, the policy program underlying an arrangement is presented to the IMF's Executive Board in a "Letter of Intent" and detailed in a "Memorandum of Understanding." The IMF staff makes a recommendation to the Executive Board to endorse the country's policy intentions and offer financing. This process can be expedited under the IMF's Emergency Financing Mechanism.
5. After its Executive Board approves a loan, the IMF monitors how members implement the policy actions underpinning it. A country's return to economic and financial health ensures that IMF funds are repaid so that they can be made available to other member countries.

WHAT ARE THE CONDITIONS APPLICABLE TO AN IMF BAILOUT?

Among the conditions laid down for a country seeking financial assistance from the IMF could be certain structural reforms, such as fiscal transparency, tax reforms and reforms in state-owned enterprises. Critics say these reforms can be tough on the public and may be driven by a geopolitical influence, since they are often decided by officials of various countries.

Proponents say these conditions are necessary to ensure successful lending by the IMF, as countries with policies that stem economic growth and stability would not be able to pay back their debts.

Conditions for IMF lending also relate to macroeconomic variables, like monetary and credit aggregates, international reserves, fiscal balances, and external borrowing, as per the IMF.

PROS AND CONS

An IMF bailout ensures the survival of a country amid economic turmoil, also ensuring that essential industries and economic systems remain up and running. The IMF can also provide technical expertise to the affected country on how to implement reforms to strengthen the economy and institutions

On the downside, the IMF's conditions can result in reduced government spending and higher taxes, measures which have been historically unpopular with the people and often resulted in public unrest. It can also create a sense of dependency on external funding, while also harming the country's reputation in the eyes of investors.

WHERE DOES IMF GET ITS MONEY?

IMF funds come from three sources: member quotas, multilateral and bilateral borrowing agreements. Quotas are the IMF's main source of financing, wherein each member of the IMF is assigned a quota, based broadly on its relative position in the world economy.

The IMF's current total resources of about SDR 977 billion translate into a capacity for lending of about SDR 713 billion (around US\$1 trillion).

Besides members of the Paris Club of creditor nations such as the United States, France and Japan, other lenders include China, India, Saudi Arabia, South Africa and Kuwait.

DELAYS IN FUNDING APPROVAL WORRY NATIONS IN NEED

IMF funding is often the sole financial lifeline available to countries in a debt crunch, and key to unlocking other financing sources, with delays putting pressure on government finances, companies and populations.

Sri Lanka waited for over 180 days to finalise a bailout after a \$2.9 billion September staff level deal while Ghana, having defaulted on its overseas debt in December following a preliminary IMF deal, has yet to get board approval 80 days later. For countries such as Sri Lanka facing shortages of food, fuel and medicines as well as painful reforms to alleviate a debt crisis after years of economic mismanagement, the delays can be devastating.

This compares to a median of 55 days it took low- and middle-income countries over the last decade to go from preliminary deal to board sign-off, according to public data from over 80 cases compiled by Reuters.

These delays have been caused by a number of reasons, but debt experts mainly point to the fact that China is still reluctant to offer debt relief in comparable terms with other external creditors. Beijing is the largest bilateral creditor to developing nations, extending \$138 billion in new loans between 2010 and 2021, according to World Bank data.



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103 Years of the Us Joining World War 1

Relevance

Context: 1917- The United States declared war on Germany, joining World War I.

QUOTES AND SCHOLARLY VIEWS

“The world must be made safe for democracy.”

– **President Woodrow Wilson in his address to Congress on April 2, 1917, justifying the US entry into World War I.**

“The U.S. entry into World War I marked a significant shift in global power dynamics, as the country emerged as a major player on the world stage. The war also had profound social and cultural effects, as it disrupted traditional gender roles and sparked debates over civil liberties and free speech.”

– **Michael Kazin, Professor of History at Georgetown University**

On April 6, 1917, the United States officially entered World War I, marking a significant turning point in the global conflict. The decision to enter the war was not taken lightly, as it followed years of neutrality and diplomatic efforts to resolve the conflict through peaceful means.

At the start of the war in 1914, President Woodrow Wilson declared the United States to be neutral and urged American citizens to remain impartial in the conflict. However, as the war dragged on and casualties mounted, public opinion in the United States began to shift towards intervention.

One major factor that pushed the United States towards entering the war was the unrestricted submarine warfare campaign launched by Germany in 1917. German U-boats had been sinking American ships, causing significant loss of life and damage to American commerce. In addition, intercepted communications from Germany to Mexico suggested that Germany was attempting to form an alliance with Mexico against the United States.

In response to these provocations, President Wilson asked Congress to declare war on Germany on April 2, 1917, stating that the world must be made safe for democracy. The declaration passed with overwhelming support from both the Senate and the House of Representatives.

The United States' entry into the war was a significant boost to the Allied Powers, who had been struggling against the Central Powers for years. The United States contributed significant resources to the war effort, including troops, supplies, and financing. The American Expeditionary Forces (AEF), led by General John J. Pershing, arrived in France in 1917 and played a crucial role in the eventual Allied victory.

The war had a profound impact on the United States, both domestically and internationally. The experience of fighting in a global conflict helped to shape the country's identity and cement its status as a world power. However, the war also had significant social and economic consequences, including changes in labor and immigration policies, the rise of the women's suffrage movement, and a shift towards a more interventionist foreign policy.

In conclusion, the United States' entry into World War I in April 1917 was a significant moment in history, marking the beginning of the country's involvement in a global conflict that would shape the course of the 20th century.

Bhutan King Visits India

Relevance

❑ Syllabus:

- **PSIR:** India and South Asia: (a) Regional Cooperation
- **GS2:** Bilateral groupings and agreements.

Context: Bhutan's King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck visited India from April 3-5.

QUOTES:

"India-Bhutan relations are truly unique, and represent a very close partnership between two countries that share a common destiny."
– **S. Jaishankar, Indian External Affairs Minister**

"The India-Bhutan relationship is a model of South-South cooperation and a testament to the power of friendship."
– **Tshering Tobgay, former Bhutanese Prime Minister**

"The India-Bhutan partnership is based on utmost trust, mutual respect and shared values of democracy and development."
– **Narendra Modi, Indian Prime Minister**

"Bhutan has always appreciated India's support and assistance in its development process, and we look forward to further strengthening our partnership."
– **Lotay Tshering, Bhutanese Prime Minister**

"India and Bhutan are not just neighbours, but also natural partners with a shared heritage and common aspirations."
– **S. Jaishankar, Indian External Affairs Minister**

"India is committed to the prosperity and well-being of Bhutan, and we will continue to support the country in its journey towards sustainable development."
– **S. Jaishankar, Indian External Affairs Minister**



Key Highlights of the Meeting

❑ Bhutan's Development Plans:

- The focus was primarily on Bhutanese's Transformation Initiatives and Reforms Process, as well as India's support for Bhutan's development plans, including the 13th Five Year Plan that starts from next year 2024.

- Bhutan is set to graduate from the list of **Least Developed Countries** in 2023 and aims to turn into a developed country with a per-capita income of USD 12,000 in the next ten years.
- ❑ **Credit Facility and Financial Support:**
 - India has agreed to extend Bhutan a third additional standby credit facility and has also discussed financial support for reforms and institutional capacity building, infrastructure and connectivity projects, energy cooperation including hydropower and solar energy projects, as well as space cooperation, including the recent launch of the **India-Bhutan satellite**.
- ❑ **Power Tariff for Hydro-Electric Project:**
 - The Indian government has agreed to a long-pending demand from Bhutan to increase the power tariffs for the Chhukha hydro-electric project, which began operations with India's help in 1986.
 - Furthermore, India has agreed to discuss buying power from the Basochhu hydel project that was built with Austrian support in 2008.
- ❑ **Sankosh Hydel Project:**
 - The two sides will also try to expedite negotiations on the reservoir-based 2,500 MW Sankosh hydel project, which has been stuck for decades due to environmental and cost concerns.
- ❑ **Integrated Check Post:**
 - India is also examining the possibility of setting up the first Integrated Check Post along the India-Bhutan border at Jaigaon and expediting the proposed Kokrajhar-Gelephu rail link project.
- ❑ **Rail and Air Link:**
 - Bhutan is constructing its second international airport at Gelephu, near the border with India, and the rail link project would help build the southern Bhutanese city into a hub for attracting international investment.
- ❑ **Digital Infrastructure:**
 - Cooperation in newer areas beyond the traditional realms of cooperation such as new **STEM-based initiatives**, establishment of digital infrastructure such as the Third International Internet Gateway, integration of Bhutan's DrukRen with India's National Knowledge Network – a key cooperation in the domain of e-Learning, E-library project complementing Bhutan's efforts at digital transformation, e-learning, were also discussed.
- ❑ **Financial Cooperation:**
 - Under Financial Cooperation or Integration, the first phase of the RuPay project was launched, India's **Bharat Interface for Money (BHIM)** was also launched in July 2021.
 - The two sides will also review the implementation of the BHIM app in Bhutan.

What are recent developments in Bhutan-China relations?

1. During an interview, Prime Minister Tshering stated that Bhutan and China have developed mutual understanding and were close to resolving their boundary disputes. Tshering refuted any claims of Chinese incursions in Bhutan's territory, stating that there were no Chinese installations in Bhutan and no intrusion in Bhutan's territory.
2. According to the Bhutanese Prime Minister, Doklam is a tri-junction point shared by India, China, and Bhutan. The responsibility to solve the border problem is not solely on Bhutan, as each country counts for a third. Bhutan is willing to discuss the border dispute as soon as the other two parties are also ready.
3. The two sides have agreed to work simultaneously towards the implementation of all the steps of the Three-Step Roadmap. This roadmap was agreed upon by the two countries in April 2021 to expedite China-Bhutan boundary negotiations.
4. The frequency of Expert Group Meetings will be increased, and both sides will keep in touch through diplomatic channels, as per the agreement between Bhutan and China.
5. In January, Bhutan and China engaged in talks in Kunming as part of an ongoing dialogue on the border issue.

6. The discussions during the Kunming talks mainly focused on Doklam and the areas near the India-Bhutan-China trijunction in the west, as well as the Jakarlung and Pasamlung pasturelands in the north

PRELIMS TITBITS

Indo-Bhutan Treaty of Peace and Friendship, 1949:

- ❑ The Treaty provides for, among other things, perpetual peace and friendship, free trade and commerce and equal justice to each other's citizens.
- ❑ In 2007 the treaty was re-negotiated, and provisions were included to encourage Bhutan's sovereignty, abolishing the need to take India's guidance on foreign policy.

What is the Indian position on Bhutan and Doklam issue?

1. Foreign Secretary Vinay Mohan Kwatra reiterated that Tshering's statements were in line with India's own position on the issue.
2. S Jaishankar, in 2017-18, referred to the "Common Understanding" agreement between the Special Representatives of New Delhi and Beijing. According to this agreement, trijunction boundary points would be finalized in consultation with the third countries involved.
3. India believes that the Chinese actions in Doklam in 2017 were an attempt to unilaterally change the Bhutan-China border. This was a violation of two agreements between Bhutan and China, signed in 1988 and 1998.
4. New Delhi maintains that any agreement between Bhutan and China regarding the border is a sovereign decision of the two countries. Bhutan is aware of India's concerns.
5. There is a close consultation and coordination between the two sides on security issues of mutual interest, as stated in the 2007 Treaty of Friendship.

What is the Chinese stand on Doklam?

1. China aims to move the tri-junction point from Batang La to Gyomochen, further south. This move would violate the 2012 agreement with India and grant China a strategic advantage over India. It would bring China closer to the "chicken's neck" region.
2. Beijing is proposing a land swap with India, offering concessions on disputed territory in the north in exchange for the control of Doklam.
3. China sees Bhutan as a leverage point against India. During the King's visit to India, Beijing renamed places in Arunachal Pradesh and imposed a "freeze" on the visas of two Indian journalists.

What are the concerns of India on recent developments in Bhutan and China relations?

1. If China and Bhutan reach an agreement on their boundary, particularly if it includes Doklam, it would have significant and immediate implications for India's security.
2. India was surprised by Tshering's denial of Chinese incursions into Bhutanese territory, as there are reports of Chinese villages and infrastructure being built in Doklam.

OTHER ISSUES BETWEEN TWO COUNTRIES

1. **Border Dispute:** There are disputes between India and Bhutan regarding the exact demarcation of their border.
2. **Hydropower Projects:** Bhutan has expressed concerns over the environmental and social impacts of these projects, and has also sought greater revenue from them.
3. **Trade Imbalance:** Bhutan is heavily dependent on India for its imports, which has resulted in a trade imbalance between the two countries.
4. **Cross-Border Movement:** Bhutan has placed restrictions on the cross-border movement of Indian workers due to concerns over the potential impact on Bhutan's culture and society.
5. **Political Interference:** Bhutan has accused India of interfering in its internal affairs, particularly during the 2013 elections.

Way Forward

The importance of environmental sustainability cannot be overstated in the context of Indo-Bhutan relations. Both India and Bhutan are blessed with abundant natural resources, and it is imperative that they **work together to preserve and protect these resources for future generations**.

Therefore, it is crucial that India and Bhutan continue to prioritize environmental sustainability in their bilateral relations, and work towards achieving their shared goals of promoting sustainable development and protecting natural resources.

PYQs

1. "The Treaty of Perpetual Peace and Friendship between India and Bhutan needs to be revised with more pragmatic, realistic obligations and responsibilities." Comment (2017, 150, 10)



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Geopolitical Flux in Middle East

Relevance

❑ Syllabus:

- **PSIR:** Recent Developments in India's Foreign Policy.
- **GS2:** Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora.

Context: Saudi Arabia-Iran agree to restore diplomatic ties.

In News: Saudi and Iranian officials held bilateral talks in Beijing that concluded with an agreement to restore diplomatic ties. Ties have been severed since 2016.

Adversaries across the Middle East have been taking steps to mend relations strained by years of tension and conflict, a trend most recently demonstrated **in an agreement between Iran and Saudi Arabia** to reestablish diplomatic ties.

The foreign ministers of Iran and Saudi Arabia met in China for the first formal meeting of their most senior diplomats in more than seven years. Here is how ententes in the region are playing out.

NEW DYNAMIC

Although Iran's nuclear programme remains a source of tension, and violence between Israelis and Palestinians has been surging, diplomacy has eased several of the region's explosive rivalries.

The shift comes amid efforts to boost economic development, and geopolitical moves as US allies question Washington's long-term commitment to the region and as other powers — notably China with its growing trade ties — seek more sway.

"The Arabs, the Iranians, and the Turks are trying to create a grey area where they can all coexist, rather than a region of black and white," said Vali Nasr of the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies in Washington.

Some US allies had concluded their interests are not best served by a highly polarised Middle East, he added. "There is a dynamic in the region that is pushing everyone to the middle."

SAUDI-IRAN

Saudi Arabia and Iran have agreed to reestablish relations in a deal brokered by China. The agreement between leading Sunni Arab power Saudi Arabia and the Shi'ite Islamist government in Tehran could defuse tensions and conflicts such as the Yemen war.

The deal underlines Saudi Arabia's desire for security as Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman focuses on expanding and diversifying the economy. Saudi Arabia has turned to China at a time of strain in its historic alliance with the United States.

Iran, its economy constrained by U.S. sanctions, is meanwhile seeking to undercut Western efforts to isolate it. China is a major trading partner for both Saudi Arabia and Iran.

UAE-IRAN

The United Arab Emirates, also driven by economic interests that hinge on its reputation as a safe business haven, moved to engage with Tehran in 2019, upgrading diplomatic ties in August. Iran has appointed an ambassador to the UAE for the first time since 2016.

TURKEY-SAUDI ARABIA, EGYPT, UAE

Ties soured between Turkey and Saudi Arabia, Egypt and the United Arab Emirates after the Arab Spring uprisings of 2011, when Turkey backed Islamists who were challenging Arab autocrats for power.

Ankara's ties with Riyadh worsened in 2018 when a Saudi hit squad killed Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi at the kingdom's Istanbul consulate. Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan accused the "highest levels" of the Saudi government of giving the orders.

Turkey launched a charm offensive in 2021, resulting in state visits and investment deals at time of deep crisis for the Turkish economy. Saudi Arabia in March agreed to deposit \$5 billion at the Turkish central bank.

Ties are also improving between Egypt and Turkey, which opposed the Egyptian army-led ouster of President Mohamed Mursi of the Muslim Brotherhood in 2013. On March 18, Turkey's foreign minister visited Cairo for the first time in a decade. The better ties have been evident in Libya, where Turkey backs the Tripoli government while Egypt and the UAE support eastern factions. Warmer relations have made it easier for warring Libyan parties to stick with a ceasefire.

QATAR-UAE, EGYPT, SAUDI ARABIA

Egypt, the UAE, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia severed relations with Qatar in 2017 over accusations of Qatari support for terrorism — a broad allusion to Islamist movements, a charge Doha denied.

Saudi Arabia took the lead in rebuilding ties in 2021, declaring an end to the boycott of Qatar. Riyadh and Cairo have appointed ambassadors, while Abu Dhabi and Manama have yet to do so. All but Bahrain have restored travel and trade links.

ISRAEL-UAE, BAHRAIN, MOROCCO AND SUDAN

Israeli ties with the Arab world broadened significantly in 2020 thanks to the U.S.-brokered "Abraham Accords". The UAE and Bahrain were first to normalise ties, driven by mutual concern over Iran, followed by Morocco.

Sudan and Israel announced in February they had finalised a deal normalising ties, with the signing due to follow a transfer of power from the military to a civilian government in Khartoum. Israel has hoped for normalisation with Saudi Arabia too.

But although Riyadh has signalled tacit support for the Abraham Accords, allowing Israeli national carriers to fly in its airspace, it says any normalisation would require progress in the Palestinians' long-stalled quest for statehood. Separately, Turkey and Israel also last year restored ties that had been strained for more than a decade.

SYRIAN GOVERNMENT-ARAB STATES, TURKEY

Several Arab states that once backed rebels fighting President Bashar al-Assad have restored ties with Damascus. The UAE has taken the lead, partly to counter the influence of Iran, which helped Assad regain most of Syria. The trend has accelerated since the Feb. 6 earthquake, which prompted an outpouring of Arab support for Syria. Sources say Syria and Saudi Arabia have agreed to reopen embassies. Sources have also said Riyadh plans to invite Assad to an Arab summit in May.

Turkey, which long supported Syria's rebels, has also reopened contacts with Assad, encouraged by Russia. Assad has rejected any meeting with Erdogan unless the Turkish military withdraws from northern Syria.

HOW SAUDI IRAN DEAL CAN AFFECT THE MIDDLE EASTERN FLASHPOINTS?

Here is a summary of the situation in parts of the Middle East where Iran and Saudi Arabia have been involved in proxy conflicts and which could be affected by a Beijing-brokered deal to re-establish relations between the two regional powers.

YEMEN

Riyadh intervened in Yemen at the head of a Western-backed coalition in 2015 against the Houthi movement after the Iran-aligned group ousted the internationally recognised government from power in the capital, Sanaa. The war has been in military stalemate for years.

The Houthis, de facto authorities in North Yemen and holding areas of its border with Saudi, have launched repeated missile and drone strikes on the kingdom, which has tried to extract itself. Riyadh and the Houthis last year resumed direct talks, facilitated by Oman, following a U.N.-brokered truce. The truce lapsed in October, but has largely held.

Restored ties between Riyadh and Tehran could facilitate agreement between Saudi and the Houthis. The Yemen war has also been a point of tension with the United States under President Joe Biden's administration, which has slapped restrictions on U.S. arms sales to the kingdom.

SYRIA

Iran has offered military, economic and diplomatic support to President Bashar al-Assad since his crackdown of protests in 2011 left him isolated.

China also provided cover for Syria at the United Nations and kept up economic and political ties with Damascus. Early on, Riyadh backed insurgents trying to topple Assad to weaken Tehran. But as Iran's support helped Assad turn the tide, Saudi backing for the armed and political opposition has waned.

The Saudi-Iranian deal comes as Arab isolation of Assad is thawing. Saudi has said more engagement could lead to Syria's return to the Arab League. Syria's foreign ministry welcomed the deal as an "important step" that could boost regional stability. The opposition's umbrella body did not comment.

Israel, which wants to normalize relations with Saudi, has struck Iran's positions in Syria.

LEBANON

Lebanese politics have been broadly split for years between a pro-Iran alliance led by powerful armed group Hezbollah and a pro-Saudi coalition. In 2021, Saudi and other Arab Gulf states withdrew their ambassadors over what they said was Hezbollah's hold over the state.

The envoys returned but Lebanon has since sunk deeper into financial meltdown and now faces an unprecedented political crisis, with no president for months and a cabinet operating with limited powers.

The rapprochement between Tehran and Riyadh has sparked hope that paralysis could end. Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri said the "positive reading" of the news should prompt Lebanon's politicians to "quickly" elect a president.

Hezbollah said the deal was a good development but cautioned its full implications were still unknown. The group backed Christian politician Suleiman Frangieh for president but sources say Saudi opposes him.

IRAQ

After the toppling of Saddam Hussein in the U.S.-led invasion of 2003, Iran deepened its political, security and economic influence in Iraq, sparking Saudi alarm.

In 2019, Iran launched a drone attack on Saudi oil facilities that flew through Iraqi airspace. The following year, the re-opening of a Saudi-Iraqi border crossing after more than two decades prompted hopes of improved ties.

Baghdad has hosted direct talks between its two neighbours but they stalled last year as Iraq faced a political crisis. Baghdad welcomed the deal as a way to "turn the page". Iraqis hope for a general regional detente that would allow their country to rebuild, instead of being destabilised by U.S., Gulf Arab and Iranian score-settling.

MARITIME SECURITY

Friction between Iran and the West has also played out in Gulf waters, through which much of the world's oil transits.

There were several attacks on tankers there in 2019, after then-U.S. President Donald Trump abandoned a nuclear pact with Iran and re-imposed sanctions on it. Seeking to de-escalate, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi began engaging directly with Iran.

The U.S. Fifth Fleet, based in Bahrain, has seized shipments of weapons suspected to have come from Iran. Iran and Israel have also traded accusations of attacking each other's vessels in recent years.

EXPERT OPINION ON IRAN SAUDI DEAL

NIRUPAMA SUBRAMANIAN: What does the deal mean for China and India

Scene setter for Xi's third term

- The March 9 announcement of the deal came when the National People's Congress, the Chinese parliament, was in session. As expected, the session confirmed President Xi Jinping's third term. The Iran-Saudi deal appeared to usher in with a bang **Xi's new 24-character slogan for China: Be calm, be determined; seek progress and stability; be proactive and go for achievements; united under the Communist Party; dare to fight.**

- ❑ China was clearly “proactive” in pursuing an “achievement” in a region dominated by US influence. Unlike the Palestinian issue, the Saudi-Iran conflict is not an intractable problem. Beijing, new to international peace-making, sensed what observers have described as a “low risk, high impact” opportunity to establish its diplomatic and political credentials in West Asia, a region where it has high economic stakes.
- ❑ Delhi, taken aback at China’s new avatar like the rest of the world, took a week to break its silence on the deal brokered by its principal adversary in a region where it has invested much diplomatic energy over the last decade. “We have seen the reports regarding this. India has good relations with various countries in West Asia and we have abiding interests in the region,” MEA spokesman Arindam Bagchi said in response to a question at the weekly briefing. And in what could be read as a message to China on the LAC problems, he added: “India has always advocated dialogue and diplomacy to resolve differences”.

SHYAM SARAN

- ❑ There is little doubt that while India has been successful in expanding its relations with all key actors in West Asia, it has ended up with diminished relations with Iran. It is not in its interest to see China entrench itself in a country that is strategically important, quite apart from being one with which we enjoy long-standing civilisational affinities.
- ❑ That a long-standing ally of the US — Saudi Arabia — was accepting and acknowledging publicly the mediatory role of China, which is locked in a sharpening, all-round confrontation with the US, cannot be regarded as anything less than a major diplomatic setback for Washington.
- ❑ In one sense, this development should not have come as a surprise. The US is no longer dependent on energy imports from the region. It has itself emerged as a significant exporter of both oil and gas. It remains engaged because its major allies are still dependent on energy supplies from the region. It has a stake in the security of Israel, which also serves as its key regional ally. The US has tried to ensure Israel’s security by encouraging a Sunni coalition based on a projected Iranian security threat. It has promoted the normalisation of relations between Israel and key West Asian countries. The Abraham Accords of September 2020 were a significant diplomatic achievement with the UAE, Bahrain and Israel announcing their intent to establish diplomatic and trade relations. Subsequently, Sudan and Morocco joined the Accord. It was anticipated that Saudi Arabia would eventually follow suit and this would ensure a benign periphery for Israel. These calculations have now been upended.
- ❑ China has leveraged its substantial economic, trade and lately, military relations with both Iran and Saudi Arabia to broker a deal and this cannot but enhance its diplomatic credibility and international posture. Its attempt to outflank the US in West Asia may diminish American pressure and constraint in the Indo-Pacific. The timing is also noteworthy. China’s support for Russia in the ongoing **Ukraine** war had put it on the defensive. This initiative gives some of the initiative back into its hands.
- ❑ What will this mean for India? India has done well in recent years in forging much closer relations with key Gulf states like Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Oman. It has been able to do so even while forging a close strategic partnership with Israel. The Abraham Accords opened the door to the I2U2 initiative which, in July 2022, brought together India, Israel, the UAE and the US in a quadrilateral regional framework, akin to the Quadrilateral (Quad) in the Indo-Pacific. The I2U2 cannot disguise its anti-Iran orientation, though India may not subscribe to this. The Beijing accord, if one may call it that, casts doubt on the relevance and efficacy of the I2U2.
- ❑ India’s western flank is far too important to be accorded second place to the Indo-Pacific.

Xi Jinping's 24 Character Slogan

Relevance

❑ Syllabus:

- PSIR: India and Global Centers of Power.

Context: China's Foreign Policy.

In News: China's President Xi Jinping last week unveiled a 24-character slogan which could become the new guiding principle for Chinese foreign policy.

China's President Xi Jinping has unveiled a 24-character slogan which could become the new guiding principle for Chinese foreign policy. The slogan marks a significant shift from the 24-character strategy espoused by Deng Xiaoping, which for years had steered China.

Xi's slogan is more assertive, suggesting that China considers some of its goals as achieved and is preparing for a larger role on the geopolitical stage.

WHAT IS THE XI SLOGAN, AND HOW IS IT DIFFERENT FROM DENG'S?

Dr Hemant Adlakha, who teaches Chinese at JNU and is Vice-Chairperson and Honorary Fellow at the Institute of Chinese Studies, Delhi points, "Xi's 24-character slogan promises to become China's new foreign policy mantra in the 'New Era', better known as Xi-style Diplomacy in the New Era of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics. The new mantra is the ideological guide map for China to attain "national rejuvenation" in the year 1949."

Adlakha added, "In Chinese, it is 冷静沉着 (Calm and composed), 保持定力 (Maintain determination), 谋定而后动 (Plan before acting), 敢于斗争 (Dare to fight). In English, the 24-characters mean "Be calm; Keep determined; Seek progress and stability; Be proactive and go for achievements; Unite under the Communist Party; Dare to fight". These 24 characters are a very clever rephrasing of the similar 24-character mantra advocated by China's paramount leader and the architect of reforms, Deng Xiaoping. Deng's slogan was to "Observe calm; Secure China's position; Handle affairs (with the US) calmly; Hide our capacity and bide our time; Maintain a low profile; and Never claim leadership (on the world stage)".

WHAT DOES THE CHANGE INDICATE?

"It is possible that by introducing a slightly different version of Deng's 24 characters, Xi is emphasising the need for a new resolve to fight the challenges the Communist Party of China (CPC) is facing vis-à-vis a hostile West led by the United States. Deng's formula had come in the 1980s, when China needed the West for technology and markets," Adlakha said.

CHINA AND THE WEST

Coming a long way from Deng's time, China has emerged as an economic superpower now, holding an upper hand on most bargaining tables. Its relationship with the US, meanwhile, has fractured, with flashpoints increasing over the past few years. In Europe, China has a strong inter-dependence with the bigger economies, but the Russia-Ukraine war is widening the chism between them.

At the National People's Congress that concluded on March 13, 2023, Xi used strong language against the US. As reported by Reuters, Xi "vowed to modernise China's military to make it a Great Wall of Steel, calling on the country to step up efforts to defend national security amid mounting tensions with the United States".

Xi also said that China must achieve greater self-reliance in science and technology, at a time when the US has blocked its access to chip-making equipment and other cutting-edge technologies, reported Reuters.

"Led by the United States, the West has implemented all-round containment to suppress China, bringing unprecedented challenges to China's development," state radio quoted Xi as saying, according to Reuters.

In this backdrop, Xi's mantra of "be proactive and go for achievements" and "dare to fight", from Deng's "keep a low profile" and "never claim leadership on the world stage", assume significance.

An indication of China claiming a bigger role on the world stage came recently, when long-time adversaries Saudi Arabia and Iran announced the restoration of diplomatic ties last week, with Beijing brokering the peace deal.

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India-China Tensions Resurface

Relevance

❑ Syllabus:

- **PSIR:** India and the Global Centres of Power: USA, EU, Japan, China and Russia.
- **GS2:** India and its Neighborhood.

Context: India and China bilateral relationship.

In News: Recently, China renamed 11 places in Arunachal Pradesh.

WHAT ARE THE FACTORS BEHIND THIS CHINESE MOVE?

The Indian Army's successful thwarting of the People's Liberation Army's (PLA) attempt to capture a post at Yangtse in the Tawang sector in December 2022 may have triggered a response from China

This situation is further exacerbated by India's decision to host a G-20 engagement group meeting on innovation technology in Itanagar, which the Chinese embassy snubbed. Unless there is a willingness to engage in dialogue and resolve the border dispute, the relationship between India and China is unlikely to improve.

The relationship between the two nations has been strained, with a lack of productive dialogue for three years since the Chinese troops crossed the Line of Actual Control (LAC) at Galwan in 2020. Despite multiple rounds of talks, political relations have not resumed.

China is not interested in solving the border dispute: China has little motivation to resolve the border conflict with India as it holds significant natural military advantages along the LAC. For example, since the 2020 Galwan clashes, China has constructed new roads, bridges, and helipads on its side. Instead, China desires India to normalize relations and separate the border dispute. This shows that China is not interested in resolving the border dispute and prefers to maintain the status quo.

China wants to have an edge over India: China aims to maintain an advantage over India as it prepares for a worsening strategic rivalry with the US and the Quad. China seeks to have an edge on the border dispute with India. Therefore, India must quickly narrow the border infrastructure gap to prevent further incremental encroachment tactics by China.

HOW HAS CHINA BEEN CONSISTENTLY INVOLVED IN CARTOGRAPHIC DECEPTIONS?

In the early 1950s, China engaged in cartographic deception by laying claims to significant parts of Indian territory. However, Indian leadership viewed these claims as negotiable misunderstandings and trusted Zhou Enlai. In October 1962, India launched the "forward policy" to assert its authority over these territories. At that time, Nehru believed that China would never attack India. In 1959, he criticized British Tibetan expert George Patterson for spreading rumours about China.

Presently, President Xi Jinping continues to follow the old Maoist strategy of using cartography as a weapon to breach the sovereign national boundaries of neighbouring countries. The recent renaming of villages, uninhabited areas, rivers, and hills in Arunachal Pradesh by the State Council is another instance of this cartographic deception.

China's deceptive tactics date back to the 1950s when it claimed a vast area of Indian territory through cartographic manipulation. Although Indian leaders believed these claims to be negotiable, China continued to use cartography as a weapon to breach the sovereign national boundaries of its neighbours.

In response, India launched the "forward policy" to assert its authority over these territories. However, the policy failed when China attacked India in 1962.

Despite these historical events, President Xi Jinping continues to employ the same Maoist strategy of using cartography to gain an advantage over its neighbours. The recent renaming of villages, uninhabited areas, rivers, and hills in Arunachal Pradesh by China's State Council is another instance of China's cartographic deception. If China continues to pursue this strategy, it could lead to further tensions and conflicts in the region.

IS THERE ANY BASIS FOR THE CHINESE HISTORICAL CLIMATE OVER ARUNACHAL PRADESH?

Never in known history did Arunachal Pradesh have any distant contact with China. There was never any Chinese presence there. Tibetans from Lhasa used to travel to Kolkata via Sikkim and sail onwards to mainland China. At most, the Monpas of Tawang spoke Tibetan

The only time in recent history the Chinese army came near Arunachal Pradesh's borders was during the final years of the Qing dynasty in 1910-12. It entered Kham as part of a campaign to quell the rebellion by the Khampas in eastern Ladakh.

Some pro-China historians argued that Tawang was under the rule of Lhasa before 1950. The sixth Dalai Lama was born in Tawang in 1683. But, Tawang remained largely independent of any outside authority. Historical records also refute such claims.

Through the Shimla Agreement between the British and Tibetan governments in 1914, the McMahon Line became the international boundary between India and Tibet. Tawang fell south of the McMahon Line. The McMahon Line is labelled as a "colonial" imposition by the Chinese.

WHAT ARE THE ASPIRATIONS OF LOCAL PEOPLE OF ARUNACHAL PRADESH?

The inhabitants of western Arunachal Pradesh have always remained independent and have never been ruled by any external power. In the early 1900s, when the British reached out to them, they engaged in negotiations. After India gained independence, the focus shifted to developing the region rather than establishing authority. However, the people of the North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA) were more interested in having visible Indian authority over the region.

When China invaded Arunachal Pradesh in October 1962, they made an attempt to win the hearts and minds of the people by emphasizing the shared racial affinity between them. However, the Chinese failed to convince the people of NEFA. After the war, Indian officials returned to the region in early 1963 and were warmly welcomed by the people.

WHAT IS THE WAY FORWARD FOR INDIA?

Quicker execution of Vibrant Villages Programme: The scheme is a well-meaning effort at stopping out-migration from remote border villages to make them natural fortifications. But its success hinges on speed and quality of execution.

Develop a multifaceted approach: Arunachal is important for China's Tibet issue. So, India must start devising a multifaceted approach for future conflicts over the announcement of the next Dalai Lama

Do not assume China is reliable: India should understand that nothing can be assumed in an environment on the Line of Actual Control. So, India has to act with the goal of building deterrence even while making earnest attempts to find peace with China.

Transparency: The government should be more transparent about the nature of its talks so far. It should investigate the causes behind China's actions and the rationale for its constant hostilities. Otherwise, it will be difficult to plan for a future course of action.

PYQs

1. Describe briefly China's One Belt One Road (OBOR)' Initiative and analyse India's major concerns. (2019, 20, 250)
2. The relationship between India and China is characterised by high levels of conflict and cooperation.' Comment. (2008, 20, 200)

India's Outreach to Italy and France

Relevance

❑ Syllabus:

- **PSIR:** Recent developments in Indian Foreign Policy
- **GS2:** Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests.

Context: About India's ties with Italy and France.

In News: The Union minister of commerce and industry went on a visit to Italy and France from 11th-13th April.

ABOUT INDIA'S TRADE RELATIONS WITH ITALY AND FRANCE

Bilateral merchandise trade between India and Italy was \$13.23 billion in 2021-22, while the India-France bilateral trade in goods (excluding military equipment) was at \$12.42 billion.

- ❑ **Top exports from India to France:** Petroleum products, electric machinery and equipment, drug formulations, cotton garments ready-made (including accessories) and aircraft, spacecraft and parts.
- ❑ **Top exports from India to Italy:** Iron and steel, products made of these, aluminium and its products, petroleum products and cotton garments ready-made.
- ❑ **Trade in Goods and Services:** India had a positive trade balance in goods with both these European countries. India's services exports to the two markets include telecommunication services, IT and IT-enabled services, business services and transport services

WHAT ARE THE AREAS OF COOPERATION IN INDIA-ITALY RELATIONS?

Italian businesses have established a significant presence in India, with over 130 companies either sourcing from or partnering with Indian companies. These include well-known brands such as Fiat Auto, Heinz Italia, and Piaggio, which have invested in various sectors such as automobiles, trading, services, machinery, and food processing.

In addition, a Strategic Partnership on Energy Transition between India and Italy was launched in 2021. This partnership presents opportunities for further exploration of joint investments.

WHAT ARE THE AREAS OF COOPERATION IN INDIA-FRANCE RELATIONS?

France is among the top foreign investors in India, ranking 11th in terms of investment. The country has invested in various sectors such as services, cement and gypsum products, air transport, petroleum, and natural gas. Some notable French companies that have established a presence in India include Airbus Group and BNP Paribas.

One of the key components of the strategic partnership between India and France is their defense ties. Recently, India has opened up foreign direct investment in the defense sector, which presents an opportunity for further collaboration between the two countries.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL OPPORTUNITIES IN INDIA'S TIES WITH ITALY AND FRANCE?

1. Italian and French companies are interested in building resilient supply chains and exploring the vast and expanding Indian market.
2. India has the potential to diversify its export basket further, both in terms of goods and services.
3. Collaborative opportunities exist in several areas, such as research and development, technology-based services like health-tech and edutech, and startup and audio-visual sectors.
4. India can serve as a cost-effective post-production hub for audio-visual companies from Italy and France.
5. With its large and growing market, India provides an excellent opportunity for Italian and French manufacturers to test-market and explore their products.

6. India's strengths in organic production, traditional medicine, and practices like Yoga and Ayurveda can be showcased to consumers in Italy and France.

The other areas include:

1. India's emphasis on organic food and millet aligns with the EU's emphasis on promoting a sustainable food system.
2. By identifying skill requirements in the EU and partnering with France and Italy on joint skill development and language training programs, Indian professionals and skilled workers can gain better access to the EU market.

WHAT SHOULD INDIA DO?

To secure a broad-based, balanced, and comprehensive trade agreement with the EU, India must collaborate closely with Italy and France. The support of these two countries is essential in achieving this goal.

An India-EU trade agreement would result in increased trade and investment flows, encourage business-to-business collaborations, diversify and secure supply chains, provide a stable operating environment for businesses, and create employment opportunities in both markets. Therefore, it is crucial for India to work towards finalizing this agreement with the support of Italy and France.

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Mahad Satyagraha

Relevance

□ Syllabus:

- **GS2:** Indian Constitution: Historical underpinnings.
- **PSIR:** Making of Indian Constitution: Different social and political perspectives.

Context: Ambedkar and the foundation event of Dalit Movement.

In March 1927, Babasaheb and his followers drank water from a community tank that was prohibited for them. That December, they burnt the Manusmriti, a powerful symbolic rejection of the caste system

There was no dearth of milestones in the life of Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar. He was the first Dalit to study at Bombay's Elphinstone College, and he went to Columbia University on a Baroda State Scholarship and then to the London School of Economics. He was the chair of the drafting committee of the Constitution of India, and he became the first law minister of independent India. A lawyer, economist, and political philosopher, he wrote numerous books and gave countless speeches.

But Babasaheb's most significant contribution lay in galvanising the movement for Dalit emancipation. He is credited with awakening the Dalit consciousness, which powered the community's bid for political power. It all started with the Mahad Satyagraha of 1927, which was the first major collective protest of the so-called "untouchables" under the stewardship of Ambedkar.

As a grateful nation celebrates the 132nd **birth anniversary** (14th April) of the father of India's Constitution, here is a recall of the Mahad Satyagraha, one of the earlier and among the most significant of milestones in a great life.

Context of the Satyagraha

The events that led to the **Mahad Satyagraha** began to unfold in August 1923. The Bombay Legislative Council passed a resolution moved by the social reformer Rao Bahadur S K Bole, which said "the Untouchable classes be allowed to use all public water sources, wells and dharmashalas which are built and maintained out of public funds or administered by bodies appointed by the Government or created by statute, as well as public schools, courts, offices and dispensaries."

Albeit with reluctance, the Bombay government adopted the resolution in the following month, and issued directions for its implementation. The situation on the ground, however, remained unchanged — upper caste Hindus would not allow the lower castes to access public water sources.

At that point, Ramchandra Babaji More, a Mahad-based Dalit political leader, approached Ambedkar to preside "over a conference of the Untouchables in Konkan", the scholar and civil rights activist **Anand Teltumbde** wrote in his book, Mahad: The Making of the First Dalit Revolt (2016).

Ambedkar at the time was helping Dalits fight against the social evil of untouchability through the Bahishkrit Hitkarini Sabha, the institution that he had founded in 1924.

Ambedkar agreed to More's proposition, and involved himself in overseeing the preparations for the conference, which was to take place in Mahad town in the Konkan (now in Maharashtra's Raigad district) on March 19 and 20, 1927. He conducted meetings with local Dalit leaders, stressed on creating "a wave of awakening" among the lower caste people of Konkan, and directed other organisers to conduct meetings to propagate news of the conference.

"The volunteers collected Rs 3 from each of the 40 villages and also collected rice and wheat to feed the participants at Mahad. It took nearly two months of preparations to hold the Conference. Workers and leaders personally met depressed class people and explained to them the importance of the Conference," historian **Swapna H Samel** wrote in her paper

'Mahad Chavadar Tank Satyagraha of 1927: Beginning of Dalit Liberation Under B R Ambedkar' (Proceedings of the Indian History Congress, 1999).

WHAT HAPPENED AT THE SATYAGRAHA

According to Samel, the Mahad Satyagraha — it was labelled as a “conference”, not Satyagraha, at the time — was attended by around 2,500 “delegates, workers and leaders of Depressed Classes from almost all the districts of Maharashtra and Gujarat”, including “boys of fifteen to old men of seventy”.

On the first day of the conference, progressive non-Dalit leaders also came to the event and addressed the attendees, talking about the civil rights of the Dalits and promising to help them in their struggle.

In his speech, Ambedkar said: “I feel that until we get to eat these pieces of stale bread, our condition may stay the same. So long as the old path exists, nobody will take the new path. By clinging to the old path we have been deprived of our dignity. You ought to think how far you are going to walk that path.

“I want to particularly emphasize that all of us have to speed up our work of creating awakening among our people....Here, this conference is happening only now. You should never let the fire of awakening douse.”

After the day’s proceedings, it was decided that the next morning, Ambedkar, the other organisers and attendees would march to the nearby Chavadar tank, where people from untouchable communities weren’t allowed to draw water from, to implement the resolution — this wasn’t originally planned by the organisers though.

On March 20, Teltumbde wrote, “They began marching in a long procession through the marketplace of Mahad with utmost discipline, shouting slogans of Mahatma Gandhi ki jai (Victory to Mahatma Gandhi), Shivaji Maharaj ki jai (Victory to Shivaji Maharaj), and victory to equality. They stopped at the Chavadar Tank and followed Dr Ambedkar, who entered it and picked up its water with his cupped hands. They all shouted ‘Har Har Mahadev (Victory to Lord Mahadev) and drank its water.”

Soon after the conference came to an end, a priest of a local temple went around the town claiming that Dalits were planning to enter the temple, and asked people to help thwart them. This resulted in a clash in which “20 people were seriously injured and 60-70 people, including 3 to 4 women were wounded”, Teltumbde wrote.

Upper caste Hindus conducted a purification ritual of the tank by “emptying out 108 earthen pots full of gomutra (cow’s urine) into it,” Teltumbde wrote.

But Ambedkar was not to be deterred by the backlash. He announced another conference on a much bigger scale, at the same venue on December 26, 1927, in order to showcase the resolve of the Dalit community. This time, he consciously called it a Satyagraha.

Some upper caste Hindus filed a case in court against Ambedkar and his followers on December 12, claiming that the tank was private property. Two days later, the court issued a temporary injunction, prohibiting Babasaheb and other Dalits from going to the tank or taking water from it until further orders.

MAHAD SATYAGRAHA, DECEMBER 1927

The court injunction could dissuade neither the organisers nor the participants. “With the resolve to do or die, the villagers decided to come to the Conference. From each village, the Satyagrahis, nearly 4,000 people gathered at Mahad,” Samel wrote. On December 24, Ambedkar reached the spot, where the police informed him about the lawsuit, and asked him to postpone the Satyagraha.

In the following days, deliberations were held on whether to continue with the Satyagraha in the changed circumstances. Although most people wanted to go ahead, the Satyagraha was suspended on the advice of Ambedkar. Also, unlike the last time, no water was drawn from the Chavadar tank.

“The basic argument Babasaheb Ambedkar put forth before the conference was that their struggle was against the caste Hindus; the objective to demonstrate the strength of their unity and determination was fulfilled; and if they went for the Satyagraha defying the court injunction, it would be direct confrontation with the state, which they ill afforded, particularly when the District Magistrate had assured them of his sympathies,” Teltumbde wrote.

Still, the Satyagraha did not pass without an event. Ambedkar and his followers burnt the Manusmriti, a powerful rejection of the caste system, and the first time that such symbolic action was undertaken.

Samel wrote: "At 9 PM a copy of Manusmriti was placed on the pier in a specially dug pit in front of the pendal (where the conference was taking place) and was ceremoniously burnt at the hands of the untouchable hermits. The burning of the laws of Manu sent shock waves through the Hindu society and filled the untouchables with awe mixed with apprehensions."

SIGNIFICANCE OF MAHAD SATYAGRAHA

The Mahad Satyagraha is considered to be the "foundational event" of the Dalit movement. This was the first time that the community collectively displayed its resolve to reject the caste system and assert their human rights. Although anti-caste protests had taken place before the Mahad Satyagraha, they were mostly localised and sporadic.

"The difference between (the) Mahad (Satyagraha) and them mainly lay in the organisation and leadership; they lacked elements of organisation and the charismatic leadership of Dr Ambedkar," Teltumbde mentions.

The Mahad Satyagraha was to become the blueprint for organising future movements against the caste system and its practices. It marked an important point in Ambedkar's political journey, catapulting him to the leadership of the downtrodden and oppressed classes in the country.

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Issue of Separate Electorate

Relevance

❑ Syllabus:

- **GS2:** Indian Constitution: Historical Underpinnings
- **PSIR:** Making of Indian Constitution.

The issue of separate electorates reveals fundamental differences between Ambedkar and Gandhi when it came to the issue of caste and their respective ideas of political representation for untouchables.

India has a system of caste-based reservations which sets aside a certain number of seats for people belonging to castes that historically experienced social and economic discrimination. Reservations are applicable in a range of settings, such as higher education, government jobs, and even political office. There are a certain number of seats reserved for scheduled castes (SCs) and (STs) in all legislative bodies, including Parliament.

While the issue of reservations is perpetually being debated, most often among upper castes who do not enjoy its 'benefits', it is important to note that it was not the only mode of affirmative action to have been suggested. The alternative, advocated by Dr BR Ambedkar, was the mode of separate electorates.

In the early 1930s, the issue of separate electorates for lower castes became a source of major debate. On opposite sides of the debate stood two of India's tallest leaders: Dr Ambedkar and Mahatma Gandhi.

In this context we look at the issue of separate electorates, Dr Ambedkar's position, the opposition to it from Gandhi, and how it was eventually rejected in favour of reservations.

Ambedkar's views on caste

Unlike Gandhi, who advocated for reforming the caste system by abolishing untouchability, Dr Ambedkar held a more radical view which rejected the institution of caste itself. He saw the reformism advocated by contemporary upper caste Hindus as inadequate to undo millennia of discrimination. According to him, any revolt against the caste system would only be possible after the oppressed themselves rejected their condition and oppression as being divinely ordained.

Thus, Ambedkar's political programme emphasised on lower castes obtaining political power. "Nobody can remove your grievances as well as you can and you cannot remove them unless you get political power in your hands," he wrote. He suggested separate electorates as the form of affirmative action to empower lower castes.

AMBEDKAR'S ARGUMENTS FOR SEPARATE ELECTORATES

"The depressed classes form a group by themselves which is distinct and separate ... and, although they are included among the Hindus, they in no sense form an integral part of that community," Dr Ambedkar said during the plenary session of the First Round Table Conference in London. "The Depressed Classes feel that they will get no shred of political power unless the political machinery for the new constitution is of a special make," he continued.

AND WHAT WAS THIS POLITICAL MACHINERY HE WAS TALKING ABOUT?

Separate electorates with double vote – one for SCs to vote for an SC candidate and the other for SCs to vote for in the general electorate. While he had previously rejected communal electorates (i.e. separate electorates for Hindus and Muslims), his position changed over time, as he realised that while joint electorates might better help integrate lower castes into the Hindu fold, they would do little to challenge their subservient position.

He felt that the system of unqualified joint electorates "enabled the majority to influence the election of the representatives of the dalits community, and thus disabled them for defending the interests of their oppression against the 'tyranny of the majority'".

GANDHI'S OPPOSITION

Gandhi's opposition to separate electorates was ostensibly based on his view that they "do too little" for lower castes. Gandhi argued that rather than being restricted to just this measly share of seats, lower castes should aspire to rule "the kingdom of the whole world". However, the reality of lower castes' material and social condition was not likely to put them in a position to rule the world.

Gandhi's opposition also stemmed from the fear that separate electorates would "destroy Hinduism" by driving a wedge within the community.

This was especially important for two strategic reasons. First, Gandhi rightly understood how the British had exploited internal divisions in Indian society for their own purposes. Separate electorates, according to him, would only help the British 'divide and rule'.

Second, this was also a time when antagonism between Hindus and Muslims was rising. If separate electorates for lower castes would be announced in addition to those for Muslims, this would significantly reduce the power that caste Hindu leadership enjoyed by breaking the consolidated Hindu fold.

THE YERAWADA FAST AND THE POONA PACT

Thus, on September 16, 1932, while imprisoned in the Yerawada Jail in **Pune**, Gandhi began a fast unto death against the British decision to create separate electorates based on caste. "This is a God-given opportunity that has come to me," Gandhi said from his prison cell, "to offer my life as a final sacrifice to the downtrodden".

This put Ambedkar in a tricky situation. On one hand, he disagreed with Gandhi's political alternative (i.e. reservations) as he believed that even with reserved seats, upper castes would numerically dominate lower castes, blunting possibilities for more radical social change by determining which lower caste candidate to vote for. On the other, Gandhi was the nation's most loved political leader, and if something were to happen to him, the fledgling Dalit movement might bear heavy consequences – including the possibility of violence against defenceless Dalits by upper castes.

Thus, with a heavy heart, Ambedkar succumbed to Gandhi's pressure, inking what would be known as the Poona Pact. The pact secured reservations for lower castes but put the question of separate electorates to bed.

Ambedkar was never satisfied with this outcome. As he would later write in *What Congress and Gandhi have done to the Untouchables*, "The Joint Electorate is from the point of the Hindus to use a familiar phrase a "Rotten Borough" in which the Hindus get the right to nominate an untouchable to set nominally as a representative of the untouchables but really as a tool of the Hindus".

Ambedkar's and Ides of Political Reservation

In the run up for political representation of the oppressed millions of untouchables in India, Ambedkar's efforts, along with those of the nominated untouchable members of the legislative councils in Bombay, Madras and Calcutta Presidencies, bore fruit in the 1920s. The colonial state was forced to nominate two members from among untouchables to the Round Table Conference in 1930 to state their position in the constitutional process which eventually led to the framing of the Government of India Act, 1935.

Ambedkar and his colleague from Madras, Rettamalai Srinivasan, were able to convince the first Round Table deliberations in 1930 to accept elected representation through reserved seats and separate electorate method. When Mahatma Gandhi attended the second Round Table Conference in 1931, he initially opposed any representation by electoral process for the untouchables and later opposed the method of election, separate electorate (which was available to Muslims and other minorities).

Gandhi's opposition to the idea of separate electorate was that untouchables are an intrinsic part of the Hindu society. Gandhi's fast unto death in 1932 resulted in a settlement between Hindus and untouchables called the Poona Pact. The Pact created reserved seats from among the general seats to untouchables and altered the method of election from separate electorates to a two-round election process. The Poona Pact needs a re-reading to understand its misinterpretation by Prakash Ambedkar. Its clause 6 reads: "The system of representation of Depressed Classes by reserved seats in the

Provincial and Central Legislatures (as provided for in clauses (1) and (4)) shall continue until determined otherwise by mutual agreement between the communities concerned in this settlement.”

“Mutual agreement” is the golden rule that governs the extension of reserved seats for untouchables even till now. That is why the reserved seats have continued even after 70 years of India’s Constitution. The method of election to these reserved seats, whether by separate electorate or joint electorate or qualified joint electorate or territorial separate electorate, became a point of attrition between Ambedkar and Gandhi and later, between Ambedkar and Sardar Patel in 1946.

The election results to provincial assemblies in 1937 under the Poona Pact design were analysed by Ambedkar in his book *What Congress and Gandhi Have Done To Untouchables* in 1945 and castigated Gandhi for creating slaves of the elected representatives of untouchables. Ambedkar’s solution to this “slavery” was to return to his idea of a separate electorate. He claimed the same in his March, 1947 representation to the Constituent Assembly, *The States and Minorities*. Ambedkar suggested the initial 25 years of reserved seats and any extension (or otherwise) after 25 years should have the approval of two-thirds of members of Parliament and also two-thirds of scheduled castes members (elected through separate electorate method).

With the arrival of Constituent Assembly, Sardar Patel effectively blocked the idea of separate electorate as a method in the Constituent Assembly proceedings. After the Partition of India and Gandhi’s assassination, Sardar Patel, in December 1948, moved the idea to abolish all the reserved seats in political representation, even though the Constituent Assembly had initially approved it in August 1947. Ambedkar opposed the abolition of reserved seats and threatened to walk out of the Constituent Assembly. After a stalemate of six months, in May 1949, Sardar Patel had to accept the continuation of reserved seats for Scheduled Castes. The clause that was binding on the Constituent Assembly as per its proceedings is “Provided that reservation shall be for ten years and the position would be reconsidered at the end of the period”.

When Patel moved the amended Report, which abolished reservations for all minorities except those of Scheduled Castes in the Constituent Assembly on 25 May 1949 and on the next day when the resolution was approved, Ambedkar did not attend the Constituent Assembly. Jawaharlal Nehru was present. It was the Clause 6 of Poona Pact and the Constituent Assembly Report of August 1947 amended by the May 1949 Report, that holds good on the idea of 10 years or more as a mutually agreed settlement. Dissatisfied with the 10 years clause, Ambedkar suggested other methods such as multi-member constituencies with cumulative vote in 1955, before his death in 1956. This in no way alters Ambedkar’s core idea of representation, which was reserved seats with separate electorates for untouchables and its extension based on mutual agreement. He last stated this in *The States and Minorities*. The reserved seats for Scheduled Castes and Tribes were extended for another 10 years till 2030, unanimously by Parliament in December 2019.

The contention of Ambedkar’s grandson that, “Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar had envisaged reservation for ... just 10 years” is erroneous. Ambedkar’s idea of nation, equality, democracy, his constitutional values and ideology and his unrelenting support for women’s rights have, over the years, found resonance in the entire country. The Ambedkarite movement and constitutional values drive millions of Dalits and youth who want an equitable society. It is not clear whether Prakash Ambedkar was speaking for his party (the Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi) or interpreting Ambedkar. Unfortunately for the legal heirs of Ambedkar, the interpretation of Ambedkarite ideas have moved beyond their canvas.

Understand The Quote: “Caste System is Not Merely A Division of Labour, It Is Also Division of Labourers” – B.R Ambedkar

Relevance

☐ Syllabus:

- PSIR: IPT, Ambedkar views on caste system.

Context: Ambedkar’s criticism of caste system in india

Dr Ambedkar remains one of India’s tallest leaders, the father of the Indian constitution, and an inspiration for generations of Indians continuing his struggle against caste oppression.

Here, we discuss a small excerpt from his classic undelivered speech, Annihilation of Caste. Written in 1936, the speech was meant to be delivered at a meeting of liberal Hindu caste reformers in Lahore. However, in light of its apparent controversiality, the organisers of the meeting revoked Dr Ambedkar’s invitation. Consequently, he self-published the speech which would go on to become arguably his most famous piece of writing.

THE QUOTE

“The Caste System is not merely a division of labour. It is also a division of labourers. Civilised society undoubtedly needs division of labour. But in no civilised society is division of labour accompanied by this unnatural division of labourers into watertight compartments ... it is a hierarchy in which the divisions of labourers are graded one above the other.”

Responding to a commonly stated defence of caste (that it is just another name for division of labour), Dr Ambedkar succinctly yet profoundly describes the uniqueness of the caste system and why it is problematic.

DIVISION OF LABOUR

The basic point of social organisation is to share responsibilities. In other words, living in a society means that no one person has to perform all the tasks required for their sustenance. The burden of these tasks is distributed in society, through what we call ‘specialisation’. Thus, a society has farmers who produce food, factory workers who produce goods, sweepers who clean buildings, cobblers who produce shoes, and so on. Over time, the division of labour has morphed and gained sophistication.

However, in almost all schools of thought, it is considered both necessary and inevitable. The issue surrounding it is rather about how this division is made – “who does what work” – and how remunerations are decided. This is at the heart of many discussions about different bases of injustice, such as class (why are factory workers paid a fraction of the amount a CEO is paid?) and gender (why is women’s labour at home not remunerated?/why are women expected to work at home?).

DIVISION OF LABOURERS

Ambedkar acknowledges that the division of labour is necessary for society. However, caste goes far beyond being just that. This is because of two basic features of the caste system.

First, the caste system works on the principle of heredity – an individual inherits their caste, and thus their occupation, from their father. This means that if the father is a vaidya (doctor), the son must follow in his footsteps regardless of his own talents or proclivities. Through the principle of endogamy (marrying within one’s own community), the society is divided into “clear, watertight compartments”. This is why Ambedkar calls caste a division of labourers rather than labour – there is no scope for mobility and intermixing among castes (through taboos on things like interdining, untouchability, etc.)

If caste were just a division of labour, it would be possible for a sweeper’s son to become a priest and a priest’s son to be a sweeper. But that is not how caste society works. In fact, till this day, stories of social mobility are exceptions rather than the rule.

For instance, as recently as 2021, then Minister of State of Social Justice and Empowerment Ramdas Athwale told the **Rajya Sabha** that 73.31 per cent of all manual scavengers were from Scheduled Castes, who, as per the 2011 census, make roughly 16 percent of the population. Ambedkar calls this an “unnatural” division.

GRADATION OF THESE DIVISIONS

Not only does caste create watertight compartments in society, but it also grades these compartments on what French anthropologist Louis Dumont would call “the notion of purity and pollution”. Every occupation falls somewhere in this vast, often contested, scale. For example, intellectual work, such as reading scriptures, is considered to be the purest while manual work like cleaning toilets is considered to be polluting.

This is the basis of untouchability as well – people of castes who engage in certain tasks considered polluting are thus discriminated against as untouchables. Given that occupation is strictly passed down hereditarily, this gradation of individuals on the basis of the purity of their occupation is the ultimate injustice of caste.

While across the world, there are class divisions, which too treat some occupations as being better than others, the reason why caste is unique is that this treatment has a moral connotation, with certain tasks more virtuous than others. In fact, the justification for the caste system is done on moral terms – people are born into a caste based on the deeds/misdeeds of their previous life.

As Ambedkar writes in the following paragraph, “This division of labour is not spontaneous, it is not based on natural aptitudes... (the caste system) attempts to appoint tasks to individuals in advance – selected not on the basis of trained original capacities, but on that of the social status of the parents.”

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Rules under the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act 1996

Relevance

Context: The PESA Act 1996 has been increasingly becoming an important issue in state elections to garner Tribal votes as has been seen in Chattisgarh and Gujarat Assembly elections.

QUOTE: “People living in fifth scheduled areas were excited as they hoped that the new legislation will ensure their control over their resources, land, mines and minerals, minor forest produce etc. But their reality did not change even after 25 years of this law.”
– Dayamani Barla

The Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act 1996

The PESA Act was enacted in 1996 “to provide for the extension of the provisions of Part IX of the Constitution relating to the Panchayats to the Scheduled Areas”. (Other than Panchayats, Part IX, comprising Articles 243-243ZT of the Constitution, contains provisions relating to Municipalities and Cooperative Societies.)

Under the PESA Act, Scheduled Areas are those referred to in Article 244(1), which says that the provisions of the Fifth Schedule shall apply to the Scheduled Areas and Scheduled Tribes in states other than Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, and Mizoram. The Fifth Schedule provides for a range of special provisions for these areas.

The Panchayat (Extension of the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 or PESA, was enacted by the Centre to ensure self-governance through gram sabhas (village assemblies) for people living in scheduled areas. It legally recognises the right of tribal communities, residents of the scheduled areas, to govern themselves through their own systems of self-government, and also acknowledges their traditional rights over natural resources. In pursuance of this objective, PESA empowers gram sabhas to play a key role in approving development plans and controlling all social sectors. This includes the processes and personnel who implement policies, exercising control over minor (non-timber) forest resources, minor water bodies and minor minerals, managing local markets, preventing land alienation and regulating intoxicants among other things.

How is the PESA Act, 1996 supposed to work?

The PESA Act was enacted to ensure self-governance through Gram Sabhas (village assemblies) for people living in the Scheduled Areas. It recognises the right of tribal communities, who are residents of the Scheduled Areas, to govern themselves through their own systems of self-government, and also acknowledges their traditional rights over natural resources.

In pursuance of this objective, the Act empowers Gram Sabhas to play a key role in approving development plans and controlling all social sectors. This includes the processes and personnel who implement policies, exercising control over minor (non-timber) forest resources, minor water bodies and minor minerals, managing local markets, preventing land alienation and regulating intoxicants among other things.

State governments are expected to amend their respective Panchayati Raj Acts without making any law that would be inconsistent with the mandate of PESA.

Ten states — Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Rajasthan, and Telangana — have notified Fifth Schedule areas that cover (partially or fully) several districts in each of these states.

After the PESA Act was enacted, the central Ministry of Panchayati Raj circulated model PESA Rules.

So far out of the ten PESA States, eight States namely; Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Telangana have framed and notified their State PESA Rules under their respective State Panchayati Raj Acts.

Why are rules under PESA important? What topics will be covered?

PESA rules enable the residents of scheduled areas to strengthen their village-level bodies by transferring power from the government to the gram sabha, a body of all the registered voters of the village. The powers of gram sabhas include maintenance of cultural identity and tradition, control over schemes affecting the tribals, and control over natural resources within the area of a village.

The PESA Act thus enables gram sabhas to maintain a safety net over their rights and surroundings against external or internal conflicts. Without proper rules, its implementation is not possible as it is an exercise in decentralising the power from institutionalised structures, back to the village residents.

The laws, once formed, will give gram sabhas the power to take decisions not only over their customs and traditionally managed resources, but also on the minerals being excavated from their areas. The rules state that the gram sabha will have to be kept informed by any and all agencies working in their village, and that the gram sabha has the power to approve or stop the work being done within the village limits.

The rules also give power to the gram sabhas over management of resources over jal, jangal, zameen (water, forest and land), the three major demands of tribals; minor forest produce; mines and minerals; markets; and human resources. The gram sabha would have the powers to monitor and prohibit the manufacturing, transport, sale and consumption of intoxicants within their village limits. It also has a duty to maintain peace and resolve conflicts arising in the village, while protecting tribal customs and traditions, and encouraging customs like ghotul.

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Suspension of Operations (SoO) Agreement

Relevance

❑ Syllabus:

- **GS2:** Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

Context: The revocation of this SoO agreement by Manipur Government with two tribal insurgent groups.

QUOTES: “People living in fifth scheduled areas were excited as they hoped that the new legislation will ensure their control over their resources, land, mines and minerals, minor forest produce etc. But their reality did not change even after 25 years of this law.”
– Dayamani Barla

In News: The BJP-led Manipur government on March 10 decided to withdraw from the Suspension of Operations (SoO) agreement with two hill-based tribal militant groups, alleging they were “influencing agitation among forest encroachers”.

The state government claimed that a protest rally organised recently, defying Section 144, was influenced by the two groups, Kuki National Army (KNA) and Zomi Revolutionary Army (ZRA).

Subsequently, a team of top bureaucrats, including Manipur Chief Secretary Rajesh Kumar, on March 12 left Imphal for the national capital to meet the Union Home Secretary to discuss issues pertaining to the withdrawal of the SoO.

What are the roots of the Kuki insurgency?

While the Naga movement is the country’s longest-running insurgency, underground Kuki groups, too, have fought the Indian government for an ‘independent Kuki homeland’, spread across Manipur.

The Kuki insurgency gained momentum after ethnic clashes with the Nagas of Manipur in the early 1990s, with the Kuki arming themselves against Naga aggression.

While the two tribes have shared a hostile relationship since colonial times, things came to a head in the 1990s when the Naga-Kuki clashes took place. Land that the Kukis claim to be their “homeland” in the Manipur hills overlaps with the imagined Naga homeland of Greater Nagaland or Nagalim.

As many as 115 Kuki men, women and children were believed to have been killed by the NSCN-IM in Tengnoupal in 1993 — a day still marked by the Kuki as ‘black day’.

What is the Suspension of Operations pact?

There are nearly 30 Kuki insurgent groups in Manipur, of which 25 are under tripartite Suspension of Operations (SoO) with the Government of India and the state. As many as 17 are under the umbrella group Kuki National Organisation (KNO), and eight are under the United People’s Front (UPF).

The SoO pact was signed on August 22, 2008, with the primary objective of initiating political dialogue. Talks are ongoing under AB Mathur, former special secretary of the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), as the interlocutor. The Kuki outfits who were initially demanding a separate Kuki state have come down to a ‘Kukiland territorial council’, which would have financial and administrative powers independent of the Manipur Assembly and government.

What are the terms of the SoO pact?

While the period of the Suspension of Operation agreement is one year, it is extendable according to the progress of its implementation.

To oversee the effective implementation of the SoO pact, a committee called the Joint Monitoring Group (JMG), with representatives from all the signatories, has been formed.

The important terms under the pact are that security forces, including state and central forces, are not to launch any operations, nor can the underground groups.

The signatories of UPF and KNO shall abide by the Constitution of India, the laws of the land and the territorial integrity of Manipur. They are prohibited from committing all kinds of atrocities, extortion, among others.

The militant cadres are to be confined in designated camps identified by the Government. Arms are deposited in a safe room under a double-locking system. The groups are given arms only to guard their camps and protect their leaders.

As a rehabilitation package, the UG cadres living in the designated camps are given a monthly stipend of Rs 5000. Financial assistance is also being provided to maintain the designated camps.

An eviction and a protest

Various departments under the Manipur government, have been sending out notices since August 2022, claiming that 38 villages in the Churachandpur-Khoupum Protected Forest area (in Churachandpur and Noney districts) are “illegal settlements” and its residents are “encroachers”.

While notices were sent to five villages, the government finally set out on an eviction drive in the K Songjang village on February 20. It culminated in clashes between the residents and the police authorities. To protest against the police action, the Kuki Inpi, the apex tribal body of the Kukis in Manipur, called for a peaceful rally on Friday in the Kuki-dominated districts of the state: Kangpokpi, Churachandpur and Tengnoupal. The government clamped down on the protests by imposing **Section 144** but to little avail.

What are the Kuki tribal bodies saying?

The tribal groups have maintained that the protests had nothing to do with the armed groups. Instead, they claimed it was a “peaceful” protest against the dilution of Article 371 C, which confers some administrative autonomy to the tribal-dominated hill areas of Manipur.

Ch Ajang Khongsai, the president of Kuki Inpi, said the peace rally was purely caused by public discontent, over what he said was the state government’s extreme disregard for scheduled Hill Areas and Article 371C of the Indian Constitution. “The peace rally was a result of extreme disrespect and exploitation of tribal land rights in the name of various laws and acts,” added Khongsai.

“They are (not only) clearing land, but are evicting our right to existence and our customs. We tribals are on the brink of extinction,” said Sasang Vaiphei, president of the Kuki Students’ Organisation.

In a memorandum to the Manipur Governor, the Kuki Inpi said that tribes of Manipur have always been the “rightful landholders” since colonial times and that the aggrieved villagers have been settling in those areas pre-Independence, much before the enactment of the Indian Forests Act, 1972, Wildlife Protection Act, 1972, and other Acts the government has cited to carry out the evictions.

What next for the SoO?

This ceasefire agreement was signed with two umbrella groups, the Kuki National Organisation (KNO) and the United People’s Front (UPF), comprising 25 groups – 17 under KNO and 8 under the UPF. A tripartite agreement signed by the Centre, state and the groups, this arrangement meant ending violence and hostilities from all sides and initiated a political dialogue.

Union home minister Amit Shah ahead of the 2022 election promised to “solve” the Kuki demand for a separate ethnic state if the BJP was voted to power. The Kuki groups even officially announced their support for the BJP. The revocation of this SoO agreement by Biren’s government has raised questions about this arrangement. Seilen Haokip, the KNO spokesperson, said, “It will be the Centre’s decision as to what happens next.”

What is Article 356 of the Constitution?

Relevance

☐ Syllabus:

- **GS2:** Federalism
- **PSIR:** Union-State Relations

Context: In 2023 Budget session of Parliament, Prime Minister Narendra Modi recalled in Rajya Sabha that Congress governments at the Centre had dismissed 90 state governments by “misusing” Article 356 of the Constitution, and that former PM Indira Gandhi had “misused” it 50 times to dismiss elected state governments.

Article 356 allows the Centre to dismiss an elected state government and impose “President’s Rule”. Its rampant misuse by almost all central governments has been largely curbed after the Supreme Court’s landmark Bommai judgement of 1994.

Article 356 of the Indian Constitution contains provisions for the imposition of “President’s Rule” in a state, removing an elected government. While the Constitution intended Article 356 to be used only under extraordinary circumstances, central governments, including the Janata government of which members of the BJP’s predecessor Jana Sangh were part, repeatedly used the provision to settle political scores.

Modi’s barb against the Congress came at a time when the Opposition has been demanding a Joint Parliamentary Committee probe into the Hindenburg Research allegations, and Rahul Gandhi has accused industrialist Gautam Adani and his companies of having benefited greatly from Adani’s long-standing proximity to the Prime Minister.

WHAT DOES ARTICLE 356 SAY?

Article 356 empowers the President to withdraw to the Union the executive and legislative powers of any state “if he is satisfied that a situation has arisen in which the government of the state cannot be carried on in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution”.

Whether the constitutional machinery has broken down may be determined by the President at any time, either upon receipt of a report from the Governor, or suo motu.

According to the provisions of Article 356, President’s Rule in a state can be imposed for six months at a time for a maximum duration of three years. Every six months, Parliamentary approval to impose President’s Rule will be required again.

However, in the past, the President’s Rule has been extended for significantly longer periods under specific circumstances. For instance, Punjab was under President’s Rule from 1987-1992 due to the growing militancy.

WHAT ARE THE ORIGINS OF ARTICLE 356?

Article 356 was inspired by Section 93 of the Government of India Act, 1935. This provided that if a Governor of a province was satisfied that a situation had arisen in which the government of the province cannot be carried on in accordance with the provisions of the said Act, he could assume to himself all or any of the powers of the government and discharge those functions in his discretion. The Governor, however, could not encroach upon the powers of the high court.

For the British, this provision allowed for a ‘controlled democracy’ – while providing some autonomy to provincial governments, Section 93 allowed the British authorities to exercise ultimate power when they deemed necessary.

HOW WAS THE PROVISION USED AS A POLITICAL WEAPON IN INDEPENDENT INDIA?

During the decades of Congress’s dominance at the Centre, Article 356 was used against governments of the Left and regional parties in the states.

Until 1959, Jawaharlal Nehru’s government had used the article six times, including to dislodge the first-ever elected communist government in the world, in Kerala in 1959. In the 1960s, it was used 11 times. After Indira came to power in 1966, Article 356 was used seven times between 1967 and 1969 alone.

The 1970s were more politically turbulent. Between 1970 and 1974, President's Rule was imposed 19 times. Post Emergency, the Janata Party government used it in 1977 to summarily dismiss nine Congress state governments. When Indira returned to power in 1980, her government too imposed President's Rule in nine states.

In 1992-93, Prime Minister Narasimha Rao dismissed three BJP governments in the wake of the demolition of Babri Masjid, besides Kalyan Singh's government in UP.

HOW WAS THIS POLITICAL MISUSE OF ARTICLE 356 CURBED?

In 1989, the Centre dismissed the S R Bommai government in Karnataka. In its judgement in the landmark S. R. Bommai v. Union of India case, the Supreme Court discussed the provisions of Article 356 at length.

A nine-judge Bench in its decision in 1994 noted the specific instances when President's Rule can be imposed and when it cannot.

The court held that Article 356 can be invoked in situations of the physical breakdown of the government or when there is a 'hung assembly', but that it cannot be used without giving the state government a chance to either prove its majority in the House or without instances of a violent breakdown of the constitutional machinery.

Since the judgement, the arbitrary use of Article 356 has been largely controlled.

Revisiting the Role of Governor vis a vis Article 356 in Indian Polity so far.

Both the Congress and the BJP, when in power at the Centre, have been accused of misusing the office of the Governor for political purposes. And when in Opposition, both have alleged murder of democracy and the Constitution.

The role of Governors in imposing President's Rule in states dates as far back as 1959, when the E M S Namboodiripad government in Kerala was dismissed. The role of Governors in toppling one government and installing another is not new either: in 1967, West Bengal Governor Dharma Vira dismissed the Ajoy Mukherjee government and installed a Congress-supported government with P C Ghosh as Chief Minister.

Governors have also courted controversy by not inviting the single largest party to form the government.

1980s-90s: Congress years

In August-September 1984, Governor Ram Lal installed minister Nadendra Bhaskara Rao as Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh when Chief Minister N T Rama Rao was abroad for a heart surgery. The same year, Sikkim Governor Homi Taleyarkhan dismissed the Nar Bahadur Bhandari ministry.

Both instances were during the Indira Gandhi regime at the Centre.

In 1989, P Venkatasubbaiah's action to dismiss the S R Bommai government triggered a legal battle, which ended up in the landmark Bommai judgement of the Supreme Court of 1994.

Bommai faced a rebellion when an MLA K R Molakery defected and claimed the support of 18 MLAs. The Chief Minister told the Governor that his government enjoyed the majority but Bommai was not given the opportunity to prove it in the Assembly. Instead, Venkatasubbaiah recommended imposition of President's Rule, which was accepted by the Rajiv Gandhi government.

Bommai was in the Janata Party. In 1988 his party had merged with the Lok Dal, forming the Janata Dal, and new members were inducted into Bommai's Ministry.

1990s: United Front

In 1996, Gujarat Governor K P Singh recommended President's rule in the BJP-ruled state. At the Centre was the United Front government headed by H D Deve Gowda.

The crisis for the Suresh Mehta government began after Shankarsinh Vaghela and 40-odd MLAs rebelled. Mehta proved his majority but the session witnessed a bloody clash between MLAs. Citing breakdown of the constitutional machinery, the Governor recommended Central rule which was accepted.

Then came the Romesh Bhandari episode in Uttar Pradesh. In the middle of the 1998 Lok Sabha polls, the Kalyan Singh government wobbled after the 22-member Loktantrik Congress headed by Jagadambika Pal withdrew support. Governor

Bhandari dismissed the government a little after 8 pm, invited Pal to form the government and swore him in as Chief Minister at around 10 pm along with 17 ministers. Kalyan Singh approached the court, which reinstated him and ordered a floor test which he won. Pal became known as the one-day Chief Minister.

2003-13: UPA rule

The Bihar Assembly elections in February 2005 threw up a fractured mandate. With no party in a position to form the government, President's rule was imposed in the first week of March.

Two months later, the NDA claimed it had the support of 115 MLAs. The JD(U) and the BJP had managed the support of some LJP leaders and independents. Governor Buta Singh alerted the President that this could lead to horse-trading and recommended dissolution of the Assembly on May 21. The Union Cabinet of the UPA met at midnight and faxed the Governor's report to President Abdul Kalam who was in Moscow. Kalam approved the recommendation in two hours and the Assembly was dissolved.

The Supreme Court later came down heavily on Buta Singh. In its interim order, it held the dissolution unconstitutional. In its final judgement, it held that the Governor had misled the Centre and pointed out that the Union Council of Ministers should have cross-checked before accepting his recommendation. Singh resigned.

The same year saw Jharkhand Governor Syed Sibtey Razi installing JMM's Shibu Soren as Chief Minister overruling the NDA's claims that it had the support of 41 MLAs in the 81-member House after the elections threw a hung Assembly. The BJP was willing to parade the MLAs. Soren resigned without facing a trust vote after nine days in office and BJP's Arjun Munda was sworn in as the next Chief Minister.

Since 2014: NDA

On March 18, 2016, Congress's Harish Rawat government in Uttarakhand plunged into crisis after nine MLAs joined hands with the BJP, which staked claim to form the government. The next day, Governor K K Paul asked the Chief Minister to prove his majority by March 28.

A day before the trust vote, the Speaker disqualified the nine rebels. The NDA government at the Centre, on the recommendation of the Governor, imposed President's rule the same day without giving Rawat an opportunity to prove his majority. The matter went to court and in April the Uttarakhand High Court quashed the imposition of President's Rule and asked Rawat to prove his majority, which he did.

In 2017, after Assembly elections in Goa, the Congress emerged the single largest party with 17 seats (out of 40) while the BJP had 13. But Governor Mridula Sinha invited the BJP which had cobbled up a post-poll alliance with some regional parties and independents and formed the Government.

In Manipur too, the Congress emerged the single largest party with 28 seats in the 60-member House, but Governor Najma Heptullah invited the BJP first after it submitted a list of legislators supporting it.

In the 2018 elections in Karnataka, the BJP emerged the single largest party but fell eight seats short of the halfway mark out of 224. The Congress dramatically announced a post-poll alliance with JD(S) to keep the BJP out. Governor Vajubhai Vala invited BJP's B S Yeddyurappa and gave him 15 days to prove the majority.

Yeddyurappa was sworn in on March 17, 2020. The Congress rushed to the Supreme Court which curtailed the time given and asked Yeddyurappa to prove his majority on May 19, 2020. Unable to get the numbers, he resigned without taking the floor test.

In Maharashtra, the Assembly elections in October 2019 threw up a hung verdict. With possibilities of formation of a stable government not emerging even 15 days after the results, Governor Bhagat Singh Koshiyari recommended President's rule which was imposed.

The Congress, Shiv Sena and the NCP began discussions and came to an understanding on November 22 to stake claim for formation of a government with Shiv Sena chief Uddhav Thackeray as Chief Minister. But it was BJP leader Devendra Fadnavis who Koshiyari swore in as Chief Minister on November 23 at 8 am, with NCP leader Ajit Pawar as his deputy. This came after the President's rule was revoked at 5.47 am that day. The Governor had submitted a report recommending revocation at 12.30 am.

Preventive Detention-A Roadblock for the Modern Indian State?

Relevance

☐ Syllabus:

- **GS2:** Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.
- **PSIR:** Salient Features of the Indian Constitution.

Context: Recently, two separate cases in the Supreme Court have highlighted the issues with preventive detention laws.

WHAT IS PREVENTIVE DETENTION?

Preventive detention refers to the detention of an individual without a trial or conviction by a court, with the aim of preventing them from committing an offense in the near future, rather than punishing them for a past offense.

The grounds on which preventive detention can be made:

1. Security of the state
2. Maintenance of public order
3. Maintaining essential services and defense
4. Foreign affairs concerning the security of India.

LEGISLATION IN INDIA ON PREVENTIVE DETENTION

The **National Security Act, 1980**, provides for administrative detention for a period of up to twelve months. It is primarily used for preventive detention of individuals who are perceived to be a threat to national security, public order or relations with a foreign country.

The **Conservation of Foreign Exchange and Prevention of Smuggling Activities Act (COFEPOSA), 1974**, is a preventive detention law that allows for the detention of individuals suspected of being involved in activities related to smuggling and foreign exchange violations.

The **TADA (Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act) 1985** was enacted to prevent and control terrorist activities in India. The act allowed for preventive detention of individuals suspected of being involved in terrorist activities. It was repealed in 1995 and replaced with POTA (Prevention of Terrorism Act), which was also repealed in 2004.

ABOUT PREVENTIVE DETENTION CASES IN INDIA

Preventive detention provisions are frequently abused across India, with a common practice of detaining suspects for up to a year to prevent them from obtaining bail. The result is a widespread misuse of these provisions.

The state of Tamil Nadu has recorded the highest number of preventive detentions in the country between 2011 and 2021, largely due to its broad application of the “Goondas Act” to offenders ranging from bootleggers and slum grabbers to cyber-criminals and sex offenders.

WHAT ARE THE OBSERVATIONS OF THE COURT ON PREVENTIVE DETENTION CASES?

The Supreme Court and High Courts have noted that executive officials often fail to follow procedural safeguards when dealing with the rights of detainees. Furthermore, courts have observed that detention orders are often struck down only after several months of detention, and in some cases, only after the full detention period has elapsed.

In Case 1, the court censured the Uttar Pradesh government for invoking the National Security Act in a politically motivated case, highlighting the misuse of preventive detention laws. The court emphasized that the government must not misuse preventive detention and that the detaining authority must have compelling reasons to invoke such laws.

In Case 2, in the *Pramod Singla vs Union of India* case, the Supreme Court remarked that India's preventive detention laws are a colonial-era inheritance that have the potential to be misused. The court observed that such laws are susceptible to abuse and that the detaining authority must exercise restraint while invoking them. The court also noted that preventive detention should be used sparingly and only in exceptional circumstances, and that any infringement of individual liberty must be justified by compelling reasons.

ENRICH YOUR ANSWERS

The Supreme Court in the *Alijiv vs. District Magistrate, Dhanbad* case emphasized that preventive detention does not involve punishing a person for an offense committed by him.

In the *Ankul Chandra Pradhan vs. Union of India* case, the Court clarified that the purpose of preventive detention is to keep the detainee from endangering the state's security, rather than to punish them.

In the *AK Gopalan vs. State of Madras* case, the Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of the Preventive Detention Act and held that Article 22 of the Constitution includes procedural safeguards for preventive detention. The Court concluded that the Act did not violate fundamental rights because it adhered to the procedural safeguards outlined in Article 22(5). These safeguards ensure that every person who is detained under a preventive detention law is informed of the grounds of detention, is afforded an opportunity to make a representation against the detention, and has the right to be defended by a legal practitioner of their choice.

WHAT ARE THE VARIOUS REASONS BEHIND THE COURT SETTING ASIDE PREVENTIVE DETENTION CASES?

Detentions are often overturned, with the most frequent reason being an unexplained delay in addressing the detenu's representations. Other common reasons include inadequate or delayed provision of grounds for detention, illegible document copies, and the government's use of preventive detention laws for trivial reasons.

WHAT SHOULD BE DONE TO LIMIT PREVENTIVE DETENTION?

The court emphasized that the government must follow every procedural requirement in cases of preventive detention and that any lapse in procedure should benefit the detenu.

While the Constitution permits preventive detention, the government should recognize that effective policing and speedy trials are necessary to curb crime, rather than relying solely on unrestricted power and discretion.

Parliamentary Committees-A Holistic Lookup

Relevance

❑ Syllabus:

- **GS2:** Parliament and State Legislatures—Structure, Functioning, Conduct of Business, Powers & Privileges and Issues Arising out of these.
- **PSIR:** Principal Organs of the Union Government: Envisaged role and actual working of the Executive, Legislature, and Supreme Court.

WHAT ARE PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEES?

Parliamentary committees serve the purpose of examining and addressing a range of issues that are beyond the capacity of the legislature to handle directly due to their scope. Additionally, these committees oversee the performance of the executive branch.

There are two types of Parliamentary committees:

1. **Standing committees**, which are either elected or appointed on a regular basis and function continuously, and
2. **Ad hoc or select committees**, which are established as needed and dissolved upon completion of their assigned task.

POWERS AND REPORT

Parliamentary committees derive their authority from Article 105 (on parliamentary member privileges) and Article 118 (on Parliament's power to create rules governing its procedures and business conduct).

The reports submitted by these committees are typically thorough and provide accurate information on governance-related matters.

Bills that are referred to committees are usually returned to the House with substantial improvements. It is worth noting that Parliament is not obligated to follow the recommendations of committees.

IMPORTANCE OF PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEES:

Lawmaking: The Committees engage in a comprehensive examination and evaluation of proposed legislation, which ensures that every law is advantageous to the citizens.

Executive accountability: Parliamentary committees promote executive accountability by scrutinizing public expenditures and various laws.

Better informed discussions: Committees facilitate more informed discussions among members by allowing for a more meaningful exchange of ideas compared to discussions in open Houses, where party positions often take precedence. This enables members to make more informed decisions regarding policies.

Expertise: Committees allow for input and suggestions from various experts on the subject matter of the law, which helps in formulating better policies and laws.

HOW HAS THE PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE EVOLVED WITH TIME?

The establishment of a structured committee system only took place in 1993. Nevertheless, individual committees had been formed for various purposes since independence. For example, the Ad Hoc Committee on the Citizenship Clause was created to deliberate on the nature and extent of Indian citizenship.

In relation to the North-Eastern region, the Northeast Frontier (Assam) Tribal and Excluded Areas Sub-Committee (July 28, 1947) and the Excluded and Partially Excluded Areas (Other than Assam) Sub-Committee (August 18, 1947) were established. Thus, committees have been performing significant work since India gained independence.

At present, the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha have their respective Standing Committees (permanent) and Ad Hoc Committees (need-based). Additionally, Joint Committees, comprising members from both Houses, are also in place.

The government is obligated to present an “Action Taken” report to the House, which allows Parliament to assess the progress made on the committee’s recommendations.

The Business Advisory Committee prepares the complete schedule for both Houses when Parliament is in session. Additionally, committees are responsible for preparing papers laid on the table of the House.

Committees also address issues that are critical from a nation-building perspective. For example, in a 2015 report, the Public Accounts Committee raised several concerns about shipyards that were not discussed in the Lok Sabha. **The committee reports are not binding on the government.**

HOW HAS BEEN THE PERFORMANCE OF PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEES IN RECENT YEARS?

One of the notable recent contributions of a committee was on the Digital Data Protection Bill. After the Puttaswamy judgment, the Justice Srikrishna Committee was established with the mandate of formulating a data protection framework for India. The committee submitted a report in 2018, and based on its recommendations, the Personal Data Protection Bill, 2019 was introduced in the Lok Sabha.

Furthermore, other bills like the Prohibition of Child Marriage (Amendment) Bill, Anti-Maritime Piracy Bill, among others, have also been referred to Parliamentary Committees for further review and analysis.

WHAT ARE THE RECENT CONCERNS WITH PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEES?

In recent times, only a few bills are being referred to Parliamentary Committees for further analysis. For instance, during the 17th session of the Lok Sabha, only 14 bills were referred to such committees.

According to data from PRS, in the 16th Lok Sabha, 25% of the bills introduced were referred to committees, while the percentage was much higher in the 15th Lok Sabha (71%) and 14th Lok Sabha (60%). This indicates a trend of decreasing reliance on expert scrutiny for national legislation.

WHAT IS THE WAY AHEAD?

In the United States, committees have a critical role in the legislative process, and bills are referred to them after introduction for further scrutiny. This allows for modifications to be made, and the revised bill to be voted on by the relevant legislative body.

The Indian Parliament could consider instituting a compulsory referral process for bills to the appropriate committees. It is important to institutionalize such procedures to prevent political considerations from taking precedence over sound law-making practices. By subjecting proposed legislation to expert scrutiny, the Parliament can ensure that bills are well-crafted and serve the best interests of the people.

PYQs

1. Do Department-related Parliamentary Standing Committees keep the administration on its toes and inspire reverence for parliamentary control? Evaluate the working of such committees with suitable examples.
2. What are Parliamentary Standing committees? Why are they necessary? Discuss their roles and functions to bring out their significance.
3. With the help of suitable examples, explain the significance of parliamentary committees for the effective functioning of the legislature.

Uttaramerur Inscription

Relevance

Context: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday (April 14) referred to the Uttaramerur inscription in Kanchipuram, Tamil Nadu, while discussing India's democratic history

An 1,100 years old inscription from Tamil Nadu, built during the reign of Chola king Parantaka I, describes processes of village self-governance.

"India is the world's oldest democracy, it is the mother of democracy. There are numerous historical references to this. An important reference in Tamil Nadu," Modi said. "The inscription found there is like a local constitution for the gram sabha. It tells how the assembly should be run, what should be the qualification of members, what should be the process to elect the members, and how a member would be disqualified."

While Uttaramerur has multiple inscriptions spanning centuries, the most famous one – being referred to by Modi – is from the reign of Parantaka I (907-953 AD). These provide a detailed description about the village's self-governance and have been cited by historians and political leaders alike as evidence of India's history of democratic functioning.

WHERE IS UTTARAMERUR?

Uttaramerur lies in present-day Kanchipuram district, approximately 90 km southeast of Chennai. Today, it is a small town and had a population of roughly 25,000 in the census of 2011. It is known for its historic temples built during Pallava and Chola rule.

The famous inscription from **Parantaka I's** reign is found on the walls of the **Vaikunda Perumal Temple**.

WHAT DOES THE INSCRIPTION SAY?

The inscription gives details of the functioning of the local sabha, i.e. the village assembly. A sabha was an assembly exclusively of brahmins and had specialised committees tasked with different things. The Uttaramerur inscription details how members were selected, the required qualifications, their roles and responsibilities, and even the circumstances in which they could be removed.

APPOINTING REPRESENTATIVES TO THE SABHA

Describing how the sabha shall be constituted, the inscription says, "There will be 30 wards. Everyone living in these 30 wards would assemble and select one representative for the village assembly." It then goes on to describe what the qualifications for such a representative must be. These include ownership of a certain amount of land, having a house, being between the age of 35 and 70 and "knowing mantras and Brahmanas" (from the Vedic corpus). An exception can be made on land ownership if the person has learnt at least "one Veda and four Bhashyas". One must also be "well-versed in business" and "virtuous".

The inscription then lists a number of factors which disqualify someone and their family (all the relations are systematically listed) from consideration. These include, "not having submitted accounts" while previously serving in a committee, committing any of the first four of the five 'great sins' (killing a brahmin, drinking alcohol, theft and adultery), being associated with outcasts, and eating 'forbidden' dishes.

All those eligible and willing would write their names on palm leaf tickets following which, the representative would be chosen on the basis of an elaborate draw of lots, conducted by priests in the inner hall of the building where the assembly meets.

DETAILING RESPONSIBILITIES

The inscription describes a number of important committees within the sabha with their own distinct functions. These include, the garden committee, the tank committee, the annual committee (an executive committee which required prior experience and knowledge to be a part of), the committee for supervision of justice (for supervising appointments and wrong doing), the gold committee (in charge of all the gold in the village temple) and the five-fold committee (its role is unclear in the inscription).

These committee assignments would last for 360 days after which the members would have to retire. Anyone in the committee who was implicated in any wrongdoing, such as forgery or having ridden a donkey (i.e. being punished for a crime), was removed instantly. Also, the inscription emphasises upon the keeping of accounts – any discrepancy can also disqualify members of the sabha.

IS THIS AN EXAMPLE OF A DEMOCRACY?

While the Uttaramerur inscription gives details of local self-governance, on closer inspection, it is far from a truly democratic system. Not only does it restrict sabha membership to a tiny subsection of land-owning brahmans, it also does not have true elections. Rather, it chooses members from the eligible pool of candidates through a draw of lots.

That being said, this does not mean that this inscription should not be cited as a precedent for democratic functioning. The idea of a democracy, as understood today, is a fairly recent phenomenon. The United States, often hailed as the epitome of a liberal democracy, only gave universal adult franchise to its population in 1965.

What the Uttaramerur inscription details is a system of local self-government, outside the direct authority of the king. Furthermore, for all intents and purposes, the inscription is like a constitution – it describes both the responsibilities of members of the sabha as well as the limitations to the authority of these members. If the rule of law (rather than rule by personal diktat) is an essential component of a democracy, the Uttaramerur inscription describes a system of government which follows just that.

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Term in News: Guillotine

WHAT IS THE PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURE OF 'GUILLOTINE'? WHERE DOES THE WORD COME FROM?

What is a guillotine?

A guillotine is an apparatus designed for efficiently carrying out executions by beheading.

It consists of a large, weighted blade that is raised to the top of a tall, erect frame and released to fall on the neck of a condemned person secured at the bottom of the frame, executing them in a single, clean pass. The origin of the exact device as well as the term can be found in France.

The design of the guillotine was intended to make capital punishment more reliable and less painful in accordance with new Enlightenment ideas of human rights. Prior to use of the guillotine, France had inflicted manual beheading and a variety of methods of execution, many of which were more gruesome and required a high level of precision and skill to carry out successfully.

The guillotine is most widely associated with the French Revolution, when it became popular with the revolutionaries meting out capital punishment to members and supporters of the Ancien Regime, including King Louis XVI and Queen Marie Antoinette. It was a method of execution in France until the country stopped capital punishment in 1981.

What does 'guillotine' refer to in legislative parlance?

In legislative parlance, to **"guillotine"** means to **bunch together and fast-track the passage of financial business**. It is a fairly common procedural exercise in Lok Sabha during the Budget Session.

After the Budget is presented, Parliament goes into recess for about three weeks, during which time the House Standing Committees examine Demands for Grants for various Ministries, and prepare reports. After Parliament reassembles, the Business Advisory Committee (BAC) draws up a schedule for discussions on the Demands for Grants. Given the limitation of time, the House cannot take up the expenditure demands of all Ministries; therefore, the BAC identifies some important Ministries for discussions.

It usually lists Demands for Grants of the Ministries of Home, Defence, External Affairs, Agriculture, Rural Development and Human Resource Development. Members utilise the opportunity to discuss the policies and working of Ministries.

Once the House is done with these debates, the Speaker applies the "guillotine", and all outstanding demands for grants are put to vote at once. This usually happens on the last day earmarked for the discussion on the Budget. The intention is to ensure timely passage of the Finance Bill, marking the completion of the legislative exercise with regard to the Budget.

SCHOLARS DIGEST: KNOW YOUR SCHOLAR

NICCOLO MACHIAVELLI (1469-1527 AD)

Italian politician and author. The son of a civil lawyer, Machiavelli's knowledge of public life was gained from a sometimes precarious existence in politically unstable Florence. He served as Second Chancellor, 1498–1512, and was despatched on missions to France, Germany and throughout Italy.

After a brief period of imprisonment and the restoration of Medici rule, Machiavelli embarked on a literary career. Machiavelli's major work, *The Prince*, written in 1513 and published in 1531, was intended to provide guidance for the ruler of a future united Italy, and drew heavily upon his first-hand observations of the statecraft of Cesare Borgia and the power politics that dominated his period. His 'scientific method' portrayed politics in strictly realistic terms and highlighted the use by the political leaders of cunning, cruelty and manipulation. This emphasis, and attacks upon him that led to his excommunication, meant that the term Machiavellian subsequently came to mean scheming and duplicitous. His *Discourses*, written in 1513–17 and published in 1531, provides a fuller account of Machiavelli's republicanism, but commentators have disagreed about whether it should be considered as an elaboration of or a departure from the ideas outlined in *The Prince*.

PLATO (427-347BC)

Greek philosopher. Plato was born of an aristocratic family. He became a follower of Socrates, who is the principal figure in his ethical and philosophical dialogues. After Socrates' death in 399 BCE, Plato founded his

Academy in order to train the new Athenian ruling class, which might be considered the first 'university'.

Plato taught that the material world consists of imperfect copies of abstract and eternal 'ideas'. His political philosophy, as expounded in *The Republic* (1955), is an attempt to describe the 'ideal state' in terms of a theory of justice. Plato's just state was decidedly authoritarian and was based upon a strict division of labour that supposedly reflected different character-types and human attributes. He argued that government should be exercised exclusively by a small collection of philosopher-kings, supported by the auxiliaries (collectively termed the 'Guardians'), whose education and communistic way of life would ensure that they ruled on the basis of wisdom. In his view, knowledge and virtue are one. In *The Laws*, he advocated a system of mixed government, but continued to emphasize the subordination of the individual to the state and law. Plato's work has exerted wide influence upon Christianity and upon European culture in general.

ARISTOTLE (384-322 BCE)

He was a Greek philosopher who made significant contributions to the field of political science. He believed that the state is the highest form of human association and that the purpose of politics is to promote the common good. Aristotle's political theory is grounded in his belief in natural hierarchies and his emphasis on moderation and the pursuit of the mean.

One of Aristotle's key ideas was that the state exists to promote the good life, or eudaimonia, for its citizens. He believed that the state should be organised to promote virtue and excellence in its citizens. This requires a just distribution of goods and opportunities, as well as a system of laws and institutions that promote the common good.

Aristotle also emphasised the importance of natural hierarchies in his political theory. He believed that some people are naturally suited to rule, while others are naturally suited to be ruled. This idea is reflected in his distinction between natural and artificial forms of rule. Natural forms of rule are based on the inherent qualities of the ruler, while artificial forms of rule are based on external factors such as wealth or military power.

Another key aspect of Aristotle's political theory is his emphasis on moderation and the pursuit of the mean. He believed that virtuous behaviour involves finding the right balance between excess and deficiency. This idea is reflected in his concept of the "golden mean," which refers to the idea that virtuous behaviour lies between two extremes.

In conclusion, Aristotle's political theory emphasises the importance of the state in promoting the common good and the pursuit of eudaimonia. His ideas about natural hierarchies and the pursuit of the mean continue to be influential in political science today.

PRELIMS PRACTICE QUESTIONS

- Which one of the following statements correctly describes the Fourth Schedule of the Constitution of India?
 - It lists the distribution of powers between the Union and the states
 - It contains the languages listed in the Constitution
 - It contains the languages listed in the Constitution
 - It allocates seats in the Council of States
- If a new state of the Indian Union is to be created, which one of the following schedules of the Constitution must be amended?
 - First
 - Second
 - Third
 - Fifth
- Which one of the following amendments to the Indian Constitution empowers the President to send back any matter for reconsideration by the Council of Ministers?
 - 39th
 - 40th
 - 42nd
 - 44th
- The 93rd Constitution Amendment deals with the:
 - continuation of reservation for backward classes in government employment
 - free and compulsory education for all children between the age of 6 and 14 years
 - reservation of 30 percent posts for women in government recruitments
 - allocation of more number of parliamentary seats for recently created States
- Which one of the following was not proposed by the 73rd Constitutional Amendment in the area of Panchayati Raj?
 - Thirty percent seats in all elected rural local bodies will be reserved for women candidates at all level
 - The States will constitute their Finance Commissions to allocate resources to Panchayati Raj institutions
 - The Panchayati Raj functionaries will be disqualified to hold their offices if they have more than two children
 - The elections will be held in six months time if Panchayati Raj bodies are superceded or dissolved by the State government
- Given below are two statements, one labelled as Assertion (A) and the other labelled as Reason (R).

Assertion (A) : Reservation of thirty-three percent of seats for women in Parliament and State Legislature does not require any Constitutional amendment:

Reason (R) : Political parties contesting elections can allocate thirty-three percent of seats they contest to women candidates without any Constitutional amendment.

In the context of the above two statements, which one of the following is correct?

 - Both A and R are true and R is the correct explanation of A
 - Both A and R are true but R is not the correct explanation of A
 - A is true but R is false
 - A is false but R is true
- Which of the following are/is stated in the Constitution of India?
 - The President shall not be a member of either House of Parliament
 - The Parliament shall consist of the President and two Houses

Choose the correct answer from the codes given below:

 - Neither 1 nor 2
 - Both 1 and 2
 - Only 1
 - Only 2

8. In the following quotation,
“WE THE PEOPLE OF INDIA, having solemnly resolved to constitute India into a Sovereign Socialist Secular Democratic Republic and to secure to all its citizens: JUSTICE, social, economic and political; LIBERTY of thought, expression, belief faith and worship; EQUALITY of status and of opportunity: and to promote among them all; FRATERNITY assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity and the integrity of the Nation. In our Constituent Assembly this ‘X’ do hereby adopt, enact and give to ourselves this Constitution.”, ‘X’ stands for:
- (a) twenty-sixth day of January, 1950
 - (b) twenty-sixth day of November, 1949
 - (c) twenty-sixth day of January, 1949
 - (d) None of the above
9. Which one of the following schedules of the Constitution of India contains provisions regarding the anti-defection Act?
- (a) Second Schedule
 - (b) Fifth Schedule
 - (c) Eighth Schedule
 - (d) Tenth Schedule
10. The Constitution of India recognises:
- (a) only religious minorities
 - (b) only linguistic minorities
 - (c) religious and linguistic minorities
 - (d) religious, linguistic and ethnic minorities
11. Consider the following statements:
An amendment to the Constitution of India can be initiated by the:
- 1. Lok Sabha
 - 2. Rajya Sabha
 - 3. State Legislature
 - 4. President
- Which of the above statements is/are correct?
- (a) Only 1
 - (b) 1, 2 and 3
 - (c) 2, 3 and 4
 - (d) 1 and 2
12. Which Article of the Constitution provides that it shall be the endeavour of every state to provide adequate facility for instruction in the mother tongue at the primary stage of education?
- (a) Article 349
 - (b) Article 350
 - (c) Article 350-A
 - (d) Article 351
13. What is the primary function of parliamentary committees?
- (a) To amend and pass legislation
 - (b) To oversee the work of the executive branch
 - (c) To conduct inquiries and investigations
 - (d) To hold the President accountable
14. Which of the following is a standing committee of the Lok Sabha?
- (a) Committee on Public Undertakings
 - (b) Committee on Estimates
 - (c) Committee on Subordinate Legislation
 - (d) Committee on Privileges
15. Who is the chairperson of the Public Accounts Committee?
- (a) The Speaker of the Lok Sabha
 - (b) The Leader of the Opposition
 - (c) A member of the ruling party
 - (d) A member of the committee elected by the members
16. Which article of the Indian Constitution deals with preventive detention?
- (a) Article 14
 - (b) Article 19
 - (c) Article 21
 - (d) Article 22
17. In which year was the National Security Act passed?
- (a) 1950
 - (b) 1967
 - (c) 1971
 - (d) 1980

18. What is the maximum duration of preventive detention under the NSA?

- (a) 1 month (b) 3 months
(c) 6 months (d) 1 year

19. Consider the following statements with reference to Parliamentary Committees:

1. There are a total of 24 Departmental Standing Committees:- 8 under Rajya Sabha and 16 under Lok Sabha.
2. Committee on Home Affairs falls under the Rajya Sabha

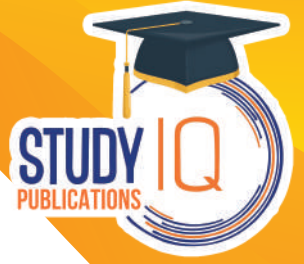
Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only (b) 2 only
(c) Both 1 and 2 (d) Neither 1 nor 2

ANSWERS

1. (d) Fourth schedule allocates seats in the Council of States i.e. Rajya Sabha.
2. (a) First schedule contains names of the States and UTs, that's why it should be amended, if a new state is created.
3. (d) 44th Before the 42nd amendment, Article 74(1) stated that, "there shall be a Council of Ministers with the Prime Minister at the head to aid and advise the President in the exercise of his functions". However, there was a slight ambiguity whether the advice of the Council of Ministers is binding on the President. Forty-second Amendment of the President shall, "act in accordance with such advice". The amendment went into effect from 3 January, 1977. The 44th Amendment (1978) however added that the President can send the advice back for reconsideration once. But if the Council of Ministers sends the same advice again to the President then the President must accept it. The amendment went into effect from 20 June, 1979.
4. (b) According to the 93rd Amendment every Child of the age group of 6-14 years shall have the right to free and compulsory Education. No child is liable to pay any kind of fee/capitation fee/charges. A collection of capitation fee invites a fine up to 10 times the amount collected.
5. (c) Statement given under option (c) is not mentioned in 73rd amendment act. But this norm is applied in Haryana, Rajasthan, MP, Odisha and Andhra Pradesh.
6. (d) Assertion is wrong as reservation for women in Parliament and state legislature would require a constitutional amendment.
7. (b) Statement 1 is correct as per provisions under Article 59. Statement 2 is correct as according to Article 79, Parliament shall consist of the President and two Houses.
8. (b) The Constitution of India was enacted on Nov. 26, 1949 but it was commenced on Jan. 26, 1950.
9. (d) Tenth schedule was added by the 52nd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1985. It provides for anti-defection law.
10. (c) The Constitution of India recognizes religious and linguistic minorities under article 29 and 30 (Cultural and Educational rights). However it does not define the term Minority.
11. (d) An amendment to the Constitution of India can be initiated by either House of Parliament under article 368. It does not require the President's recommendation.
12. (c) Article 350A was inserted by 7th Constitutional Amendment act 1956. It says, it shall be the endeavour of every State and of every local authority within the State to provide adequate facilities for instruction in the mother tongue at the primary stage of education to children belonging to linguistic minority groups; and the President may issue such directions to any State as he considers necessary or proper for securing the provision of such facilities. Article 349 – Special Procedure for enactment of certain laws relating to language; Article 350 – Language to be used in representations for redress of grievances; Article 351 – Directive for development of the Hindi language.
13. (c) To conduct inquiries and investigations
14. (b) Committee on Estimates
15. (d) A member of the committee elected by the members
16. (d) Article 22
17. (b) 1967
18. (c) 6 months
19. (c) Both 1 and 2

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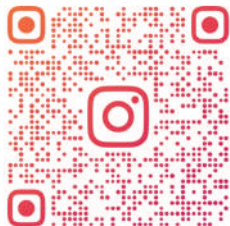
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