

Q.1) Discuss the constitutional provisions that protect the independence of the Election Commission of India (ECI). Also, suggest reforms recommended by various committees to enhance its autonomy and transparency. (150 words, 10 marks)

Introduction

The Constitution establishes the Election Commission of India (ECI) under Article 324 as an autonomous body to ensure free and fair elections, a cornerstone of India's democratic fabric.

Body

Constitutional Provisions:

- **Article 324(1):** Grants ECI the power of “superintendence, direction and control” over elections to Parliament, State Legislatures, and offices of President and Vice-President.
- **Security of Tenure:** Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) enjoys protections akin to a Supreme Court judge—removable only through parliamentary impeachment (Article 324(5)).
- **Conditions of Service:** Salaries and service conditions of CEC and Election Commissioners are charged on the Consolidated Fund of India, ensuring financial independence.
- **No Arbitrary Removal:** While other Election Commissioners can be removed on the CEC's recommendation, this check prevents executive overreach.
- **Judicial Backing:** In *S.S. Dhanoa v. Union of India* (1991), the Supreme Court upheld service protections for ECI members, reinforcing constitutional design.

→ Despite these provisions, operational autonomy is diluted by executive influence in appointments and post-retirement benefits.

Reform Suggestions:

- **Goswami Committee (1990):** Proposed a collegium system for ECI appointments and legal backing for Model Code of Conduct.
- **Law Commission (255th Report):** Recommended independent secretariat and budgetary independence for ECI.
- **Second ARC:** Suggested fixed tenure and bar on post-retirement appointments for commissioners.
- **Supreme Court Verdict (2023):** Mandated a selection committee comprising PM, CJI, and LoP for appointment until legislation is enacted.
- **Justice Lokur's Recommendations:** Urged mandatory disclosure of Form 17C and real-time voter turnout data for greater transparency.

Conclusion

Despite constitutional safeguards, allegations of biased conduct in Karnataka and flawed voter roll revisions in Bihar highlight urgent concerns. India must adopt UK-style transparent appointments and autonomy to ensure the Election Commission earns lasting public trust.

Q.2) Discuss the mandate and functions of Gram Nyayalayas. How are they different from Lok Adalats? Have they been effective in ensuring timely justice to rural population? (150 words, 10 marks)

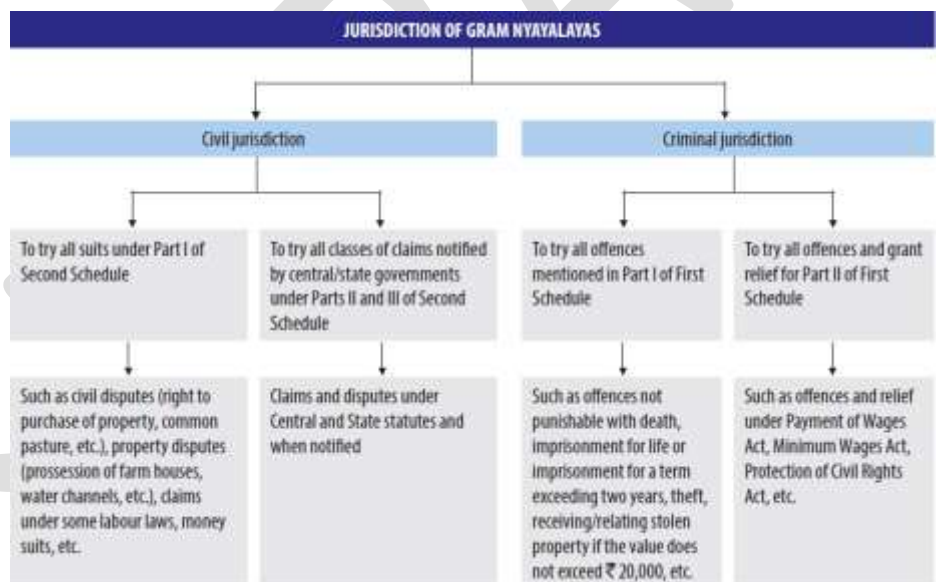
Introduction

Gram Nyayalayas were established under the Gram Nyayalayas Act, 2008 to decentralize justice and ensure affordable, accessible, and speedy dispute resolution at the grassroots level, especially in rural India.

Body

Mandate and Functions:

- **Statutory courts:** Set up under a Central Act but established by State Governments in consultation with High Courts (Sec. 3, Gram Nyayalayas Act, 2008).
- **Jurisdiction:** Handle both civil and criminal cases including petty offences and local disputes listed in the First and Second Schedules of the Act.
- **Mobile courts:** Can hold proceedings at villages to increase accessibility, especially for women and marginalized communities.
- **Conciliation-focused:** Encouraged to settle cases through conciliation and plea bargaining, in line with principles of natural justice.
- **Summary procedures:** Empowered to follow simplified procedures and accept evidence that may not strictly conform to the Indian Evidence Act.



→ While Gram Nyayalayas function like regular courts with judicial authority, **Lok Adalats** follow a distinct framework based on voluntary settlement.

Gram Nyayalayas vs Lok Adalats:

Aspect	Gram Nyayalayas	Lok Adalats
Legal Authority	Statutory courts under Gram Nyayalayas Act, 2008; follow CrPC/CPC; appeal allowed.	Established under Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987; awards binding; no appeal.
Jurisdiction	Fresh and pending civil/criminal cases (e.g., theft, hurt, suits ≤ ₹5 lakh).	Pre-litigation and compoundable pending cases (e.g., cheque bounce, MACT).
Binding Nature	Formal decisions; appealable to higher courts.	Decisions are final and non-appealable; deemed civil court decrees.

IASBABA'S MAINS FULL LENGTH TEST-2 (GS 2) SYNOPSIS

<i>Presiding Officials</i>	Judicial officer (Nyayadhikari); appointed by state judiciary.	Panel includes judges, lawyers, and social workers; chaired often by judges.
<i>Legal Process</i>	Trial conducted if no settlement; structured and adjudicative.	Based only on mutual settlement; if failed, case goes to regular court.
<i>Performance</i>	Only ~400 functional out of 5000 planned (2023 data); infrastructure issues persist.	Over 1 crore cases disposed in Nov 2023 National Lok Adalat (NALSA data).

Effectiveness in Rural Justice:

- **Limited coverage:** As of 2022, only around 395 Gram Nyayalayas were operational against the target of over 5000.
- **Infrastructural constraints:** States cite lack of funds, space, and judicial officers for delay in implementation.
- **Legal awareness gap:** Rural citizens remain unaware or underconfident about accessing these courts.
- **Positive interventions:** Where functional, they reduce case pendency and increase local trust in justice delivery.
- **Need for revival:** Justice B.N. Srikrishna and Law Commission reports highlight their potential, if adequately supported.

Conclusion

Gram Nyayalayas, if implemented sincerely, can complement Lok Adalats in rural justice delivery. Their revival is vital to bridging the justice gap for India's underserved rural population and ensure inclusive justice system.

Q.3) Discuss the role of the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) in the Indian administrative system. Has the PMO, in recent years, increasingly overshadowed the role of the Cabinet. (150 words, 10 marks)

Introduction

The Prime Minister's Office (PMO), though not mentioned in the Constitution, plays a key role in coordinating administration and guiding political decisions, reflecting the Prime Minister's central position in India's governance system.

Body

Role of the PMO

- **Policy coordination:** Acts as the chief policy advisory body, facilitating coordination among ministries and aligning executive action with the Prime Minister's vision.
- **Administrative supervision:** Exercises oversight over civil services, intelligence agencies, and key policy initiatives through empowered officers like the Principal Secretary and NSA.
- **Crisis management:** Plays a central role during national emergencies (e.g., COVID-19 task forces, G20 negotiations, Balakot response) by centralising decisions.
- **Appointments and governance:** Influences key appointments through the Appointments Committee of Cabinet (ACC) and monitors flagship programs.

- **Strategic diplomacy:** Supports the PM's global outreach and bilateral diplomacy, enhancing India's image abroad through proactive coordination.

→ However, its growing clout raises concerns about concentration of power and decline of institutional deliberation.

Cabinet Overshadowed?

- **Centralised leadership:** In the last decade, especially post-2014, PMO has emerged as the principal command centre, with ministries implementing top-down directives.
- **Diminishing collegiality:** Cabinet Committees rarely meet as deliberative forums; decisions are increasingly routed through PMO clearance.
- **Reduced ministerial autonomy:** Several initiatives (e.g., Digital India, Swachh Bharat, NITI Aayog reforms) are steered directly by PMO bypassing sectoral ministries.
- **Institutional imbalance:** Former bureaucrats and scholars (e.g., T.R. Raghunandan, Sanjaya Baru) note erosion of collective Cabinet responsibility.
- **Opaque functioning:** PMO is not directly accountable to Parliament, yet influences legislative priorities, weakening consultative governance.

Conclusion

While the PMO ensures coherence and leadership, its increasing dominance may dilute Cabinet accountability. A healthy democracy requires balancing executive efficiency with collective decision-making.

Q.4) Examine the challenges faced by regulatory bodies in India's higher education sector. How does the proposed Higher Education Commission of India (HECI) seek to address these challenges, and how does it differ from the existing University Grants Commission (UGC)? (150 words, 10 marks)

Introduction

India's higher education sector, with over 1,100 universities and 43 million students (AISHE 2021–22), faces regulatory fragmentation and quality concerns. The need for a modern, unified regulatory framework led to the proposal of the Higher Education Commission of India (HECI) under NEP 2020.

Body

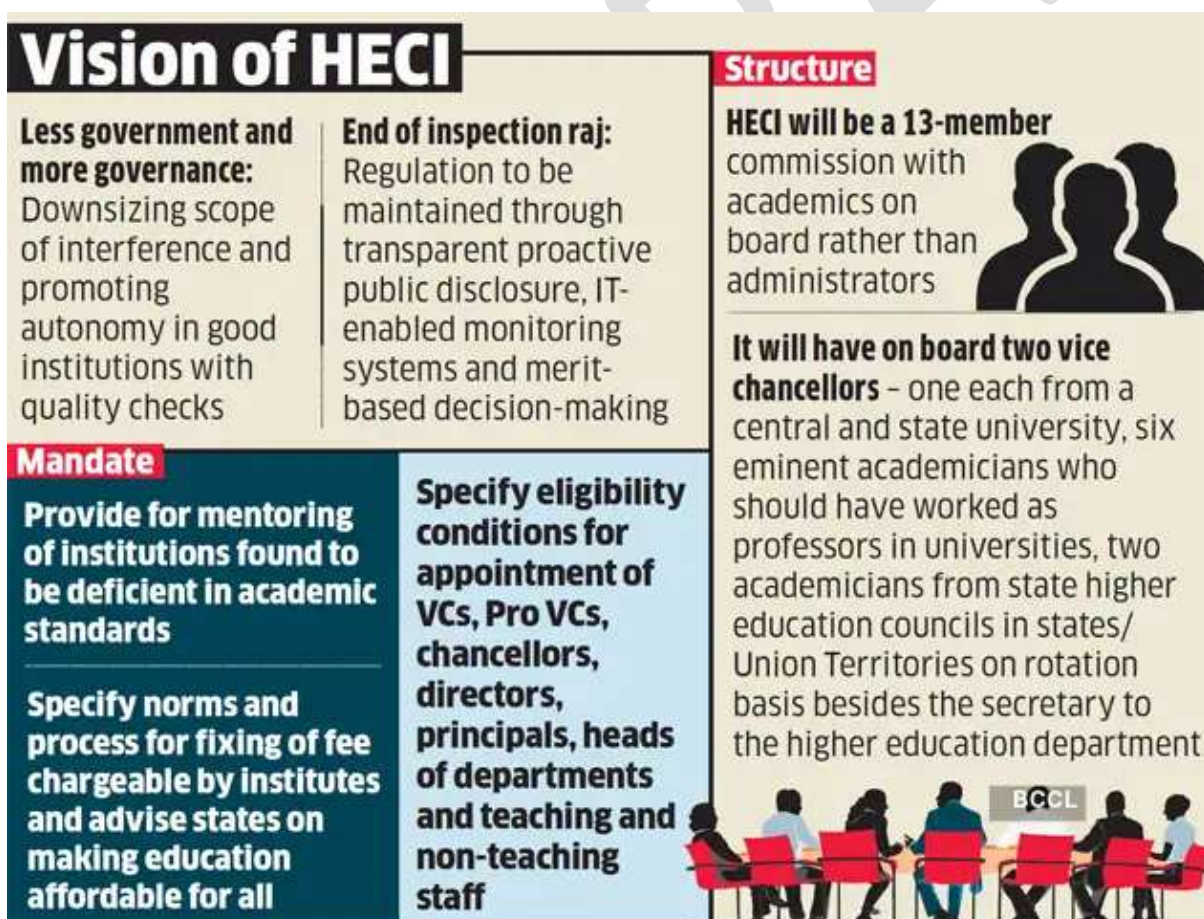
Challenges in Regulation:

- **Multiplicity of bodies:** Overlapping roles of UGC, AICTE, and NCTE create administrative confusion and inefficiency.
- **Bureaucratic hurdles:** Lengthy approval processes and rigid norms restrict institutional autonomy and innovation.
- **Conflict of interest:** UGC performs both funding and regulatory roles, affecting transparency and objective oversight.
- **Weak accreditation:** Only **30%** of institutions are NAAC-accredited, reflecting gaps in quality assurance.
- **Low global competitiveness:** No Indian university ranked in top 100 globally (QS Rankings 2024), indicating systemic stagnation.

→ To address these issues, NEP 2020 recommends the creation of a streamlined, forward-looking regulatory body — the HECI.

HECI's Reformed Approach:

- **Single regulator model:** HECI will replace UGC, AICTE, and other bodies for non-medical and non-legal education.
- **Functional verticals:**
 - **NHERC** – National Higher Education Regulatory Council (for regulatory oversight)
 - **NAC** – National Accreditation Council (for accreditation)
 - **HEGC** – Higher Education Grants Council (for grant disbursement)
 - **GEC** – General Education Council (for academic standards and learning outcomes)
- **Technology-driven governance:** Paperless compliance through digital submissions and dashboards.
- **Outcome-based evaluation:** Focus on student learning achievements and institutional performance, not infrastructure alone.
- **Autonomy with accountability:** Institutions gain curricular flexibility while ensuring public accountability.



UGC vs HECI: Key Differences

Feature	UGC (Existing)	HECI (Proposed)
Year of Origin	1956	Proposed in NEP 2020
Regulatory Coverage	Universities and colleges	All higher education (except legal and medical)

IASBABA'S MAINS FULL LENGTH TEST-2 (GS 2) SYNOPSIS

<i>Functional Approach</i>	Integrated funding + regulation	Separated into 4 distinct verticals
<i>Accreditation Mechanism</i>	NAAC under UGC	Independent National Accreditation Council (NAC)
<i>Mode of Oversight</i>	Norm-based, physical inspection	Digital compliance, outcome-focused
<i>Autonomy & Innovation</i>	Limited curricular freedom	Greater academic flexibility with oversight

Conclusion

HECI can improve education quality and standards, making Indian youth more job-ready. This is key to fully using our demographic dividend and helping India become more competitive in the global knowledge economy.

Q.5) Critically examine the impact of parastatal bodies such as the proposed Greater Bengaluru Authority on urban governance and grassroots democratic participation in India. (150 words, 10 marks)

Introduction

Parastatal bodies like the proposed Greater Bengaluru Authority reflect a trend towards centralized urban governance. However, this often bypasses elected local bodies, undermining the vision of decentralized democracy outlined in the 74th Constitutional Amendment.

Body

Impact on Urban Governance:

- **Fragmentation of authority:** The 2nd ARC (6th Report: "Local Governance") noted that multiple parastatals dilute the accountability of elected urban local bodies.
- **Poor coordination:** Overlapping jurisdictions between municipal bodies and parastatals (e.g., BDA, BWSSB) result in service delivery delays and policy incoherence.
- **Lack of citizen interface:** Parastatals are often accountable to the state government, not the people, reducing civic responsiveness.
- **Technocratic dominance:** Centralised decision-making by bureaucrats and appointed boards marginalises urban planning's democratic aspects.
- **Resource competition:** Parastatals compete with municipal bodies for funds, weakening financial autonomy and planning capacity of ULBs.

→ These structural issues dilute the spirit of local self-governance and shift power away from constitutionally elected bodies.

Impact on Grassroots Democracy:

- **Undermines 74th Amendment:** Article 243W mandates devolution of functions to municipalities, but parastatals often usurp key domains like water, housing, and transport.
- **Erodes accountability:** Councillors lack control over major service providers, reducing their relevance and citizen engagement.

- **Participation gap:** Citizens' feedback mechanisms (e.g., ward committees) are often ignored by technocratic authorities.
- **Marginalises local voices:** Vulnerable urban communities are left out of planning processes dominated by state-level agencies.
- **Democratic deficit:** Real power lies with unelected bodies, weakening the municipal council's authority and public trust.

Conclusion

As highlighted by the 2nd ARC, strengthening municipal institutions—not empowering parastatals—is vital for inclusive, accountable, and democratic urban governance. Structural reforms must realign power with the people.

Q.6) SHGs in India often remain limited to savings activities. Discuss the challenges in their entrepreneurial transition and the government measures to strengthen their capacity. (150 words, 10 marks)

Introduction

SHGs have empowered 9.7 crore women across 87 lakh groups under DAY-NRLM (MoRD, 2023). Yet, only 8–10% have advanced from basic savings to sustainable entrepreneurship (NABARD SHG Report, 2022–23), limiting long-term economic impact.

Body

Challenges in Entrepreneurial Transition:

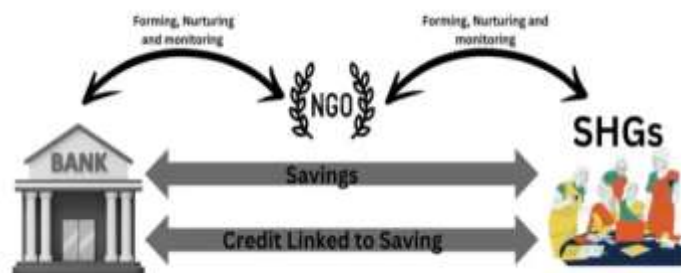
- **Inadequate financial literacy:** According to NABARD, 60% of SHG members struggle with bookkeeping and credit utilisation, hindering business management.
- **Weak market access:** A 2021 SEWA study noted that over 70% of SHG products are sold in local unorganised markets with limited margins.
- **Lack of quality control:** FSSAI's 2022 report highlighted that only 3% of SHG food producers meet standardised packaging or hygiene protocols.
- **Skill gaps:** Training is often one-size-fits-all; National Institute of Rural Development (NIRD) reported only 12% of SHGs received entrepreneurship-specific training.
- **Mobility and social barriers:** Women face localised mobility restrictions and limited digital access, especially in states like Bihar and Rajasthan (India Human Development Survey, 2018).

→ These barriers limit transition from group-based thrift to market-linked, growth-oriented enterprises.

Government Measures to Strengthen SHGs:

- **DAY-NRLM:** Offers Revolving Funds (₹10,000–₹15,000) and Community Investment Funds (up to ₹1 lakh) for enterprise activities.
- **Start-up Village Entrepreneurship Programme:** Supported over 2 lakh rural entrepreneurs across 28 states by 2022 with handholding and capital support (MoRD data).
- **Lakshpati Didi Scheme (2023):** Targets 2 crore rural women entrepreneurs through enterprise promotion and convergence with skilling and financial inclusion.

- **ONDC & GEM integration:** Over **40,000 SHGs** onboarded for digital market access and e-commerce sales (PIB, 2023).
- **Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana (MKSP):** Benefitted **36 lakh women farmers** by linking SHGs to value chains in agriculture (MoRD, 2022).
- **SHG–Bank Linkage Programme:** Promoted by NABARD, this programme has linked over 1 crore SHGs to formal credit with active support from NGOs and SHPIs, enabling financial inclusion and micro-enterprise development at the grassroots.



Conclusion

“When women progress, the nation progresses.” Empowering SHGs beyond thrift needs focused efforts—skill training, digital tools, market linkages, and social support—to make rural women key drivers of India’s grassroots enterprise and inclusive growth.

Q.7) Despite repeated warnings, the implementation of aviation safety norms remains weak in India. Critically analyze the role of regulatory authorities like the DGCA in ensuring air safety. (150 words, 10 marks)

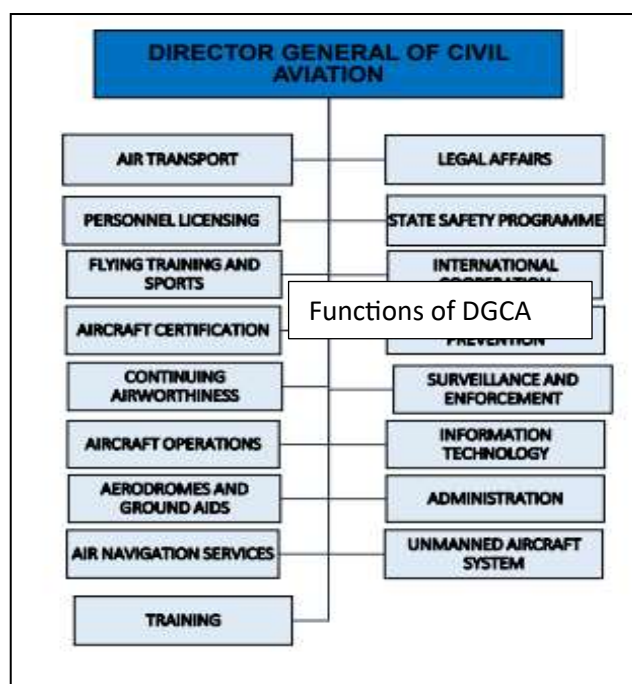
Introduction

The tragic Air India AI171 crash in Ahmedabad (2025), claiming over 240 lives, has reignited concerns over India’s aviation safety. Despite rapid sectoral expansion under schemes like UDAN, institutional gaps in regulatory oversight remain glaring.

Body

Systemic Challenges in DGCA’s Role:

- **Severe staffing gaps:** The **Parliamentary Standing Committee (2025)** reported **53% vacancy** in DGCA’s sanctioned posts, limiting its inspection and enforcement capabilities.
- **Budgetary skew:** While DGCA receives a larger share of the civil aviation budget, critical agencies like the **Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau (AAIB)** and **BCAS** remain underfunded, compromising post-crash accountability and security readiness.



- **Weak oversight culture:** Repeated lapses — such as **crew exceeding duty limits** (Air India) or **engine malfunctions grounding 70+ IndiGo aircraft** — signal poor enforcement, not isolated failures.
- **Opaque accountability:** Airlines often bypass transparent disclosure, and DGCA's penalties lack deterrent weight.
- **Fragmented response framework:** There's limited coordination between DGCA, AAIB, and MoCA in preventing and responding to crises.

→ As air traffic grew 4.2% of global share (2024), safety protocols failed to match infrastructure growth or complexity of operations.

Reform Measures and Their Gaps:

- **Ramp inspections:** DGCA conducted over **4,800 surprise audits (2023)**, but systemic follow-up remains weak.
- **Digital shift (e-GCA):** Online licensing improves efficiency but doesn't address deeper inspection deficits.
- **Safety Committees:** CASAC reconstitution shows intent, but lacks legislative empowerment.
- **UDAN priorities vs safety: Budget cuts** in FY2025 (over 30% reduction for UDAN) weaken regional safety infrastructure despite airport expansion.

Conclusion

India's aviation oversight faces a critical imbalance—rapid growth outpacing regulatory capacity. Strengthening the DGCA's autonomy, manpower, and coordination—as recommended by the Naresh Chandra Committee—is key to restoring public trust and ensuring aviation safety.

Q,8) India no longer struggles with overall food availability, but with ensuring access to a balanced and nutritious diet. In this context, discuss the measures needed to address hidden hunger. (150 words, 10 marks)

Introduction

Despite being the world's largest producer of pulses and second-largest producer of fruits and vegetables, India ranks 111 out of 125 countries in the Global Hunger Index 2023, reflecting the persistence of hidden hunger—micronutrient deficiencies despite sufficient calorie intake.

Body

Understanding Hidden Hunger:

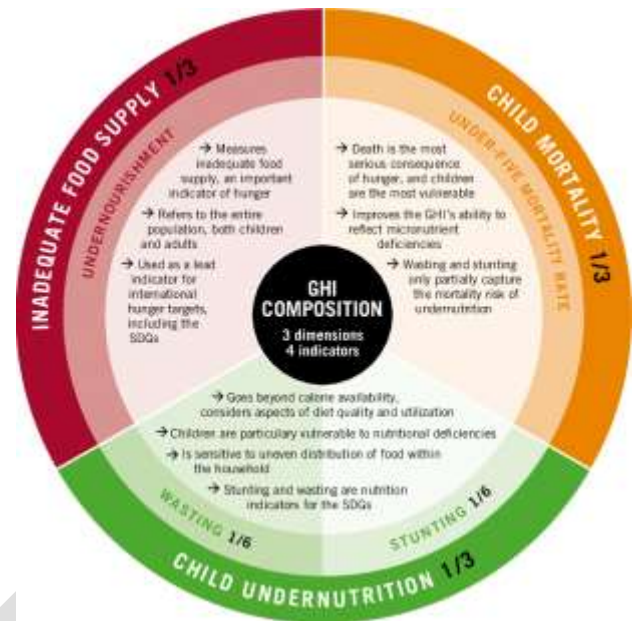
- **Micronutrient gaps:** The **Comprehensive National Nutrition Survey (CNNS, 2016–18)** showed **over 35% of children** aged 5–9 deficient in iron, Vitamin A, and B12.
- **Anaemia prevalence:** As per **NFHS-5 (2019–21)**, **57% of women** and **67% of children under 5** in India are anaemic.

- **Dietary imbalance:** A NITI Aayog-WFP Report (2022) found **76% of rural diets** lack dietary diversity—dominated by cereals with low protein, fibre, and micronutrient content.
- **Economic malnutrition:** Rising food inflation has made nutrient-rich food unaffordable for the poorest 30%, despite buffer stocks.
- **Skewed agriculture:** Over **80% of MSP procurement** focuses on rice and wheat, marginalising coarse grains and legumes that are nutrient-rich.

→ Thus, the challenge today is not food quantity, but food quality and nutritional equity.

Key Measures and Reforms:

- **Diversify diets:** Promote **millet, pulses, and vegetables** through inclusion in PDS, ICDS, and Mid-Day Meals (now PM POSHAN).
- **Food fortification:** Expand **mandatory fortification** of rice, salt, and oil, especially under government schemes (FSSAI, 2023).
- **Empower women:** Support **SHG-led nutrition enterprises**, train women in kitchen gardens, and ensure direct transfer of nutritional entitlements.
- **Nutrition education:** Include dietary literacy in **school curriculum** and **Saksham Anganwadi** under POSHAN 2.0.
- **Targeted delivery:** Use tools like **Anemia Mukt Bharat dashboard** and **Poshan Tracker** for real-time monitoring and outreach.



Hidden hunger

A Global Problem

More than **2 billion** people worldwide suffer from hidden hunger, or micronutrient deficiencies

More than **1 million** children under five die every year from vitamin A and zinc deficiencies

Micronutrient deficiencies are often caused by not eating a diverse diet including animal source foods like fish and meat and can lead to:

Impaired brain development in children

Making it difficult for them to learn at school and perform at work later in life

- Adults who suffered from undernutrition as children earn **20% less** than those who weren't



Stunting in children

- **450 million** children will be affected by stunting in the next 15 years if current trends continue

Increased risk of diseases

Like diarrhea, malaria and measles

- Malnourished children are **10 x more likely** to die from preventable diseases than healthy children

Conclusion

Addressing hidden hunger requires moving beyond calories to true nutrition security. School-level interventions like CBSE's 'Sugar Boards' initiative promoting early dietary awareness can build lifelong nutrition literacy and drive a healthier, food-secure future for India.

Q.9) The outdated structure and functioning of civil services hinder effective governance. Discuss the scope and challenges of civil services reforms in this context. (150 words, 10 marks)

Introduction

India's civil services, originally built for colonial control, often fall short of delivering responsive and efficient governance. The 2nd Administrative Reforms Commission (ARC) identified urgent reforms to transform them into citizen-centric institutions.

Body

Scope of Civil Services Reforms:

- **Specialist Cadres:** The **Alagh Committee (2001)** and **2nd ARC** recommended creation of **domain-specific cadres** (e.g., health, environment, infrastructure) to reduce overdependence on generalists.
- **Unified Civil Service Examination:** The **Hota Committee (2004)** proposed streamlining recruitment across services to ensure uniform quality and equitable talent distribution.
- **Performance-based promotions:** As recommended by the **2nd ARC**, replace seniority-based progression with **objective KPIs, RFDs**, and institutionalise **360° performance appraisal**.
- **Fixed Tenure System:** Both **2nd ARC** and **Baswan Committee (2016)** emphasized fixing minimum tenures (e.g., 2–3 years) to ensure continuity, especially in field postings.
- **Training Overhaul:** The **Baswan Committee** urged restructuring LBSNAA and other academies to focus on **problem-solving, public ethics**, and **emerging governance challenges** (AI, climate, federalism).

→ These proposed reforms are essential to reorient civil services from a process-driven to performance-driven architecture.

Challenges in Implementing Reforms:

- **Resistance from within:** Reforms like lateral entry at the Joint Secretary level (introduced in 2018) face pushback from existing civil servants who fear loss of seniority, privilege, and domain control.
- **Political reluctance:** Fixed tenure rules, recommended in the TSR Subramanian judgment (2013), are rarely enforced. Performance-based postings dilute political discretion, making governments hesitant to adopt them fully.
- **Institutional inertia:** Initiatives under Mission Karmayogi require decentralised training and appraisal systems, but most states lack administrative capacity or funding. The Mission received only ₹300 crore in Budget 2023–24.
- **Lack of legal backing:** Many key reforms are executive-driven, not anchored in legislation. Without statutory status, programs like iGOT and FRAC lack enforceability and risk discontinuity with changing governments.

- **Coordination failure:** Reform efforts by DoPT, LBSNAA, state ATIs, and sectoral ministries remain fragmented. For example, central appraisal reforms do not incorporate real-time feedback from field postings or states.

Conclusion

A reform-oriented, citizen-responsive, and future-ready civil service is critical for India's democratic and developmental journey. Timely implementation of expert recommendations is the need of the hour.

Q.10) The rise of emerging economies has diminished the G7's influence and enhanced the significance of the G20." Explain with examples. (150 words, 10 marks)

Introduction

The G7, formed in 1975 to coordinate global capitalist leadership, is increasingly sidelined by the G20, a more inclusive platform reflecting contemporary economic realities. The rise of emerging economies has catalysed this shift in global influence.

Body

Diminishing G7 Influence:

- **US-centric fragility:** The 2025 G7 summit saw former US President Trump **walk out**, reiterating unilateralism and undermining the notion of collective leadership.
- **Internal incoherence:** Discord over support to Ukraine and economic sanctions on Russia highlighted deep divides within the G7 bloc.
- **Shrinking economic clout:** The G7's share in global GDP has fallen to **43% in 2023**, compared to over **70% in the 1980s** (IMF).
- **Limited representation:** The G7 excludes major economies like China, India, and Brazil, making its policy influence less legitimate globally.
- **Reduced policy leadership:** Even during the 2008 crisis, the G7 proved insufficient—leading to the formation and activation of the **G20**.

→ The G7 now functions more as a symbolic grouping, overshadowed by the real global negotiations happening in the G20.

Rising Role of G20:

- **Inclusivity:** The G20 includes **all major emerging economies**, offering a better reflection of global power distribution.
- **Crisis response:** Coordinated stimulus and financial reforms during the **2008 financial crisis** and **COVID-19 pandemic** showcased its effectiveness.
- **India's 2023 presidency:** Championed **Global South priorities**, such as digital infrastructure, debt restructuring, and climate finance.
- **Geopolitical balance:** The G20 includes both rivals and allies (e.g., US and China), facilitating more meaningful consensus.
- **African Union membership:** Its inclusion in 2023 marked a milestone in equitable representation, unlike the exclusive G7.

Conclusion

The G20 has overtaken the G7 as the principal forum for global economic dialogue. With the inclusion of the African Union in 2023, it has become even more representative—reflecting the voices of both developed and developing economies in today's multipolar world.

IASBABA

Q.11) West Asia is witnessing a shift from a US-Israel centric order to a more multipolar regional framework. Examine the factors driving this transformation and analyse its implications for India's strategic and economic interests. (250 words, 15 marks)

Introduction

The Gaza conflict and declining US influence are pushing West Asia away from a US-Israel-led order toward a more multipolar setup, where regional powers and countries like China and Russia play a growing role.

Body

Drivers of the Multipolar Shift:

- **US credibility decline:** As noted in UN debates and the Gaza ceasefire resolution (March 2024), the US is increasingly seen as partisan and untrustworthy by Arab populations.
- **Rise of regional agency:** Arab states like **Saudi Arabia, Qatar, UAE, and Egypt** have taken independent diplomatic initiatives (e.g., ceasefire mediation, OIC summits), reducing reliance on the US.
- **China's entry:** Beijing's **Saudi-Iran deal (2023)** and support for ceasefire diplomacy show growing Chinese footprint.
- **Public pressure:** Massive pro-Palestinian protests and opinion polls in Arab nations demand an independent foreign policy aligned with public sentiment.
- **Iran-led 'Axis of Resistance':** Non-state actors like **Hezbollah** and **Houthis** challenge US-Israeli dominance, creating deterrence dynamics outside formal diplomacy.

→ Together, these developments point to a **regional rebalancing**, diluting traditional hegemonies and inviting multipolar negotiations.

Implications for India:

- **Energy security:** Stable regional diplomacy ensures **continued oil and LNG imports**; West Asia supplies over **60% of India's crude needs**.
- **Strategic autonomy:** India can engage multilaterally with Israel, Iran, Gulf states, and emerging players like China without rigid alignment.
- **Economic corridors:** Projects like **IMEC (India-Middle East-Europe Corridor)** gain traction in a cooperative regional climate.
- **Diaspora protection:** A stable West Asia reduces risks to India's **9 million-strong diaspora**, crucial for remittances.
- **Defence & diplomacy:** India can deepen security ties with UAE and Saudi Arabia while keeping open channels with Iran and Israel.

Conclusion

West Asia's move towards multipolarity offers India both flexibility and leverage. As Jaishankar said, "In a world of more choices, strategic autonomy becomes more valuable." India must pursue balanced ties through neutrality, partnerships, and active diplomacy.

Q.12) In light of ongoing disputes over religious sites, critically analyze the significance and limitations of the Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991. (250 words, 15 marks)

Introduction

The Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991 was enacted to preserve the religious character of places of worship as on August 15, 1947, with the sole exception of the Ayodhya dispute. It aimed to protect India's secular fabric and prevent the politicization of history.

Body

Significance of the Act:

- **Constitutional safeguard:** In the **2019 Ayodhya verdict**, the Supreme Court called the Act "a legislative instrument to protect secularism," affirming Parliament's intent to end retroactive communal claims.
 - **Preventive mechanism:** By freezing the status quo, it blocks fresh litigation over historical wrongs, ensuring **communal harmony**.
 - **Judicial restraint:** Reinforces the idea that courts must not be used to **settle theological or historical disputes**, preserving public order.
 - **Symbolic value:** Affirms the principle that **past injustice cannot be a ground for present-day disruption**—a key secular commitment.
 - **Broad coverage:** Applies to temples, mosques, churches, and gurdwaras across India.
- However, the Act now faces its greatest legal and political challenges since its inception.

Limitations and Emerging Challenges:

- **Post-Ayodhya precedent:** As *Frontline* (2024) notes, Ayodhya's exception is now a **template for fresh claims** at Gyanvapi, Mathura, and even Ajmer Sharif.
- **Judicial ambiguity:** In the **Gyanvapi case**, the Supreme Court allowed surveys, interpreting them as "ascertainment of religious character"—blurring the Act's boundaries.
- **Pending constitutional challenge:** Petitions in the Supreme Court claim the Act violates **Article 25 (religious freedom)** and **Article 32 (judicial remedies)**.
- **Lower court activism:** Civil courts continue to **entertain suits** despite the Act's bar, often under pressure from **majoritarian mobilisation**.
- **Enforcement deficit:** No statutory body exists to **monitor compliance** with the law, making it vulnerable to political misuse.

Conclusion

While the 1991 Act is key to protecting India's secular democracy, its strength now depends on clear court rulings, political agreement, and public calm. Without these, it risks being weakened by biased reinterpretation and divisive lawsuits.

Q.13) Critically examine the constitutional validity of domicile-based reservations in public employment. How has the judiciary addressed such measures? (250 words, 15 marks)

Introduction

Domicile-based reservation means giving job preference to local residents in government jobs. While it aims to reduce regional imbalances, it raises serious legal issues around equality, free movement, and limits on state authority under the Constitution.

Body

Constitutional Validity – Key Concerns:

- **Article 16(2):** Bars discrimination in public employment based on place of birth or residence.
- **Article 16(3):** Permits residence-based eligibility only if **Parliament explicitly enacts a law**—states cannot act independently.
- **Article 19(1)(g):** Guarantees citizens the right to work anywhere in India, making **domicile-based restrictions a violation of economic freedom**.
- **Reservation ceiling:** The **Indra Sawhney judgment (1992)** capped reservations at **50%**, including those based on domicile or local origin.
- **Judicial scrutiny:** Courts have generally held that **"sons-of-soil" policies** conflict with constitutional guarantees unless narrowly tailored and time-bound.

→ Thus, while the objective of local employment is legitimate, the **legal route must pass through Parliament**, not state laws or executive orders.

Judicial Approach:

- **Pradeep Jain v. Union of India (1984):** Struck down broad-based domicile quotas, allowing only **limited regional preferences** for educational institutions.
- **A.P. Public Employment Rules case (2002):** Held that **'local area' preferences without Central legislation are unconstitutional**.
- **Punjab & Haryana HC on Haryana's 75% quota (2023):** Declared it unconstitutional for violating **Articles 16(2), 16(3), and 19(1)(g)**; called it an "artificial wall".
- **Karnataka's 2024 proposal:** Withdrawn amid backlash from private industry and concerns of non-compliance with constitutional rights.

Conclusion

Domicile-based reservations should balance local needs with national unity. True progress lies in better skills, fair investment across states, and reforms that give equal chances to all while keeping the idea of One India strong.

Q.14) Inter-state water disputes in India are often shaped by politics, federal asymmetries, and legal ambiguities. Using recent examples, discuss the limitations of the current legal and institutional mechanisms to resolve such disputes and suggest reforms. (250 words, 15 marks)

Introduction

Inter-state water disputes in India reflect the complex intersection of federalism, resource scarcity, and regional interests. Despite the Inter-State River Water Disputes Act, 1956, such conflicts often escalate due to legal delays, political pressures, and institutional limitations.

Body

Limitations of Existing Mechanisms:

- **Political interference:** States often escalate disputes for electoral gains, as seen in the **Cauvery** and **Mahadayi** cases. Consensus-building is sacrificed for populism.
- **Federal asymmetries:** The **Centre's discretionary role** in constituting tribunals creates a perception of bias (e.g. delay in notifying the **Krishna Water Tribunal** post-bifurcation of Andhra Pradesh).
- **Judicial overlaps:** Disputes simultaneously reach tribunals and the Supreme Court (e.g. **Ravi-Beas, Krishna**), creating **confusion over jurisdiction**.
- **Delays and non-enforcement:** The **Cauvery Tribunal took 28 years** to deliver a binding decision, and enforcement remains patchy despite the Supreme Court's 2018 verdict.
- **Lack of permanent mechanism:** Temporary tribunals lack **institutional memory and continuity**, leading to repeated litigation on similar issues.

→ These factors highlight the fragility of India's current dispute resolution system in managing shared water resources.



Reform Measures Needed:

- **Enactment of the 2019 Amendment Bill:** Proposes a **permanent Inter-State River Water Disputes Tribunal** with strict timelines and multi-disciplinary expert support.
- **Clear enforcement powers:** Empower tribunals or the Centre to **enforce awards** with sanctions for non-compliance.
- **Strengthen negotiation platforms:** Institutionalise the **river basin organisations** for cooperative federalism and ecological planning.
- **Independent data authority:** Create a neutral body for transparent hydrological data sharing among states.
- **Constitutional clarity:** Amend laws to clearly define Centre and state responsibilities post-award.

Conclusion

Resolving water disputes needs a shift from conflict to cooperation. As recommended by the Punchhi and Mihir Shah Committees, stronger legal frameworks, empowered river basin authorities, and an ecological approach are key to sustainable, federal water governance.

Q.15) What are the constitutional provisions and legal frameworks that govern the removal and accountability of judges in India? Why have they proven inadequate in curbing judicial corruption? (250 words, 15 marks)

Introduction

Judicial accountability is crucial for public trust, yet current mechanisms—like the slow impeachment process and opaque in-house inquiries—often fail. The ongoing **HC judge cash row** underscores the urgent need for transparent, reformed oversight

Body

Constitutional and Legal Provisions:

- **Article 124(4) and (5):** Provide for removal of Supreme Court judges by **impeachment**, requiring a special majority in both Houses on grounds of **proved misbehaviour or incapacity**.
- **Article 217(1)(b):** Applies the same procedure for removal of High Court judges.
- **Judges (Inquiry) Act, 1968:** Lays down the **procedure for investigation** following a motion in Parliament, including setting up an inquiry committee.
- **In-House Procedure (1997):** Evolved by the judiciary to deal with complaints against judges, though it lacks statutory backing.
- **Contempt of Courts Act, 1971:** Prevents public discussion of judicial misconduct, limiting media scrutiny.
- **Judicial Standards and Accountability Bill, 2010:** Introduced to create a more robust framework but **never enacted**.

→ While these provisions aim to preserve judicial independence, they are **procedurally complex and politically sensitive**, leading to near-zero removals.

Why They Are Inadequate:

- **High threshold:** Only one judge, **Justice Soumitra Sen**, faced near-removal before resigning in 2011. No judge has been impeached since independence, making the process largely symbolic and ineffective.
- **Lack of transparency:** In-house inquiries, like in the **Justice S.N. Shukla** case, lack transparency and public accountability. There's also no statutory body for citizens to lodge complaints against judges.
- **Judicial resistance:** Strong opposition from the judiciary to any **external oversight**, citing independence concerns.
- **No independent complaints body:** No statutory mechanism for citizens to file grievances against judges.

- **Misuse of contempt powers:** Cases like **Prashant Bhushan's 2020 conviction** show how contempt powers can suppress legitimate criticism, deterring public scrutiny and weakening democratic checks on the judiciary.

Conclusion

Judicial accountability needs urgent reform. As Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer said, judges should be held to the same high standards they expect from others—making transparent laws and fair oversight essential to protect public trust.

Q.16) India is described as a quasi-federal state, whereas the United States follows a classic federal model. Compare the federal structures of India and the U.S. with respect to legislative, administrative, and financial relations. (250 words, 15 marks)

Introduction

India's Constitution establishes a federal structure with a unitary bias, often termed quasi-federal (K.C. Wheare), while the U.S. follows a dual federalism model where both the Union and states are sovereign within their spheres.

Body

Federal structures of India and the U.S.

1. Legislative Relations

Feature	India	United States
Distribution of Powers	Union, State & Concurrent Lists (7th Schedule)	Enumerated powers to Centre; residual with states
Residual Powers	With Centre (Article 248)	With States (10th Amendment)
Parliament's Override Power	Can legislate on state subjects (Art 249, 250)	No override; strict separation
Second Chamber (Upper House)	Rajya Sabha represents states, but weaker	Senate represents states equally; very powerful
Role of President	Can return bills (except money bills); strong role during emergencies	Has veto power; acts independently of states

2. Administrative Relations

Feature	India	United States
Nature of Executive	Parliamentary system; executive drawn from legislature	Presidential system; separation of powers
Control over States	Centre can direct states (Article 256); All India Services	States have independent executive machinery
Role of Governor	Appointed by Centre; dual responsibility	Governors are directly elected by the people
Emergency Provisions	Article 356 allows President's Rule in states	No such provision in normal circumstances
Law Enforcement	Unified services (IPS, IAS) serve both levels	Separate bureaucracies for state and federal levels

3. Financial Relations

Feature	India	United States
Power to Tax	Union collects most taxes; states limited	Both federal and state governments levy taxes
Devolution of Funds	Through Finance Commission (Article 280)	States retain more independent revenue
Borrowing Powers	States need Centre's consent for external loans	States borrow independently within limits
Vertical Fiscal Imbalance	High – states depend on central transfers	Low – greater fiscal autonomy of states
Grants-in-Aid	Provided under Article 275	Minimal; states largely self-funded

Conclusion

India's quasi-federalism reflects its post-colonial need for unity, whereas the U.S. model ensures strong state autonomy rooted in its origin as a union of sovereign states. Each structure suits its unique historical and political context.

Q.17) The Right to Information (RTI) Act has been a milestone in promoting transparency and accountability in governance. However, its implementation faces several challenges that limit its effectiveness. Identify the key factors hindering the realisation of its objectives and suggest measures to strengthen the RTI framework. (250 words, 15 marks)

Introduction

Nearly two decades after its enactment, the RTI Act—hailed by the 2nd ARC as the “master key to good governance”—faces serious challenges like delayed responses, vacant Information Commissions, and growing opacity within public institutions.

Body

Key Challenges:

- **Dilution of autonomy:** The **RTI (Amendment) Act, 2019** allows the Union government to decide the tenure and salary of Chief Information Commissioners (CICs) and State Information Commissioners (SICs), raising concerns of executive overreach (**PRS Legislative Research, 2019**).
- **Vacancies and pendency:** As per **Satark Nagrik Sangathan's 2023 Status Report**, 4 out of 11 CIC posts were vacant, and over **3.15 lakh appeals** were pending across the country.
- **Non-compliance with Section 4:** The **2nd ARC (Fourth Report)** found that most public authorities failed to comply with the mandate of **proactive disclosure**, making RTI a reactive tool.
- **RTI activist attacks:** The **Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI)** has documented **over 100 cases** of violence, threats, or murder against RTI users since 2005.
- **Limited awareness:** A 2019 study by **Azim Premji University** found that less than 30% of rural citizens were aware of their RTI rights.

Suggested Reforms:

- **Restore institutional independence:** Amend the RTI Act to secure **fixed tenure and pay parity** for commissioners, as originally provided.
- **Mandate Section 4 compliance:** Implement **digital records and dashboards** for proactive disclosures, as per 2nd ARC's recommendations.
- **Time-bound appointments:** Introduce statutory timelines for filling commissioner posts (suggested by **Transparency International India**).
- **RTI literacy campaigns:** Integrate RTI awareness in school curricula and panchayat-level governance training.
- **Ensure activist safety:** Operationalise the **Whistle Blowers Protection Act, 2014** and create protection cells at state levels.

Conclusion

RTI's effectiveness is not just a legal matter—it is a test of the State's commitment to democratic transparency. Urgent reforms, as proposed by the 2nd ARC and supported by civil society, are vital to restoring its transformative potential.

Q.18) The government's growing reliance on private sector investment in public health indicates a shift from welfare-oriented to market-driven governance. Critically analyse this trend.(250 words, 15 marks)

Introduction

Article 47 of the Constitution makes public health a state duty. Yet, rising reliance on private investment signals a shift toward market-led healthcare—risking affordability and access for millions of poor and marginalised Indians.

Body**Rationale Behind Private Sector Engagement:**

- **Capacity constraints in public health:** Overburdened infrastructure and personnel shortages have necessitated private participation.
- **Public-private partnerships (PPPs):** District hospitals are being leased to private medical colleges (e.g., **Madhya Pradesh 2024**), supported by **Viability Gap Funding**.
- **Ayushman Bharat (PM-JAY):** Uses insurance mechanisms to empanel private hospitals for free treatment to the poor, covering **50 crore beneficiaries**.
- **Technological innovation:** Private firms contribute to digital platforms like **NDHM**, and services like **telemedicine, diagnostics, and AI-based systems**.

Concerns Associated with Market-Driven Health Governance:

- **Equity gaps:** Private investment is **urban-centric**, exacerbating rural–urban disparities.
- **Selective service delivery:** Tendency to **cherry-pick profitable cases**, leaving complex or chronic cases to public hospitals.
- **Dual control in PPPs:** As highlighted by **Sujatha Rao**, PPP hospitals often face governance issues due to overlapping responsibilities and lack of regulatory capacity.

- **Unregulated cost structures:** Leads to **catastrophic out-of-pocket expenditure** (over 50% of health spend – **NHA 2019–20**).
- **Privatisation of public assets:** Long-term leases without accountability may result in **loss of public control over essential services**.
- **Insurance-led exclusions:** For-profit motives may limit services to only those covered under narrow insurance criteria.
- **Neglect of primary care:** The private sector focuses on **tertiary and curative care**, undermining preventive health efforts.
- **Public trust erosion:** A fully commercialised health system could widen **health inequality** and reduce state accountability.

Policy Gaps and Regulatory Deficits:

- **No strong oversight body** to monitor private hospital charges, quality, or adherence to public health obligations.
- **Weak enforcement of contract terms in PPPs**, risking asset capture and withdrawal of state responsibility.
- **Absence of grievance redress mechanisms** for patients in insurance-linked schemes.

The Way Forward:

- **Strengthen public health systems**, especially primary and secondary care in rural India.
- **Expand public investment** to at least **2.5% of GDP by 2025** (National Health Policy, 2017).
- **Promote blended financing models** with public control and private efficiency.
- **Encourage Make in India for medical technologies**, reduce import costs, and scale up indigenous innovations.
- **Empower frontline workers** and community health volunteers to expand access.
- **Enhance digital health governance** with privacy protections and interoperability across providers.

Conclusion

Countries like the UK and Thailand show that strong public healthcare ensures fairness. India must use the private sector wisely but keep health a basic right, not a service only the rich can afford.

Q.19) Despite several digital initiatives under the Digital India Mission, India still faces a significant digital divide. Examine the challenges this poses for inclusive e-governance, particularly in rural areas. (250 words, 15 marks)

Introduction

The Digital India Mission, launched in 2015, seeks to build a digitally empowered society and knowledge economy. Yet, as UN Secretary-General António Guterres noted, “Digital divide is now a matter of life and death,” highlighting the urgent need for inclusive access.

Body

Extent of the Digital Divide:

- **Internet penetration:** As per TRAI (2023), rural internet penetration is **38%**, compared to **75% in urban areas**.
- **Device ownership:** Only **24% of rural households** own a smartphone (NFHS-5), limiting access to app-based services.
- **Digital literacy:** According to the NSSO 75th round, **less than 15%** of rural Indians above 5 years are digitally literate.
- **Gender gap:** Only **33% of rural women** use mobile internet, compared to 61% of urban men (GSMA 2022).
- **Infrastructure deficit:** Only **1.3 lakh of 2.5 lakh gram panchayats** have operational BharatNet broadband as of 2023 (DoT data).

Challenges to Inclusive E-Governance in Rural Areas:

- **Access and affordability:** Limited 4G/5G coverage, high data costs, and irregular power supply impede consistent access.
- **Capacity gaps:** Lack of training and support staff undermines schemes like **Common Service Centres (CSCs)** and **DigiLocker**.
- **Language and content barriers:** Most portals are **English-dominated**, excluding non-English speakers.
- **Trust and awareness:** Citizens unfamiliar with digital processes are hesitant to use platforms for **e-services, grievance redressal, or benefits**.
- **Exclusion in welfare delivery:** In Aadhaar-linked schemes (e.g., PDS, DBT), biometric mismatches or authentication failures cause denial of entitlements.

Way Forward:

- **Expand last-mile access:** Accelerate BharatNet rollout and strengthen Common Service Centres (CSCs) as local digital hubs with trained staff for service delivery and grievance redressal.
- **Promote inclusivity:** Integrate local languages, voice-enabled interfaces, and digital literacy programs at school and panchayat levels to ensure broad-based access.

Conclusion

Bridging India's digital divide is critical not just for digital inclusion but for democratic and developmental inclusion. True e-governance will be inclusive only when every citizen, regardless of geography, gender, or literacy, can access and benefit from digital services.

Q.20) Analyze the relevance of the Simla Agreement (1972) in containing India-Pakistan disputes post-nuclearisation. Should there be a new framework of sustained diplomatic engagement? (250 words, 15 marks)

Introduction

The Simla Agreement (1972) was signed post the Bangladesh War to establish a peaceful, bilateral mechanism to resolve all India-Pakistan disputes, especially Jammu & Kashmir. However, its efficacy has been strained in the post-nuclearisation era, with recurring violations and regional instability.

Body

Relevance of the Simla Agreement Today:

- **Framework for Bilateralism:** It forms the legal and diplomatic basis for India's rejection of third-party mediation in Kashmir (as reaffirmed in ICJ and UN debates).
- **Recognition of LoC:** It was the first formal delineation of the **Line of Control**, forming the de facto boundary.
- **Symbol of Peaceful Intent:** It underscores the commitment to resolve issues through "peaceful means" — especially significant in a nuclearised South Asia.
- **Foundational for Later Accords:** Served as the basis for later CBMs like the 1988 Nuclear Facilities Agreement, 1991 Airspace Agreement, and 2003 Ceasefire.
- **Credibility of Commitment:** It still serves as a reference point in Indian diplomatic rhetoric, despite violations.

→ Yet, repeated breaches and evolving geopolitical tensions question its functional adequacy.

Limitations Post-Nuclearisation:

- **Erosion of Trust:** Pakistan's **Kargil incursion (1999)** and continued cross-border terrorism violate both the spirit and letter of the pact.
- **Use of Terror Proxies:** Events like the **2001 Parliament attack**, **26/11**, and **Pulwama (2019)** reveal a departure from state-to-state negotiation norms.
- **Redundancy in Practice:** As former diplomat Avtar Singh Bhasin noted, key clauses (POW return, communication) were fulfilled early; the Kashmir clause is now largely symbolic.
- **Ambiguity on Enforcement:** No binding enforcement mechanism or penalty for violations.
- **Recent Suspension by Pakistan (2025):** Following India's suspension of the **Indus Waters Treaty**, Pakistan unilaterally declared it may put Simla and other agreements "in abeyance," further weakening its legitimacy.

Need for a New Engagement Framework:

- **Strategic Stability Dialogue:** A **structured nuclear risk-reduction mechanism** is essential to prevent escalation (like hotline usage during Balakot).
- **Modernised Bilateral Pact:** A treaty encompassing **cyber warfare, water security, terrorism, and nuclear doctrine clarity** is needed.
- **People-to-People Confidence:** Expand Kartarpur-like corridors, ease visa regimes, and revive cultural/sports diplomacy.
- **Multilateral Pressure with Sovereign Dialogue:** India may retain bilateralism but leverage **global opinion** (e.g., FATF, UNSC) to isolate terror-friendly actions.
- **Backchannel Diplomacy:** A return to **Track II efforts**, as seen in 2004-08 composite dialogue, is vital to depoliticise critical issues.

Conclusion

The Simla Agreement needs to be backed by a more practical and regional approach. Forums like SAARC and SCO can support regular talks, while trust-building and restraint are key to stable India-Pakistan ties today.