

**GS PAPER2- MECHANISMS, LAWS, INSTITUTIONS AND BODIES CONSTITUTED FOR THE PROTECTION AND BETTERMENT OF THESE VULNERABLE SECTIONS.**

**Supreme Court's judgment on the UP Madarsa Act, 2004**

The article discusses the Supreme Court's judgment upholding the UP Madarsa Act, 2004. It protects minority rights, regulates madarsa education, ensures quality education, balances secularism and religion, and rejects misuse of the Basic Structure doctrine for ordinary laws.

**What is the Anjum Qadri and Anr vs Union of India & Ors case about?**

The Supreme Court's decision in *Anjum Qadri and Anr vs Union of India & Ors* is a landmark judgment upholding the constitutionality of the Uttar Pradesh Board of Madarsa Education Act, 2004. This ruling, authored by Chief Justice D.Y. Chandrachud, reverses the Allahabad High Court's March 22 judgment that struck down the Act, bringing relief to thousands of madaras and lakhs of students.

**What Was the Supreme Court's Ruling on the UP Madarsa Act?**

1. **Challenge to the Act:** The Allahabad High Court struck down the Madarsa Act, citing secularism as part of the Basic Structure doctrine. It argued that regulating religious education violates secularism and Article 21A (Right to Education).
2. **Act Upheld:** The Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of the Uttar Pradesh Madarsa Act, 2004, overturning the Allahabad High Court's decision to strike it down.
3. **Basic Structure Doctrine Misapplied:** The Court clarified that the Basic Structure doctrine applies only to constitutional amendments, not ordinary laws like the Madarsa Act. This was supported by the 1975 *Indira Nehru Gandhi* judgment.
4. **Secularism Defined:** Citing *S.R. Bommai v. Union of India* (1994), the Court emphasized that secularism ensures equal treatment of all religions. Recognizing madaras safeguards minority educational rights without violating secular principles.
5. **Article 21A and RTE Act:** The Court rejected claims that madarsa education violated Article 21A. In *Pramati Trust* (2014), the SC exempted minority institutions from the RTE Act's application.

**What is the significance of the ruling?**

1. **Protection of Minority Rights:** The judgment upheld the autonomy of madaras under Article 30, safeguarding the rights of 13,364 madaras educating over 12 lakh students in Uttar Pradesh.
2. **Clarification on Secularism:** It reaffirmed secularism as equal treatment of all religions, citing *S.R. Bommai* (1994), and dismissed the idea that madarsa education violates secularism.
3. **Regulation with Balance:** The Court supported state regulation to ensure education quality without undermining the minority character of institutions.
4. **Distinction Between Laws:** It clarified that the Basic Structure doctrine applies to constitutional amendments, not ordinary laws like the UP Madarsa Act.
5. **Education Quality Concerns:** The Court addressed criticisms of madarsa education quality, comparing it to systemic issues in secular schools. For example, 25% of 14-18-year-olds struggle with basic reading, according to the 2023 ASER report.

**GS PAPER 2- GOVERNMENT POLICIES AND INTERVENTIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT IN VARIOUS SECTORS AND ISSUES ARISING OUT OF THEIR DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION**

**Balancing Privacy and Justice: Aadhaar Access for Identifying Unidentified Bodies**

The article discusses the conflict between privacy rights and the need to identify unidentified deceased individuals. It argues for allowing police access to Aadhaar biometric data in specific cases, emphasizing that this would help uphold the dignity of the deceased and aid investigations.

**What is the Current Policy on Biometric Data Access?**

1. The Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) enforces strict data privacy policies to protect personal information in the Aadhaar database.
2. Core biometric information, such as fingerprints and iris scans, cannot be shared with anyone, as per Section 29(1) of the Aadhaar Act.
3. Section 33(1) allows limited disclosure of certain data, but only by a High Court judge's order.

**What Challenges Arise from this Restriction?**

1. **Identification of Unidentified Bodies:** Police face obstacles in identifying unknown bodies, especially those of economically disadvantaged individuals, migrants, and daily wagers, who often lack identification documents.
2. **Limited Fingerprint Databases:** Police fingerprint databases usually contain records only for individuals with criminal histories. Many states have not yet digitized these records, slowing down cross-referencing efforts.
3. **Inefficiencies in Standard Procedures:** Current methods, such as checking distinctive features, CCTV footage, and missing persons reports, are often inadequate, especially when bodies are decomposed.
4. **Impact on Families and Justice:** Access to Aadhaar biometric data could provide closure to families and assist in homicide investigations, but the current restrictions prevent this. In the U.S., agencies use Deceased Persons Identification (DPI) Services for similar cases, helping to uphold public safety and dignity.

**What should be done?**

1. Amend the Aadhaar Act to allow police access to core biometric data, specifically for identifying deceased individuals, to address cases where other methods fail.
2. Limit access strictly to cases with a registered First Information Report (FIR) regarding unidentified bodies under Section 194 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (formerly Section 174 of the CrPC), and allow approval by the jurisdictional judicial magistrate instead of requiring a High Court order.
3. Draw inspiration from the United States' Deceased Persons Identification (DPI) Services, which help law enforcement identify unknown bodies through fingerprint databases.

4. Ensure requests for Aadhaar data are restricted to verified cases, prioritizing privacy and security.
5. This approach upholds dignity, offers closure to families, and ensures justice, especially for marginalized communities facing unequal access to the criminal justice system.

**GS PAPER2- INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS – EFFECT OF POLICIES AND POLITICS OF DEVELOPED AND DEVELOPING COUNTRIES ON INDIA’S INTERESTS.**

**Tensions between Canada and India over the killing of Hardeep Singh Nijjar**

The article talks about tensions between Canada and India over the killing of Hardeep Singh Nijjar. India accuses Canada of sheltering Khalistani extremists. Cultural misunderstandings, legal issues, and media roles have strained relations. Both countries view the situation differently.

**Why are Canada and India in Conflict?**

1. The diplomatic row began when Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau alleged that India’s intelligence might be involved in the killing of Hardeep Singh Nijjar, a Canadian citizen.
2. India had labeled Nijjar a Khalistani terrorist.
3. In response to these accusations, both nations expelled each other’s top diplomats, worsening Hindu-Sikh tensions in Canada.

**What is the Historical Background?**

1. India has long criticized Canada for being a safe haven for Khalistani extremists.
2. India’s biggest grievance was Canada’s failure to prevent the 1985 Air India bombing, carried out by Canada-based Khalistani extremists.
3. This terrorist act killed 329 people, including children, and was the largest airline bombing before 9/11.
4. Canada’s response to the bombing and subsequent investigations has strained relations between the two countries.

**Do Sikhs in Canada Hold Political Power?**

1. Sikhs make up only 2% of Canada’s population but hold significant political influence due to geographic concentration. At one point, four Sikh ministers served in Trudeau’s cabinet.
2. Many Sikh MPs belong to Trudeau’s Liberal Party, although surveys show most Sikhs in Canada may vote Conservative in the next election.
3. While Trudeau’s government has engaged with Sikh community events where Khalistan flags are displayed, this engagement isn’t solely for political gains.

**Are There Cultural Misunderstandings Between India and Canada?**

Misunderstandings exist on both sides.

1. **In Canada**, the Air India bombing was long viewed as a “foreign tragedy” due to the victims’ Indian heritage, reflecting systemic racism. Many Canadians remain unaware of Khalistani activism because no Khalistani terrorist acts have occurred in Canada since the bombing.
2. **In India**, public opinion assumes that Canadian institutions function similarly to Indian ones, with less understanding of Canada’s guarded police independence and stringent rule of law.

**Why Does Canada Deny India’s Extradition Requests?**

1. India’s extradition requests for Khalistani extremists are often denied due to Canada’s legal standards and concerns about India’s human rights record.
2. Western countries, including Canada, avoid extradition when there’s a risk of prolonged detention without trial.
3. Only six individuals have been extradited to India from Canada between 2002-2020.
4. Notably, India also struggles to extradite individuals like Nirav Modi and Vijay Mallya from countries like the U.K., which are friendly to India.

**What Role Has the Media Played?**

1. **In Canada**, media outlets have been critical of Trudeau’s government for not sharing evidence regarding India’s alleged involvement in Nijjar’s killing. However, they also criticized India’s aggressive stance.
2. **Indian** media has strongly supported the government narrative, sometimes pushing misinformation, such as claiming there were no convictions for the Air India bombing, despite Inderjit Singh Reyat’s 30-year sentence for making the bomb.

**Is Freedom of Expression a Factor?**

1. India is frustrated by Canada’s allowance of Khalistani referendums and parades that glorify violence.
2. In Canada, free speech laws permit these expressions, as long as they do not cross the legal threshold for hate speech.
3. Legal experts in Canada argue that stronger vigilance is needed against explicit hate speech, particularly in cases where threats are made.

**GS PAPER2-GOVERNANCE-ISSUES RELATING TO DEVELOPMENT AND MANAGEMENT OF SOCIAL SECTOR/SERVICES RELATING TO EDUCATION**

**Challenges in India’s higher education**

The article discusses challenges in India’s higher education. Many graduates lack essential skills due to poor training quality. It suggests focusing on teaching over research, establishing joint degree programs between teaching and research institutions, and improving faculty development to enhance education quality and student outcomes.

**What Are the Main Challenges in India’s Higher Education?**

1. **Skill Gaps in Graduates:** Many students graduating from private colleges and newer IITs lack basic industry-required skills, impacting industry and research quality.
2. **Quality of Training:** Faculty often chase papers for rankings, compromising teaching quality. This leads to poor-quality graduates, affecting industry standards and research output.
3. **Faculty Shortages:** Institutions face faculty shortages, worsening as fewer students pursue higher education.

4. **Overemphasis on Research:** Teaching institutions prioritize research output, often participating in predatory publications, diverting resources from teaching.
5. **Limited Access to Research Institutes:** 95% of students study in non-premier institutions, like KIIT University, admitting over 2,000 computer science students annually, unlike IIT Bhubaneswar's 60.
6. **Lack of Collaboration:** Minimal partnerships exist between research and teaching institutions, with few models, like NIT Surat-IIT Bombay, showing success.

**How Can India's Education System Improve?**

1. **Separate Rankings:** Rank teaching institutions based on teaching quality, not research output, to reduce the reliance on low-quality publications.
2. **Establish Joint Degree Programs:** Research and teaching institutions should establish partnerships for pedagogy improvements through "hyphenated degrees." For instance, in India, NIT Surat and IIT Bombay collaborate, allowing select students to spend their final year at IIT Bombay and continue into its M.Tech. program. In the U.S., community colleges partner with research universities, offering similar pathways.
3. **Encourage Faculty Collaboration:** Promote partnerships like the Partnerships for Accelerated Innovation and Research (PAIR) program, launched by the Anusandhan National Research Foundation (ANRF), incentivizing research-teaching institution collaborations.
4. **Develop Centers of Excellence:** Fund government-backed centers focused on pedagogy, similar to research centers, to boost teaching quality across institutions.

**What Role Can Collaboration Between Institutions Play?**

1. **Strengthening Education:** Partnerships between research institutions (which admit about 5% of undergraduates) and teaching institutions (where 95% study) enhance the overall quality of education and research.
2. **Joint Degree Programs:** Establishing agreements allows top-performing students from teaching institutions to spend their final years in research institutions, earning degrees from both and improving their skills.
3. **Curriculum Alignment:** Collaborations help align curricula between teaching and research institutions, ensuring consistency in content and pedagogy for better learning outcomes.
4. **Faculty Development:** Faculty from research institutions can mentor those in teaching institutions through workshops and training, enhancing pedagogical skills.

**How Will These Changes Benefit India?**

1. Improving pedagogy will raise the quality of undergraduate education, helping produce more skilled graduates.
2. This focus on teaching can also improve research quality by relieving faculty of publication pressures.
3. These proposals are applicable to all fields, not just science and engineering. Revitalizing India's teaching institutions will create a stronger talent pool capable of driving research and innovation.

**Patent Abuse in Rare Diseases**

Health groups and treatment activists argue that patent monopolies in rare diseases are restricting access to affordable medication, especially for patients in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs).

**Stop Abuse of Patent Monopolies in Rare Diseases**

- **Roche's Legal Action:** Roche has filed for a permanent injunction to prevent Natco Pharma from producing a generic version of **Risdiplam**, a drug for **Spinal Muscular Atrophy (SMA)**, citing patent infringement.
- **Pricing Disparity:** Roche charges approximately ₹6 lakh per bottle for Risdiplam, while production costs suggest it could be made available at an estimated ₹3,024 annually.
- **Patent Duration:** Roche's patent for Risdiplam extends until **2035**, which limits competitive pricing and access to more affordable generics.
- **Roche's Argument:** Roche emphasises its dedication to healthcare innovation and improving patient lives, while maintaining that protecting its patents is essential to sustain future medical advancements.

**Spinal Muscular Atrophy (SMA)**

- **SMA** is a genetic disorder causing muscle weakness and atrophy.
- **Cause:** Mutation in the **SMN1 gene**, leading to deficient **survival motor neuron (SMN) protein**.
- **Types:** Four types (Type 1–4) based on onset and severity, with Type 1 being the most severe.
- **Symptoms:** Muscle weakness, poor motor function, respiratory issues, and difficulty swallowing.
- **Treatment:** Nusinersen, gene therapy and supportive care.
- **Inheritance:** Autosomal recessive; parents carry one copy of the mutated gene.

**Health Group and Activist Concerns**

- **Public Interest at Risk:** Health groups argue that Roche's monopoly on Risdiplam limits affordable access, posing a risk to public interest and patient health.
- **Impact on Local Healthcare Strategies:** This monopoly may hinder the Indian Ministry of Health and Family Welfare's efforts to utilise domestic production and pooled procurement strategies to bring down treatment costs.

**What is Rare Disease?**

- A rare disease is a health condition of low prevalence that affects a small number of people compared with other prevalent diseases in the general population.

- India accounts for one-third of the global rare disease incidence, with over 450 identified diseases.
- Example-Spinal Muscular Atrophy and Gaucher’s disease, Mucopolysaccharidosis type 1 and Whipple’s disease.

**Issues with Other Rare Disease**

- **Cystic Fibrosis (CF) Drug Access:** Patent restrictions have blocked access to CFTR modulators (elixacaftor/tezacaftor/ivacaftor) for cystic fibrosis treatment in India.
- Vertex Pharmaceuticals, the patent holder, hasn’t registered the drug with the Indian FDA, forcing patients to import it individually at an annual cost of ₹1 crore, making it unaffordable for most.
- Generic production of these modulators has begun in Argentina, but Indian patients cannot access it **due to ongoing patent restrictions.**

**Pros and cons of Patent Monopolies for Rare Diseases**

Pro	Con
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Incentivizes Innovation:</b> Patents provide a strong incentive for pharmaceutical companies to invest heavily in research and development (R&amp;D) for rare diseases, which often have smaller potential markets.</li> <li>• <b>Protects Investment:</b> Patents allow companies to recoup their significant R&amp;D costs, ensuring a return on investment and encouraging further innovation.</li> <li>• <b>Encourages Competition:</b> While patents grant temporary monopolies, they also foster competition among companies to develop better treatments and lower costs over time.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>High Drug Prices:</b> Patent monopolies can lead to high drug prices, making treatments inaccessible to many patients, especially in low-income countries.</li> <li>• <b>Limited Access:</b> Exclusive rights granted by patents can restrict access to life-saving medications, particularly for patients in need.</li> <li>• <b>Barriers to Generic Competition:</b> Patents can delay the entry of generic drugs, which are typically more affordable, further limiting patient access.</li> <li>• <b>Potential for Abuse:</b> Patent holders may engage in anti-competitive practices, such as evergreening, to extend their monopoly and maintain high prices.</li> </ul>

**Way Forward**

- **Price Controls:** Implement stringent price controls on rare disease treatments to make them affordable for patients.
- **Compulsory Licensing:** Utilize compulsory licensing to allow generic manufacturers to produce **affordable versions** of patented drugs.
- **Health Insurance Coverage:** Ensure comprehensive health insurance coverage for rare diseases to alleviate financial burdens on patients.
- **Financial Incentives:** Provide financial incentives to generic manufacturers to encourage the development and production of affordable rare disease treatments.
- **Regulatory Support:** Streamline regulatory processes for generic drug approval to expedite access to affordable medications.
- **Global Collaboration:**
- **International Partnerships:** Foster international collaborations to share knowledge, resources, and clinical expertise in rare disease research and treatment.
- **Global Access Initiatives:** Support global initiatives aimed at expanding access to affordable rare disease treatments, particularly in low- and middle-income countries.

**PRELIM FACTS**

**1. Supreme Court Ruling on Private Property and State Acquisition**

Recently, SC gave judgment on Private Property and State Acquisition.

**About the judgement**

1) A nine-judge Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court ruled that not all private properties can be regarded as “material resources of the community” for use by the State to promote the “common good.”

2) The majority opinion emphasized that allowing the State blanket authority to acquire private assets aligns with outdated economic ideologies, not current economic practices.

The decision highlights India’s shift from socialism towards liberalization and market-based reforms.

**3) Economic Evolution and Constitutional Principles:** The court’s decision reflects India’s economic evolution, with the Constitution framing economic democracy and electoral choices allowing diverse economic policies.

Chief Justice Chandrachud observed that India’s rapid economic growth and resilience are tied to this flexible economic vision, which allows varying approaches rather than strict state control.

**4) Article 39(b) and Defining “Material Resources”:** Article 39(b) of the Constitution directs the State to ensure that material resources are distributed to serve the community’s welfare.

The court clarified that “resources” under Article 39(b) should be context-dependent.

The term encompasses various resources, but acquisition for community use should be evaluated on factors like resource scarcity, the necessity for public welfare and the effects of concentrated ownership in private hands



**5) Significance of the Ruling:** This ruling reinforces the need for proper procedures and justifications before the State can acquire private property, safeguarding private ownership within India's evolving economic landscape.

**2. Russia – Iran Space Collaboration**

A Russian Soyuz rocket successfully launched two Iranian satellites, **Kowsar and Hodhod**, into orbit from the Vostochny Cosmodrome.

**About Russia-Iran:**

- **Strategic partnership:** Moscow and Tehran have been deepening their ties in defense, technology, and energy, planning to establish a “comprehensive strategic partnership” during Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian's upcoming visit to Russia.
- **Military allegations:** Both countries have faced Western accusations that Iran is supplying Russia with explosive drones for use in Ukraine, although both have denied this.

**About Iranian Satellites:**

- **Kowsar:** Developed for Earth observation to support environmental monitoring and agriculture.
- **Hodhod:** Aimed at gathering data for research and development to strengthen Iran's private space sector.
- **Previous launches:** Khayyam and Pars-1, launched in 2022 and 2023, were part of Iran's national space expansion for civilian purposes.

**3. Cia-Cia Tribe**

The Cia-Cia tribe on Buton Island, Indonesia, is using Hangul, the Korean alphabet, to document and preserve their indigenous language, which has survived orally for centuries but lacks its own script.

**About Cia-Cia tribe:**

- **Cia-Cia tribe:** Indigenous community in Buton Island, Indonesia, with a population of around 93,000.
- **Language status:** The Cia-Cia language has existed orally for centuries without a formal script, making it vulnerable to extinction.
- **Preservation efforts:** To prevent language loss, Cia-Cia is being transcribed using Hangul, which aligns closely with its phonetic structure.

**About Hangul Script:**

- **Structure:** Known for its unique phonetic system of circles and lines, representing sounds clearly.
- **Adoption for Cia-Cia:** Introduced in 2009 for Cia-Cia as Arabic script did not suit the language's sounds.
- **Implementation:** Used in schools, textbooks, and public signs in Cia-Cia areas.
- **Cultural concerns:** While some fear cultural influence, others believe the adaptation helps preserve Cia-Cia's uniqueness.

**4. Proba-3 Space Satellite**

India, in collaboration with the European Union, is set to launch the Proba-3 Space Satellite, a solar observatory mission, in December 2024.

**About Proba-3 Space Satellite:**

- **Objective:** Solar observation, specifically focusing on the dynamics of the **Sun's corona**.
- **Collaboration:** Joint mission by the European Union and India, highlighting international cooperation in scientific research.
- **Launch Date:** Scheduled for early December 2024 from Sriharikota, India.
- **Significance:** Marks the third Proba satellite launch by ISRO for the EU, building on past successful launches of Proba-1 and Proba-2.
- **Technology and Science:** Equipped to provide high-resolution images and data on solar corona behavior, advancing space weather research.

**5. Ranthambore National Park**

As many as 25 tigers, out of a population of around 75 in the tiger reserve in Ranthambore National Park (RNP) in Rajasthan, have “disappeared” within the last year.

**Issues in Ranthambore Tiger Reserve:**

- **Overpopulation:** RNP currently holds around 75 tigers in a space suitable for about 40, leading to intense competition.
- **Territorial Conflicts:** Due to overcrowding, many tigers engage in territorial disputes, sometimes resulting in fatal conflicts.
- **Human-Wildlife Conflict:** The proximity of villages in the buffer zone exacerbates human-tiger conflicts, creating challenges for coexistence.
- **Insufficient Monitoring:** Monitoring gaps, as revealed by missing tigers in camera traps, have underscored the need for consistent surveillance.
- **Delayed Relocation:** Slow relocation efforts of villages around RNP have hampered mitigation of human-animal conflicts.

**About Ranthambore Tiger Reserve (RTR):**

- **Location:** At the junction of the Aravallis and Vindhyas in eastern Rajasthan, near Sawai Madhopur.

- **Area:** Spans 1,411 sq. km, one of northern India's largest tiger reserves.
- **History:** Former royal hunting grounds for Jaipur's Maharajas.
- **Geography:** Features steep rocky hills, lakes (Padam Talab, Raj Bagh Talab), and rivers Chambal and Banas, with the Great Boundary Fault.
- **Flora:** Tropical dry deciduous and thorn forests; dominated by Dhok trees and grasslands.
- **Fauna:** Hosts tigers, leopards, sloth bears, hyenas, and over 250 bird species.

**6. Maha Kumbh Mela 2025**

The Maha Kumbh Mela 2025 in Prayagraj will be held from January 13 to February 26, drawing millions of pilgrims to perform sacred rituals and seek spiritual liberation.

**About Maha Kumbh Mela:**

- **Origin:** Rooted in Hindu mythology, the Maha Kumbh Mela began as a pilgrimage tradition thousands of years ago, with early references in Maurya and Gupta periods (4th century BCE to 6th century CE).
- **Cycle & Locations:** Occurs every 12 years, rotating between four locations — Prayagraj, Haridwar, Ujjain, and Nashik — each with its sacred rivers: Ganges, Yamuna, Shipra, and Godavari.
- **Rivers:** Prayagraj hosts the Mela at the Triveni Sangam, the confluence of the Ganges, Yamuna, and the mythical Sarasvati, considered highly auspicious for spiritual cleansing.
- **Tracing the History of Kumbh Mela**
  - **Ancient Origins:** Dates back thousands of years, with early references during the Maurya and Gupta periods (4th century BCE to 6th century CE).
  - **Growth with Hinduism:** Gained importance as Hinduism spread, with Gupta rulers elevating its status as a revered religious gathering.
  - **Medieval patronage:** Supported by dynasties like the Chola and Vijayanagar in the south, and the Delhi Sultanate and Mughals in the north.
  - **Mughal tolerance:** Emperor Akbar allowed Naga Sadhus to lead the royal procession in 1565, symbolizing religious and cultural unity.
  - **Colonial documentation:** British officials, including James Prinsep in the 19th century, recorded its rituals, large gatherings, and socio-religious impact.
  - **Post-independence significance:** Became a symbol of national unity and cultural heritage, recognized by UNESCO in 2017 as an intangible cultural heritage of humanity.
- **Significance:** Recognized as a UNESCO intangible cultural heritage, it represents a quest for spiritual purity, unity, and self-realization, attracting diverse pilgrims, sadhus, and international seekers.



**ANSWER WRITING**

**Q. Independence of the election commission is crucial for Indian democracy. Critically analyse the recent changes in the appointment process of election commissioners and suggest reforms to ensure its autonomy.**

The independence of the **Election Commission (EC)** is fundamental to India's democratic fabric, ensuring **free and fair elections** that reflect the will of the people. As a constitutional body under **Article 324**, the EC is vested with the powers to conduct elections impartially. However, recent changes over the appointment process of **Election Commissioners** have raised questions about the Commission's autonomy.

**Importance of the Independence of the Election Commission**

- **Safeguarding Electoral Integrity:** Independence ensures that the EC can conduct elections impartially without political influence, a cornerstone of **democratic legitimacy**.  
**For example:** The EC's role in enforcing the **Model Code of Conduct** during elections has helped prevent misuse of state machinery by ruling parties, ensuring **level playing fields** for all candidates.
- **Upholding Voter Confidence:** A free and autonomous EC bolsters voter trust, assuring citizens that election results are not manipulated.  
**For example:** The EC's monitoring of **campaign financing** and transparency requirements promotes public confidence by reducing the role of money power in elections.
- **Ensuring Policy Continuity:** A non-partisan EC can implement long-term **electoral reforms** that outlast any one government's tenure, contributing to stability.

**For example:** The introduction of EVMs and later VVPAT machines by the EC demonstrates its commitment to enhancing transparency and efficiency, irrespective of political pressures.

- **Upholding Constitutional Ideals:** Independence ensures the EC's adherence to constitutional principles of **free and fair elections**, as envisioned by India's founders.

**For example:** The EC's proactive stance in curbing hate speech during campaigns exemplifies its commitment to protecting constitutional values in electoral practices.

#### Advantages of Recent Changes in the Appointment Process

- **Increased Transparency:** Involving a **committee** for appointments promotes greater transparency in the selection process, reducing scope for unilateral decisions.

**For example:** The inclusion of the **Leader of the Opposition** in the committee reflects an effort to incorporate diverse perspectives in appointments.

- **Broad-based Representation:** A multi-member committee structure helps in achieving balanced representation, fostering a more accountable EC.

**For example:** With a committee involving leaders from different backgrounds, the EC is better positioned to work independently, aligning with varied public interests.

- **Enhanced Institutional Accountability:** The committee's structure introduces a **checks-and-balances approach**, limiting the centralization of appointment powers.

**For example:** By diversifying decision-makers, the recent changes seek to prevent concentration of power, strengthening the EC's autonomy.

- **Alignment with Judicial Recommendations:** The recent changes are a response to judicial recommendations aiming to improve institutional independence.

**For example:** The **Supreme Court's** directive for a multi-member appointment committee reflects judicial support for balanced representation in the EC.

- **Fostering Public Confidence:** An appointment process with multiple stakeholders enhances public trust in the EC's impartiality and fairness.

**For example:** With visible representation in the appointment process, the public perceives a more robust and transparent EC, crucial for democratic trust.

#### Negatives of Recent Changes in the Appointment Process

- **Increased Political Influence:** Replacing the **Chief Justice** of India with a Union Minister on the committee raises concerns of executive majority in appointments.

**For example:** The exclusion of **judicial oversight** in the process can create perceptions of bias, reducing the EC's credibility in overseeing elections impartially.

- **Reduced Judicial Safeguards:** The removal of the judiciary from the selection committee reduces a key check against political interference, risking impartiality.

**For example:** The presence of the Chief Justice could have provided a **non-partisan counterbalance**, aligning with principles of judicial neutrality.

- **Lack of Bipartisanship:** Having a Union Minister alongside the Prime Minister may tilt the appointment process towards the ruling party, undermining non-partisanship.

**For example:** A lack of **cross-party representation** might lead to appointments perceived as favouring the incumbent government, impacting public perception.

- **Weakened Democratic Spirit:** The change may be viewed as limiting diverse voices in the decision-making process, impacting the EC's democratic mandate.

**For example:** A bipartisan approach in appointments would better align with democratic values, fostering a broader, balanced EC representative of the entire electorate.

- **Potential Erosion of Public Trust:** Perceived politicisation in the EC's appointment process can undermine public confidence, questioning the fairness of elections.

#### Suggested Reforms to Ensure the Autonomy of the Election Commission

- **Parliamentary Approval for Appointments:** Instituting a parliamentary vote for EC appointments can promote greater transparency and bipartisan selection.

**For example:** A **two-thirds majority** requirement for appointments can ensure broader consensus, reflecting a commitment to impartiality.

- **Inclusion of Judicial Oversight:** Restoring the **Chief Justice of India** to the selection committee can add a crucial layer of judicial independence.

**For example:** Judicial participation offers an unbiased perspective, aligning the appointment process with principles of **fairness and transparency**.

- **Fixed Tenure with No Reappointment:** Setting a fixed tenure for EC members without reappointment options can prevent external influence on their decisions.

**For example:** This approach would ensure Election Commissioners focus solely on their duties without concerns of reappointment, promoting **objective decision-making**.

- **Enhanced Qualification Criteria:** Defining specific qualifications and experience criteria for EC candidates can ensure merit-based selections, reducing political influence.



**For example:** Requirements related to legal knowledge or **administrative experience** would attract qualified individuals, enhancing EC's capability.

- **Public Disclosure of Selection Process:** Publishing the criteria and reasons for EC appointments can increase transparency, reinforcing **public trust** in the EC's neutrality.

**For example:** A transparent selection report could demonstrate the merit and fairness in appointments, affirming the EC's credibility to the electorate.

The independence of the Election Commission is essential for safeguarding India's democracy and upholding the integrity of electoral processes. While recent changes in the appointment process aim at increasing transparency, balancing judicial and political representation remains crucial to maintain public confidence. Instituting bipartisan reforms and restoring judicial oversight would further reinforce the autonomy and credibility of the Election Commission, strengthening the foundation of India's democratic framework.

**MCQ**

- Which of the following unique engineering features is associated with the Kalka-Shimla Narrow-Gauge Railway?
  - World's longest railway tunnel
  - India's only double-track mountain railway
  - World's highest multi-arc gallery bridge**
  - Longest railway bridge in Asia
- Consider the following statements about the Asian Buddhist Summit 2024:
  - The summit will be organized by the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India.
  - The theme of the summit is "Buddhism for Global Peace."
  - The Asian Buddhist Summit was first initiated by the United Nations to promote interfaith harmony.
 How many of the above statements is/are correct?
  - Only one
  - Only two
  - All three
  - None**
- Which of the following accurately describes Lewotobi Laki-Laki?
  - An extinct volcano located on Bali Island, Indonesia
  - A twin volcano complex situated in central Sumatra, Indonesia
  - An active stratovolcano on Flores Island, Indonesia, part of a twin volcano system**
  - A single, isolated dormant volcano in southeastern Indonesia
- Consider the following statements regarding the defoaming process applied to the Yamuna River:
  - The defoamer solution used has been approved by the US FDA for safe application.
  - The defoaming process permanently resolves the foam issue in the river.
  - The National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) monitors the application to ensure environmental safety.
 How many of the above statements is/are correct?
  - Only one
  - Only two**
  - All three
  - None
- Consider the following statements:
 

Statement-I: The state can acquire all private properties to serve the common good.

Statement-II: Article 39(b) of the Indian Constitution directs the state to ensure that material resources of the community are distributed in a way that benefits the public.

 Which one of the following is correct in respect of the above statements?
  - Both Statement-I and Statement-II are correct and Statement-II is the correct explanation for Statement-I
  - Both Statement-I and Statement-II are correct and Statement-II is not the correct explanation for Statement-I
  - Statement-I is correct but Statement-II is incorrect
  - Statement-I is incorrect but Statement-II is correct**
- With reference to the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), consider the following statements:
  - It lacks a mutual defense pact.
  - It aims to influence the Indo-Pacific region by offering alternative debt financing for nations in the region.
  - It is often described as a coalition of economic superpowers.
 Which of the statements given above are correct?
  - 1 and 2 only**
  - 2 and 3 only
  - 1 and 3 only
  - 1, 2 and 3
- The primary objective of the PROBA-3 mission is to:
  - Study the Earth atmosphere
  - Demonstrate precision formation flying in space**
  - Deploy communication satellites
  - Monitor climate change
- Consider the following statements:
  - The right to life includes the right to dignity, both in life and after death.
  - According to Section 33(1) of the Aadhaar Act, core biometric information such as fingerprints and iris scans, can be disclosed only with an order from a High Court.
 Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?
  - 1 only**
  - 2 only
  - Both 1 and 2
  - Neither 1 nor 2
- Consider the following statements regarding cloud seeding:
  - Silver iodide is the most commonly used substance in cloud-seeding.
  - Stratus clouds are targeted in cloud-seeding to induce rain.
  - It can also help in preventing earthquakes by stabilizing atmospheric pressure.
 Which of the statement(s) given above is/are correct?
  - 1 and 2 only
  - 1 only**
  - 2 and 3 only
  - 1 and 3 only
- Consider the following statements:
  - The Four Noble Truths is considered the Middle Path in Buddhism.
  - In Buddhist philosophy, karuna refers to the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth.
  - The Middle Path of Buddhism encourages moderation in consumption and respect for nature's resources.
  - In Buddhism, the ultimate goal of spiritual practice is the attainment of Nirvana.
 How many of the statements given above are correct?
  - Only one
  - Only two**
  - Only three
  - All four