Daily News Analysis

The Hindu Important News Articles & Editorial For UPSC CSE

Wednesday, 07 May, 2025

Edition: International Table of Contents

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The Union Home Ministry has initiated nationwide civil defence drills in response to the April 22 Pahalgam terror attack that killed 26 civilians.

- 244 districts have been identified for drills, with States given autonomy to include additional vulnerable areas.
- Exercises are being held at village to metro levels, involving evacuation plans, blackout drills, coordination with Air Force, and disaster response readiness.

States to conduct civil defence drills today

| 244 districts in Categories 1, 2, and 3 identified for conduct of exercise in the wake of 'hostile situation' | States asked to add areas with vital installation to 'vulnerable list' based on their assessment | After the drills, security gaps identified will be plugged accordingly, says senior govt. official |

Vijaita Singh
NEW DELHI

Various States prepared on Tuesday for drills to test civil defence preparedness that begin on Wednesday. The Union Home Ministry has ordered the drill in the aftermath of the April 22 Pahalgam terror attack in which 26 civilians were killed.

Union Home Secretary Govind Mohan on Tuesday reviewed the preparations done by the States in the wake of a "hostile" situation.

While the Directorate-General, Civil Defence, has identified 244 districts in Categories 1, 2, and 3 for the conduct of drills up to the village level based on an assessment done in 2005 and 2010, the States have been asked to add to the "vulnerable areas" list based on their own assess-

ment. An area is designated a civil defence district if there are vital installations such as a refinery, nuclear plant or cantonment in its geographical limits. The States have been asked to submit a report to the Home Ministry after the drills are completed and the identified security gaps will be plugged accordingly, a senior government official said.

"We are not micro-managing the drill. States have been given a format to conduct the drill based on the availability of resources and mapping of vulnerable areas. The District Magistrates may decide the venue and time," the official said.

Pak. violates truce
Meanwhile, the Pakistan Army continued to violate the ceasefire along the Line of Control for the 12th consecutive night.

Taking caution: SDRF personnel train at Dal Lake in Srinagar ahead of Wednesday's drill. IMRAN NISSAR

The Indian Army responded in a proportionate manner to unprovoked small arms in Kupwara, Baramulla, Poonch, Rajouri, Mendhar, Naushera, Sunderbani, and Akhnoor districts of Jammu and Kashmir, a statement said.

The drill will test the efficacy of the operationali-

sation of air-raid warning signs, crash blackout measures, camouflaging vital installations, evacuation plans, establishing hotline with the Indian Air Force, activating control rooms, firefighting and warden services and undertake cleaning of bunkers and trenches among others.

The Anantnag police in South Kashmir issued a public advisory that a mock drill will be conducted at 4 p.m. on Wednesday by the State Disaster Response Force (SDRF).

"As part of the drill, sirens will be activated at various locations in Kashmir. This is a practice exercise

UNSC members question Pak. on Pahalgam attack

NEW YORK
The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) member nations posed tough questions to Pakistan in a discussion on the Pahalgam terror attack. The council refused to issue a statement following the meeting, effectively dismissing Pakistan's attempt to secure a favourable position from the top UN body. » PAGE 5

to test our emergency response systems," the police said.

Mocks drills in Delhi
In Delhi, the mock exercise will be conducted at 55 locations from 4-6 p.m. The locations include residential buildings, government offices, markets and colleg-

es. The Delhi Police beefed up security in the national Capital ahead of the scheduled mock drills with increased number of officials being deployed at tourist spots such as Connaught Place, India Gate, Janpath, Gole Market, Jama Masjid, Red Fort.

The South Central Railway said volunteers, instructors and associated personnel would "simulate a hostile attack scenario to evaluate emergency preparedness and inter-agency coordination" at Kacheguda (Hyderabad division), Raichur (Guntakal Division) and Aurangabad (Nanded Division) on May 7. In Maharashtra, the drill will be conducted at more than a dozen locations, including Mumbai at 4 p.m.

Uttar Pradesh Director General of Police Prashant Kumar said mock exercise will be done in all the 75 districts.

Key Highlights of the Drill Initiative:

- **Objective:** To test and strengthen civil defence mechanisms in high-risk and vulnerable zones, especially those with vital installations (nuclear plants, refineries, cantonments).
- **Scope:**
  - Mock air-raid alerts, blackout protocols, firefighting, evacuations, hotline activation with IAF.
  - Warden services, trench sanitation, control room response.

- **Execution:**
  - Managed by District Magistrates with inputs from SDRF, Police, and Civil Defence volunteers.
  - Conducted in cities (like Delhi, Mumbai), vulnerable towns (e.g. Anantnag), and railway zones (Hyderabad, Raichur, Aurangabad).
  - States submit post-drill assessment to the Home Ministry to plug security gaps.

Significance for India's Internal Security Framework:

- **Strategic Response to Terrorism:**
  - Post-Pahalgam attack drills reflect a proactive, decentralized response mechanism.
  - Enhances public awareness and trust in the government's security preparedness.
- **Inter-agency Coordination:**
  - Brings together SDRF, Police, IAF, Railways, Civil Administration — key for effective disaster and conflict zone response.
- **Decentralized Preparedness:**
  - States given liberty to identify additional vulnerable areas ensures context-specific threat analysis.
- **Operational Readiness:**
  - Tests infrastructure and communication systems like sirens, hotline lines, bunkers, and control rooms.

Challenges and Areas for Improvement:

- **Outdated Risk Assessment:** Many districts were identified based on 2005–2010 data — urgent need to revise based on current threat matrix.
- **Resource Disparity:** Not all districts have adequate personnel, equipment, or infrastructure.
- **Lack of Public Participation:** Drills often conducted in top-down manner, limiting community engagement and awareness.
- **Follow-up Mechanisms:** Effectiveness depends on action taken post-assessment; many past reports remain under-implemented.

Broader Implications:

- Reinforces the importance of civil defence as the "fourth pillar" in India's internal security, alongside police, intelligence, and armed forces.

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- Aligns with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction which emphasizes preparedness and public safety.
- Could serve as a model for regular, periodic drills in other high-risk areas — both urban (cyber threats, urban terrorism) and rural (natural disasters).

Conclusion:

- India's move to conduct nation-wide civil defence drills is a critical step in building a resilient internal security architecture. While the initiative marks progress in operational preparedness, sustained investment in capacity-building, updated threat assessments, and community participation will be key to ensuring real-world effectiveness.

UPSC Mains Practice Question
Ques : Analyze the significance and limitations of decentralized disaster and conflict preparedness mechanisms in India.

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Daily News Analysis

Page 01 : GS 2: Governance | Social Justice

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) released the Human Development Report 2025, in which India ranks 130 out of 193 countries, moving up 3 places from 2022, with an improved HDI value of 0.685.

Prelims Pointers:

- HDI is released by UNDP.
- It includes three core indicators: Life expectancy, Education, and GNI per capita.
- India's 2023 HDI rank: 130/193; HDI value: 0.685.

India climbs 3 spots to 130 among 193 nations in HDI, but inequality continues to be a burden
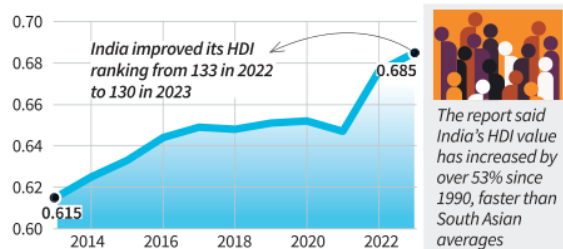
Bindu Shajan Perappadan
NEW DELHI

India moved up three spots in the Human Development Index, ranking 130 out of 193 countries in 2023, as per the Human Development Report 2025 released on Tuesday by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

With the HDI value improving to 0.685 in 2023 from 0.676 in 2022, India remained in the medium human development category, moving closer to the high human development threshold of 0.700.

The Gross National Income per capita rose over four times to $9,046.76 in 2023 from $2,167.22 in 1990, while 135 million Indians escaped multidimensional poverty between 2015-16 and 2019-21.

However, challenges persist, with inequality reducing India's HDI by 30.7%, one of the highest losses in the region, the report said.

"While health and education inequality have improved, income and gender disparities remain significant. Female labour force participation and political representation lag, though recent steps – such as the constitutional amendment reserving one-third of legislative seats for women – offer promise for transformative change," it added.

Better life expectancy
Life expectancy in India rose to 72 years in 2023 from 58.6 years in 1990, the highest since the inception of the index, indicating a strong recovery from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on life expectancy. The report attributed this to the national health programmes followed by successive governments, including the National Rural Health Mission, Ayushman Bharat, Janani Suraksha Yojana, and the Poshan Abhiyaan.

Also, children today are expected to stay in school for 13 years on average, up from 8.2 years in 1990. "Initiatives like the Right to Education Act, Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan, the National Education Policy 2020 have enhanced outcomes. However, quality and learning outcomes remain areas for continued focus," the report said.

The report, titled *A Matter of Choice: People and Possibilities in the Age of AI*, highlighted the critical role of artificial intelligence in shaping the next chapter of human development – particularly in fast-growing economies, including India. The report placed India in a unique position globally as a rising AI powerhouse with the highest self-reported AI skills penetration.

Steady progress
According to the latest UNDP report, India's Human Development Index(HDI) score improved from 0.676 in 2022 to 0.685 in 2023

India improved its HDI ranking from 133 in 2022 to 130 in 2023

0.685
0.615

2014 2016 2018 2020 2022

The report said India's HDI value has increased by over 53% since 1990, faster than South Asian averages

Key Highlights:

- **HDI Improvement:**
  - India's HDI Value rose from 0.676 (2022) to 0.685 (2023).
  - India continues to fall under the "medium human development" category.
  - The threshold for high human development is 0.700, which India is approaching steadily.

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- **Positive Indicators:**
  - **Life Expectancy:** Improved to 72 years in 2023 (from 58.6 in 1990).
  - **Education:** Expected years of schooling increased to 13 years (from 8.2 in 1990).
  - Gross National Income per capita: Rose to $9,046.76 in 2023 (from $2,167.22 in 1990).
  - 135 million people moved out of multidimensional poverty (2015–2021).
  - Government Initiatives such as Ayushman Bharat, RTE, SamagraShiksha, PoshanAbhiyaan, NEP 2020 contributed to these improvements.
- **AI and Human Development:**
  - India recognized as a rising AI powerhouse with the highest self-reported AI skills penetration globally.
  - The report highlights AI as a transformative force for the next stage of human development.

Persistent Challenges:

- **High Inequality:**
  - Inequality reduces India's HDI by 30.7%, one of the highest in South Asia.
  - Major disparities still exist in income distribution and gender equality.
- **Gender Disparity:**
  - Low female labour force participation and limited political representation remain serious concerns.
  - Recent reform: Women's Reservation Bill (33% in legislatures) is seen as a step towards gender parity.
- **Quality of Education:**
  - Despite higher enrollment and schooling years, learning outcomes remain poor.
  - Need for better implementation of NEP 2020, teacher training, and skill-based education.

Significance for India:

- **Evidence of Welfare Impact:** Shows that social sector schemes have long-term positive effects on health, education, and income.
- **Policy Learning:** Highlights which sectors need focused intervention (e.g., income inequality, women's empowerment).
- **Global Positioning:** India's improving HDI and growing AI capabilities position it as a key emerging power in human-centric technological development.
- **Demographic Dividend Opportunity:** With better health and education, India can leverage its youthful population for sustained development.

UPSC PrelimsPractice Question

Ques :Which of the following components are used in calculating the Human Development Index (HDI)?

1. Life Expectancy at Birth

2. Gross National Income (GNI) per capita

3. Expected and Mean Years of Schooling

4. Gender Inequality Index

Which of the following is/are correct?

a) 1, 2 and 3 only

b) 1 and 4 only

c) 1, 2 and 4 only

d) All of the above

Ans a)

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques : India's improvement in the Human Development Index reflects policy gains, yet inequality remains a major bottleneck. Critically examine. **(250 words)**

Following the April 22 terror attack in Pahalgam, India has intensified its strategic and diplomatic outreach to West Asian nations, including Qatar and Iran, while rejecting criticism from the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) regarding the Kashmir issue.

PM speaks to Emir of Qatar as India steps up outreach

Tamim Bin Hamad Al Thani expresses full support to India's fight against terrorism and all actions to bring the perpetrators of Pahalgam attack to justice; New Delhi rejects OIC statement as absurd

Suhasini Haidar
NEW DELHI

The Union government on Tuesday stepped up its outreach to West Asia amid tensions with Pakistan.

While Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke to Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al Thani, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar will meet Iranian Foreign Minister Seyed Abbas Araghchi in Delhi on Wednesday.

The moves came even as the Organisation for Islamic Cooperation Mission at the United Nations in New York issued a statement expressing concern about the "deteriorating security environment" in South Asia, and criticising India for "hostile rhetoric", while condemning the terror attack in Pahalgam.

In a sharp response to the OIC statement, which had also expressed support for Pakistan and called for Kashmiri "self-determination", the External Affairs Ministry said the statement had been issued at the behest of Pakistan, and called it "absurd".

The Ministry rejected any interference by the 57-nation grouping in India's

Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al Thani in New Delhi in February. SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

"internal affairs"

In a statement, the Ministry said the Emir of Qatar had conveyed condolences for the victims of the attack and "expressed full support in India's fight against terrorism and all its actions to bring the perpetrators to justice".

The statement of support to India came even as Qatari Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al-Thani met with visiting Pakistani Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi in Doha. A statement released by the Qatari PMO said that they had discussed "bilateral cooperation relations and ways to support and develop them,

along with several issues of joint interest".

Iran FM's visit
The External Affairs Ministry announced that the Iranian Foreign Minister would arrive in Delhi on Wednesday afternoon. He will hold talks with Mr. Jaishankar on Thursday, and co-chair the Joint Commission Meeting on economic issues. He will also call on President Droupadi Murmu during his visit, indicating the importance South Block is giving to the visit.

However, the government is unlikely to take up Mr. Araghchi's offer to mediate between Iran's two "brotherly neighbours" In-

dia and Pakistan. During a visit to Islamabad on Monday, the Iranian Foreign Minister, who met with Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, President Asif Ali Zardari, and Army chief General Asim Munir, told reporters that his mission in the region was to "get a clear understanding of the current situation".

The engagement with Iran and Qatar follows Mr. Modi's conversations with leaders of Saudi Arabia, Iran, and the UAE in the aftermath of the Pahalgam attack.

However, as India began preparations and drills for a possible military strike on Pakistan, in response to the attack, many countries, including Qatar, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE, along with the U.K., the U.S., and the European Union, had also issued statement calling for de-escalation and resolving issues through dialogue and diplomacy, which New Delhi has not responded to. New Delhi did not respond to a statement by Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim on Tuesday calling for an "independent and transparent investigation" into the attacks.

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Key Developments:

- **PM Modi's Call with Qatari Emir:**
  - Emir Tamim Bin Hamad Al Thani expressed full support to India's fight against terrorism.
  - He conveyed condolences and backed India's efforts to bring perpetrators of the Pahalgam attack to justice.
  - A positive signal of counter-terrorism cooperation from a key Gulf country.

- **OIC Statement & India's Response:**
  - The OIC Mission at the UN issued a statement criticizing India's "hostile rhetoric" and supported Kashmiri self-determination.
  - India termed the statement "absurd" and claimed it was issued at Pakistan's behest.
  - India strongly asserted its sovereignty and rejected any external interference in its internal affairs.

- **Visit of Iranian Foreign Minister:**
  - Iranian FM Seyed Abbas Araghchi arrived in Delhi for bilateral talks and to co-chair the India-Iran Joint Commission Meeting.
  - Despite Iran offering to mediate between India and Pakistan, India is unlikely to accept such mediation, in line with its longstanding stance of treating Kashmir as a bilateral issue.
  - Highlights India's intention to keep Iran strategically engaged but on its own diplomatic terms.

- **Qatar-Pakistan Engagement:**
  - Qatari PM also met Pakistani Interior Minister in Doha, signaling parallel outreach to both South Asian neighbors.
  - However, Qatar's overt support to India's counter-terrorism efforts reflects balanced diplomacy and India's effective lobbying.

- **Muted Indian Response to Global De-escalation Calls:**
  - Several countries (Qatar, UAE, Saudi Arabia, US, UK, EU) issued statements urging de-escalation and diplomatic resolution.
  - India has not publicly responded, indicating a calculated diplomatic posture as it prepares for a possible retaliatory move.

Significance of India's Outreach:

- **Strategic Counter to Pakistan's Narrative:**
  - India's immediate outreach to key Gulf powers helps blunt Pakistan's efforts to internationalize the Kashmir issue post-attack.
  - Ensures diplomatic isolation of Pakistan in forums like the OIC.

- **Energy and Diaspora Security:**
  - Strong ties with Qatar, Iran, UAE are vital for India's energy security and the well-being of its diaspora in the region.

- **Multipolar Diplomacy:**

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- o Shows India's ability to engage multiple stakeholders — including countries that also maintain ties with Pakistan — without compromising core interests.
- **Rejecting Third-Party Mediation:**
  - o Reinforces India's consistent stance that Kashmir is a bilateral matter and does not require external mediation.

Critical Analysis and Challenges:

- While support from Qatar and others is diplomatically beneficial, continued outreach is needed to ensure unified messaging from the Gulf.
- India's rejection of the OIC reflects its hardline approach, but long-term strategy may require more nuanced engagement with Islamic nations and institutions.
- The balancing act between defensive posturing and avoiding escalation needs careful management to preserve India's global image as a responsible power.

Conclusion:

- India's active outreach to West Asia post-Pahalgam attack reflects a mature and calibrated diplomatic strategy aimed at isolating Pakistan diplomatically, reinforcing counter-terror partnerships, and asserting national sovereignty. However, India's success in this effort will depend on its ability to maintain strategic balance while pursuing national security interests with assertiveness and restraint.

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques: Discuss the significance of India's engagement with West Asian countries in the context of counter-terrorism and regional diplomacy. (150 Words)

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Daily News Analysis

Page 10 : GS : 2: Indian Polity

Recent remarks by the Vice-President of India, questioning the judiciary's directions to constitutional functionaries like the President and Governors, have stirred a debate on the limits of judicial power, separation of powers, and judicial accountability.

Prelims Pointers:

- Article 50: Separation of judiciary from executive.
- Article 124(4): Impeachment of Supreme Court judges for misbehaviour.
- Article 142: Power of the Supreme Court to deliver complete justice.
- Popular sovereignty: Supreme authority rests with the people through their elected representatives.

How the judiciary maintains accountability

All judicial powers have been vested in the Constitution, and judges are bound to work within that constitutional ambit. Once any of them go beyond it, they may be removed on the grounds of proved misbehaviour, which would include violation of the Constitution

LETTER & SPIRIT

C.B.P. Srivastava

The recent comments by the Vice-President of India on the role of judges has caused much anxiety and is a matter of serious concern that needs to be analysed properly. It is a well-known fact that with power comes responsibility. The position of the Vice-President is second in the order of precedence in India and therefore, anybody holding such a post needs to be extremely cautious before speaking, as his views might send wrong signals to the people. The current Vice-President, Jagdeep Dhankhar, in the context of the Supreme Court setting deadlines for Presidents and Governors to clear Bills approved by the Union/State legislatures, has stated that judges are working as a 'super parliament'; that judges cannot give directions to the President; and that judges are not accountable because the law of the land does not apply to them.

Dissecting the claims

The term 'super parliament' does not have any significance as Parliament is the supreme body constituted by the free will of the people reflecting the icon of popular sovereignty. No agency including the judiciary can go beyond it. It is to be noted that in order to prevent any arbitrary exercise of power by an independent judiciary, the framers of the Constitution had placed all judicial powers in the Constitution itself. This has been reiterated by the Supreme Court in *L. Chandra Kumar versus Union of India* (1997) in which the Court held that although all judicial powers are vested in the Constitution, the independence of the judiciary is fully secured because of the principle of separation of powers. If at any time judges try to exercise their powers arbitrarily, crossing the boundaries of the separation of powers, it shall be a gross violation of Article 50 and

the government which holds majority in Parliament may initiate a process for a removal of the judge concerned.

On the second issue, that the judiciary cannot give directions to the President, a perusal of his position in India needs to be explained. The President is the head of the State (it is clear when Article 52 is read with Article 1). Hence, he or she is elected according to the provisions contained in Articles 54 and 55 establishing India as a Republic. The President is the head of the Executive, the head of the armed forces and also the head of Parliament under Articles 53(1), 53(2) and 79 respectively. Therefore, he is vested with powers

according to his position. Giving assent to the Bills is the power of the President which is well within the limits of popular sovereignty. The President cannot and shall not go beyond this doctrine of popular sovereignty. In more simpler words, if the assent is delayed inordinately, it would undermine the people's power which in itself would be undemocratic. Hence, the judiciary setting a time frame for giving assent to Bills is consistent with the requirements of popular sovereignty. It in no way undermines the dignity of the head of the State. Since the people of India abide by the Constitution and believe in its

supremacy, all authorities including the President and Governor shall abide by the provisions of the Constitution.

On accountability

The statement given by the Vice-President that the law of the land does not apply to judges is not at all rational because he himself, as the second highest constitutional authority, questions the rule of law in India. The rule of law flows from the doctrine of the supremacy of the Constitution; questioning its efficacy and limitations would undermine the Constitutional mandate. As mentioned above, all judicial powers have been vested in the Constitution itself, and judges are bound to work within that constitutional ambit. Once any of them go beyond it, he may be removed on the grounds of proved misbehaviour, which would include violation of the Constitution. Moreover, Parliament is empowered to set aside a decision of the Court, if required, by making a new law. This provision also signifies the people's power and popular sovereignty.

Last but not the least, the Constitution of India has given powers to the judiciary to review the actions of the State and its instrumentalities for the purpose of establishing the rule of law to protect the rights of the people. The exercise of the inherent power of the Supreme Court to do complete justice under Article 142 is worth mentioning. When there is no express constitutional provision or parliamentary law on a particular subject or issue at hand, the Supreme Court has been vested with the power to become the custodian and sole interpreter of the Constitution.

Conclusively, whenever the country faces large-scale turbulence in almost all sectors, constitutional authorities and citizens both need to look at the events with a liberal mindset and should avoid doing or speaking anything which might ultimately prove detrimental to democratic and constitutional sentiments.

C.B.P. Srivastava is President, Centre for Applied Research in Governance, Delhi.

GETTY IMAGES

THE GIST

▼ The current Vice-President, Jagdeep Dhankhar, in the context of the Supreme Court setting deadlines for Presidents and Governors to clear Bills approved by the Union/State legislatures, has stated that judges are working as a 'super parliament'.

▼ The term 'super parliament' does not have any significance as Parliament is the supreme body constituted by the free will of the people.

▼ The statement given by the Vice-President that the law of the land does not apply to judges is not at all rational because he himself, as the second highest constitutional authority, questions the rule of law in India.

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Key Issues Raised:

- **Judiciary Acting as a 'Super Parliament':**
  - The Vice-President stated that the Supreme Court overstepped its powers by directing the President or Governors to give timely assent to bills.
  - He criticized the judiciary for functioning like a "super parliament".
- **Claim of Lack of Judicial Accountability:**
  - The Vice-President claimed that "law of the land does not apply to judges," implying they function without accountability.

Constitutional Position and Legal Reasoning:

- **Judicial Powers Are Constitutionally Bound:**
  - As per L. Chandra Kumar v. Union of India (1997), all judicial powers are derived from the Constitution.
  - The independence of the judiciary is protected by Article 50 (separation of judiciary from executive), but not absolute or unaccountable.
- **Presidential Assent and Popular Sovereignty:**
  - Under Articles 52 to 79, the President is the head of the Executive and Parliament.
  - Assent to bills is part of this executive function, but inordinate delays undermine popular sovereignty, which is derived from the will of the people.
  - Judicial directives in this context aim to uphold constitutional efficiency, not diminish the dignity of the President or Governors.
- **Mechanisms of Judicial Accountability:**
  - Judges can be removed for "proved misbehaviour" under Article 124(4) — this includes violating the Constitution.
  - Parliament can override judicial interpretations by making a new law, reflecting people's sovereignty via legislative action.
  - This counters the claim that judiciary is beyond the law.
- **Rule of Law and Judicial Review:**
  - The judiciary is not above the law but is its guardian.
  - Article 142 empowers the Supreme Court to deliver complete justice when legal voids exist.
  - The judiciary serves as the final interpreter of the Constitution, especially when other branches fail to act.

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Why This Debate Matters:

- Tensions between constitutional authorities — especially between the judiciary and executive — can undermine public trust if not handled responsibly.
- Remarks from high offices (like the Vice-President) carry institutional weight and may confuse or mislead public opinion.
- It revives the discourse on checks and balances, a cornerstone of the Indian democratic system.

UPSC PrelimsPractice Question

Ques :Consider the following statements:

1. The President of India is the head of the Executive, Parliament, and Armed Forces.

2. The Supreme Court has the power to review decisions of the Executive and Legislature.

3. Judges are completely unaccountable under Indian law.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

a) 1 and 2 only

b) 2 and 3 only

c) 1 and 3 only

d) 1, 2 and 3

Ans: a)

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques: "Judicial accountability must coexist with judicial independence to uphold the rule of law." Discuss in the context of recent tensions between the judiciary and executive. (150 Words)

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On Civil Services Day (April 21), Cabinet Secretary T. V. Somanathan emphasized the importance of civil services in upholding democracy, ensuring administrative continuity, and the growing need for lateral entry and transparency in the system. This offers an opportunity to reflect on the functioning, challenges, and reforms in Indian bureaucracy.

What are the challenges faced by the civil services?

What are the frameworks under which the bureaucracy functions?

Rangarajan. R

The story so far:

On the occasion of Civil Services Day (April 21), Cabinet Secretary T. V. Somanathan IAS, spoke about the importance of civil services in maintaining and strengthening democracy, the need for lateral entrants and greater transparency.

What is merit versus spoils system?
The merit system entails appointments to government posts after a rigorous selection process by an independent authority. In India, this commenced in 1858 when the British introduced the Indian Civil Service to select officers for administering the country. After independence, it is the Union Public Service Commission which conducts such exams. The merit system is aimed at building career bureaucrats who are expected to function without any political leanings and provide independent advice to the incumbent political executive. The spoils system works on the adage 'to the victor belong the spoils.' It is a system where the incumbent political executive appoints its supporters to various posts in the government. It has its origins in the U.S., and continued until 1883 when it was replaced largely by the merit system.

What is the role of the civil services?
The civil services have contributed significantly in the administration of our democratic system. As mentioned by the Cabinet Secretary, they have been instrumental in the conduct of free and fair elections, and ensuring smooth transfer of power both at the Centre and States. There have been numerous instances when States have been placed under President's rule, with the civil services ensuring uninterrupted administration during such times.

On the development side, they are a repository of institutional knowledge. They provide advice to ruling governments in policy making and also implement the policies made by the political executive. The administrative tasks of public bureaucracy include executing and monitoring programmes, and laying down laws, rules and regulations. Civil servants have been the fulcrum around which governance activities like delivery of essential services, providing relief operations etc., have been carried out.

What ails the civil services?
But the civil services also suffer from significant challenges. First, neutrality as a trait is fast eroding among bureaucrats, resulting in political bias in discharge of critical functions. It is pertinent to note that both the cause and effect of this phenomenon is the increasing political interference in all aspects of bureaucracy including postings and transfers. Second, career bureaucrats who are generalists, may lack the expertise needed to address technical challenges. Third, there is also significant corruption at all levels of the bureaucracy that often goes unpunished.

What reforms are required?
Some of the measures that need to be taken are summarised here.

In a democracy, the mandate is with the elected government and it needs to be respected. However, the neutral bureaucracy needs to be insulated from undue political interference to uphold the rule of law and constitutional values. To maintain a harmonious balance between the political and permanent executive, the autonomy of career bureaucrats is essential. This includes reasonable independence with respect to postings, tenures and transfers. Also, there needs to be a shift in the focus of bureaucrats from 'procedure' to 'outcomes.' Monitoring at present in the government is primarily through the measurement of outlays and at best through outputs. There is a need to move towards measurement of 'outcomes.' This reform can be hastened by hiring domain experts as lateral entrants, especially at senior levels. These reforms would uphold the essential traits of an effective civil service.
Rangarajan. R is a former IAS officer and author of 'Courseware on Polity Simplified'. The views expressed are personal.

THE GIST

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The merit system entails appointments to government posts after a rigorous selection process by an independent authority.

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But the civil services also suffer from significant challenges. First, neutrality as a trait is fast eroding among bureaucrats, resulting in political bias in discharge of critical functions.

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What is the Civil Services' Role in Indian Democracy?

- **Administrative Continuity & Stability:**
  - Maintain governance during regime changes or President's Rule.
  - Play a crucial role in free and fair elections, public service delivery, and disaster relief.
- **Policy Advice & Implementation:**
  - Serve as advisers to the political executive on policy matters.
  - Implement laws, regulations, and development programmes efficiently.
- **Custodians of Institutional Memory:**
  - Ensure long-term policy consistency and uphold constitutional values.

Frameworks under Which Bureaucracy Functions:

- **Merit System:**
  - o Based on objective recruitment through the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC).
  - o Ensures political neutrality, professional competence, and continuity.
- **Spoils System (Contrasted):**
  - o A system where political loyalty determines appointments, historically prevalent in the U.S.
  - o India has largely rejected this, but concerns remain about creeping politicization.
- **Permanent vs. Political Executive**:
  - o The elected government (political executive) is accountable to people.
  - o The bureaucracy (permanent executive) is expected to function impartially under the Constitution.

Key Challenges Faced by Civil Services:

- **Erosion of Neutrality:**
  - o Growing political interference in transfers, postings, and promotions.
  - o Declining perception of bureaucratic impartiality and ethical independence.
- **Generalist vs. Specialist Debate:**
  - o Most IAS officers are generalists, often lacking domain-specific expertise.
  - o Hinders effective policymaking in technical sectors like health, climate, AI, etc.
- **Corruption and Accountability Gaps:**
  - o Systemic corruption at all levels, often going unpunished due to weak vigilance and lack of transparency.
- **Procedure-Oriented Culture:**
  - o Focus remains on rules and processes, rather than outcomes and impact.

Recommended Reforms:

- **Insulation from Political Interference**:
  - o Secure fixed tenures, transparent posting norms, and independent civil service boards.
- **Shift from Procedure to Performance:**
  - o Adopt a results-based framework with clear outcome indicators.
  - o Modernize monitoring and evaluation systems beyond mere budget utilization.
- **Lateral Entry of Experts:**
  - o Bring in domain specialists at mid and senior levels to improve decision-making and innovation.

- **Reinforce Ethical Governance:**
  - Strengthen internal vigilance, ensure protection for whistleblowers, and promote ethical training in public service.

Conclusion:

Civil services are the bedrock of administrative stability in India's democracy. While the merit-based structure offers resilience, the system must evolve through strategic reforms to tackle politicization, enhance efficiency, and meet contemporary governance needs. Balancing political accountability with bureaucratic autonomy remains central to this reform agenda.

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques :"An impartial and efficient civil service is crucial to democratic governance." Discuss the challenges and reforms needed in the Indian context.

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Paper 02: International Relations

UPSC Mains Practice Question: In the context of India-Pakistan tensions, discuss how civil defence drills can serve both as preparedness measures and instruments of strategic signalling. (250 words)

Persuasion strategy
Pakistan must hand over designated terrorists to India

For the first time in over 50 years, India has been told that it is on the threshold of a full-scale war. The drills seek to bring that war into the people's consciousness, not as a media event but as a way of preparing them for what could unfold in their lives. Civil defence preparedness is a key element of war strategy. These drills will help to take stock of how common people, those responsible for key civil assets and trained personnel, will interact and act in a war-like situation. Defence preparedness is another matter altogether. The government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi has not baulked at national, war-like mobilisations. From demonetisation through Swachh Bharat to the lights off during COVID-19 that also tested electric grid resilience, there have been many projects that have sought to tell the people that they have to be in mission-mode. Grid resilience is once again being tested by the drills through blackouts.

Wars and war-like simulations can serve to bring up consciousness and produce more social cohesiveness and a focus on common, larger goals. They can prepare the people for hardships without their losing morale. The other side is, of course, destruction. In the eyes of many, including possibly the government, Pahalgam was India's 9/11, if not in its scale but in the response. This view holds that Pakistan is the Afghanistan of 2001 – a nation coming apart with only religious zealots holding it together using terror as the only statecraft. George W. Bush's "I hear you" in the rubble of the World Trade Center was followed by a blitzkrieg that sought to bomb the nation into the Stone Age. The U.S. had zero risk of any retaliation then. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's promise to pursue terrorists to the end of the earth comes with the risk of a furious retaliation if the pursuit means full-fledged war. While testing civil defence preparedness is one thing, a real war is a highly dangerous escalation that will do little good to the narrative of India being an economic powerhouse ready to take its place in a multipolar world as a true and responsible leader. The government must keep its options open so that Pakistan may be persuaded to walk back from the brink by agreeing to hand over terror leaders of the LeT, JeM and fringe outfits. India's non-muscular response to 26/11 brought much shame to Pakistan and the Pakistani media willingly brought more shame to its government by turning its focus on Ajmal Kasab's village and family. Perhaps the civil defence preparedness drills will serve as psy-ops, signalling India's intent that could make Pakistan see the folly of using terror as a tactic in geopolitical disputes.

Context :

- Following the Pahalgam terror attack, India has initiated large-scale civil defence drills across the country. These are not just emergency preparedness measures but are also being viewed as strategic messaging tools aimed at internal mobilisation and external signalling to Pakistan and the international community.

Civil Defence as a National Strategy:

- **Beyond Routine Drills:**
  - The drills are designed to simulate war-like conditions — blackouts, air-raid protocols, and civil infrastructure stress testing.
  - These exercises are similar to India's earlier mission-mode mobilisations like Swachh Bharat, COVID-19 lockdowns, and even demonetisation — projects that demanded mass psychological engagement.

- **Psychological Preparedness:**
  - The objective is to mentally condition the public for scenarios involving conflict and national hardship.

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- o Such preparedness is critical not only for civilian safety but also for maintaining morale and unity during external threats.
- **War Simulation as Psy-Ops:**
  - o These drills double as psychological operations (psy-ops) to convey to adversaries, particularly Pakistan, India's seriousness in retaliating against terror attacks.
  - o The drills may be seen as a non-verbal strategic threat, without actual military escalation.

India's Strategic Dilemma: Escalation vs. Restraint

- **Post-Pahalgam Strategic Posture:**
  - o Pahalgam is being interpreted by many in policy circles as India's 9/11, justifying a more assertive stance on cross-border terrorism.
  - o However, unlike the U.S. post-9/11, India does not enjoy risk-free retaliation due to the nuclear backdrop and proximity to Pakistan.
- **Geopolitical Risks of War:**
  - o A full-scale war would derail India's economic aspirations, undermine investor confidence, and contradict its global image as a mature, responsible rising power.
  - o India's narrative of being a global leader in a multipolar world rests on stability, not escalation.

Diplomatic Options and Persuasion Strategy:

- **Calling for Terror Extradition:**
  - o The focus should remain on diplomatic pressure, urging Pakistan to hand over designated terrorists from groups like LeT and JeM.
  - o Internationalising Pakistan's harbouring of terrorism through the UN, FATF, and bilateral lobbying can build pressure without war.
- **Historical Lessons from 26/11:**
  - o India's non-militaristic response to 26/11, though criticised domestically, forced Pakistan's civil society and media to acknowledge and question their state's duplicity.
  - o A similar model of measured yet firm response could delegitimize Pakistan's use of terror as statecraft.
- **Soft Power and Global Narrative:**
  - o India must continue to project itself as a civilised, law-abiding state that believes in rule-based global order, leveraging soft power diplomacy to isolate Pakistan.

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Conclusion:

India's civil defence drills post-Pahalgam are more than readiness exercises — they are a multi-layered strategy encompassing internal solidarity, deterrence, and international messaging. While a muscular response may be tempting, strategic persuasion and restraint — combined with calculated signalling — remain the most effective tools in dealing with Pakistan's use of terrorism. India's long-term credibility and global leadership aspirations hinge on its ability to manage security threats without losing strategic rationality.

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