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The Union Government has notified a set of new regulations for the Union Territory of Ladakh amid growing demands from local civil society for constitutional safeguards. These include policies on job reservation, domicile status, official languages, and women's political representation. These changes aim to address concerns about demographic change, employment, and cultural identity after the abrogation of Article 370.

Ladakh gets new policies on quota, domicile

- Non-Ladakhis should have 15 years of continuous residence in the UT to be considered 'domiciles'
- 80% of govt. jobs likely to be reserved for STs; a third of hill council seats to be reserved for women
- The official languages of the Union Territory will be English, Hindi, Urdu, Bhoti, and Purgi

Vijaita Singh
NEW DELHI

Amid demands by Ladakhi civil society groups seeking "constitutional safeguards" for the region, the Union government on Tuesday notified new policies on reservation, languages, domiciles, and the composition of hill councils for Ladakh, which became a Union Territory in 2019.

The notifications pave the way for 85% reservation for resident Ladakhis in government jobs. For other residents –including children of Central government officials–to be considered "domiciles", they will have to show 15 years of continuous residence from October 31, 2019, Ladakh's foundation day.

In a first, a third of the seats in hill councils have been reserved for women on a rotational basis. The official languages of the UT will be English, Hindi, Urdu, Bhoti, and Purgi.

President Droupadi Murmu notified the Union Territory of Ladakh Reservation (Amendment) Regulation, 2025, which amends the Jammu and Kashmir Reservation Act, 2004 in Ladakh's context.

The new proviso, substituting a section in the 2004 Act which capped the reservation at 50%, said, "The total percentage of reservation shall in no case exceed 85%, excluding reservation for Economically Weaker Sections (EWS)." Total reservation for government jobs in the Union Territory now stands at 95%, one of the highest in the country. Meghalaya has 85% reservation for Scheduled Castes/Tribes, and Arunachal Pradesh has an 80% quota for STs.

The Rules governing the Regulation, which are yet to be notified, will specify the categories covered under reservation. Around 80% of Ladakh's population of 2.74 lakh is tribal, according to the 2011 Census.

Policy progress

Key events in the ongoing negotiations regarding Ladakh from 2023 to 2025

- **Jan. 3, 2023:** Committee forms to address Ladakh concerns
- **Nov. 30:** Committee is reconstituted with new members
- **March 4, 2024:** Talks between govt. and Ladakh leaders collapse
- **Oct. 6:** Activist Sonam Wangchuk begins fast
- **Oct. 21:** Govt. agrees to resume talks, fast ends
- **Dec. 3:** Committee meets with Leh and Kargil leaders
- **Jan. 15, 2025:** Follow-up meeting takes place in Delhi
- **May 27:** Domicile and reservation policy is hammered out

Major demand: Protests demanding Statehood for Ladakh have been continuing for the past few years. ANI

'Studying notifications'

Cherring Dorjay Lakruk, the president of the Ladakh Buddhist Association and co-convenor of the Leh Apex Body (LAB), who is also part of the high-powered committee which has been deliberating the constitutional safeguards with the government, said that they were studying the multiple notifications published on Tuesday.

"In a meeting on May 27, Home Ministry officials informed the members of LAB that at least 80% vacancies is reserved for Scheduled Tribes (ST), 4% for people living along the Line of Actual Control/ Line of Control, 1% for Scheduled Castes, and 10% for EWS. The Rules, as and when they are notified, will give a breakdown of the reserved categories. Our demand for Statehood still continues," Mr. Lakruk said.

The Hindu reported first on May 27 that the Centre was mulling a new domicile and reservation policy for Ladakh.

Protests, shutdowns

After the special status of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) under Article 370 of the Constitution was read down by the Parliament on August 5, 2019, civil society groups in Ladakh erupted in protests, demanding protection of their land, resources, and employment. The region, bordering China and Pakistan, witnessed shutdowns, amid fears of big businesses and conglomerates taking away land and jobs from the local people.

After initial jubilation, protests began in 2020 with four specific demands: Statehood for Ladakh, inclusion of Ladakh in the sixth schedule of the constitution thus giving it a tribal status, job reservation for locals, and a Parliamentary seat each for Leh and Kargil.

Three other Regulations were also notified by President Murmu: The Ladakh Official Languages Regulation, 2025; The Ladakh Civil Services Decentralisation and Recruitment (Amendment) Regulation, 2025; and The Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Councils (Amendment) Regulation, 2025.

The decentralisation and recruitment Regulation is applicable to "all the Gazetted and non-Gazetted posts" in the Union Territory.

The Ladakh Official Languages Regulation, 2025 said that "English, Hindi, Urdu, Bhoti and Purgi" shall be the official languages, adding that "institutional mechanisms shall make efforts for the promotion and development of other native languages of Ladakh".

Key Highlights:

- **Domicile Policy:**
  - To be considered a domicile of Ladakh, non-locals (including children of Central government employees) must prove 15 years of continuous residence since October 31, 2019 (Ladakh's UT foundation day).
- **Reservation Quota:**
  - Up to 85% reservation (excluding EWS) has been allowed for locals.
  - 80% of vacancies are to be reserved for Scheduled Tribes (STs), reflecting the tribal majority (80%) of Ladakh's population.
  - 4% for LAC/LoC residents, 1% for SCs, and 10% for EWS—totaling 95% reservation in jobs.
- **Women's Representation:**

- One-third of seats in Ladakh's Hill Councils will be reserved for women on a rotational basis.

- **Official Languages:**
  - The official languages notified are English, Hindi, Urdu, Bhoti, and Purgi. Other native languages will also be promoted institutionally.
- **Other Regulations Notified:**
  - Ladakh Official Languages Regulation, 2025
  - Ladakh Civil Services Decentralisation and Recruitment (Amendment) Regulation, 2025
  - Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Councils (Amendment) Regulation, 2025

Mains Analysis:

- These notifications are a response to the long-standing demands for local protection post-2019, especially concerns around land rights, employment, and cultural preservation. While job reservations and language recognition address identity-related concerns, the exclusion of Statehood and Sixth Schedule inclusion—key demands of local leaders—remains a point of contention. The increased reservation quota also raises constitutional questions, as the general cap on reservations is 50%, though Ladakh is a UT without a legislature.
- The move to promote native languages like Bhoti and Purgi reflects a broader cultural recognition effort. Similarly, women's political empowerment through seat reservations marks a progressive step toward inclusive governance.

Conclusion:

- The Centre's policy push in Ladakh is aimed at balancing development with local aspirations. However, the absence of statehood and Sixth Schedule status may continue to fuel discontent. The coming months will be crucial to see whether these administrative safeguards are enough to satisfy Ladakh's civil society or whether the demand for constitutional status gains momentum.

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques : The recent domicile and reservation policies in Ladakh aim to balance development with identity protection. Critically examine the implications of these policies for tribal rights, federalism, and regional autonomy. **(250 words)**

Page 01: GS 2 : Indian Polity and Constitution

The Union Government plans to bring a motion of impeachment against Justice Yashwant Varma (now posted at the Allahabad High Court) during the upcoming Monsoon Session of Parliament. This follows his indictment by a committee set up by the then Chief Justice of India, Sanjiv Khanna, regarding recovery of unaccounted cash from his premises. Despite being asked to resign, Justice Varma refused, leading to the initiation of constitutional removal proceedings under Article 217 read with Article 124(4).

Motion of impeachment against Justice Varma likely during Monsoon Session of Parliament

Nistula Hebbar
NEW DELHI

The Union government will bring a motion of impeachment against Justice Yashwant Varma of the Allahabad High Court during the coming Monsoon Session of Parliament and has initiated the process of building an all-party consensus for this action.

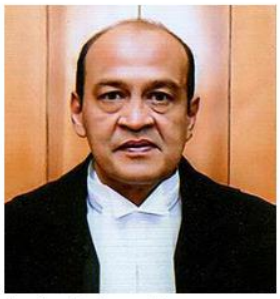
All-party consensus

Speaking to *The Hindu*, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju confirmed that he had begun speaking to political parties over the impeachment motion.

"I have started reaching out to political parties as this is a non-political issue and would be better for all parties to be on board for the same," he said.

Mr. Rijiju did not disclose the names of the leaders of parties he had contacted so far, but said these would be revealed in due course.

The impeachment motion against Justice Varma follows his indictment by a three-member committee constituted by the then Chief Justice of India Sanjiv Khanna.


Justice Yashwant Varma

A fire at Justice Verma's residence in New Delhi in March, when he was a judge at the Delhi High Court, had led to the discovery of unaccounted cash in an outhouse.

The committee submitted its report to Chief Justice Khanna on May 4.

While Justice Varma maintained his innocence over the recovery of the cash, the committee indicted him. Justice Varma, who was transferred to the Allahabad High Court during the controversy, was nudged to resign but he refused, prompting Chief Justice Khanna to write to the President and the Prime Minister to take measures for his removal.

Sources in the government said the inquiry committee's report had recommended Justice Varma's removal and the Union Law Minister will move the motion based on the report.

For the motion of impeachment to be moved, the resolution requires the support of 50 MPs if it is to be moved in the Rajya Sabha and 100 MPs if moved in the Lok Sabha. The motion of impeachment can be moved in either House. "The attempt of the government would be to make it a wholly bipartisan move," a senior government source said.

Key Constitutional Provisions:

- **Article 124(4):** Lays down the procedure for the removal of Supreme Court and High Court judges for "proved misbehaviour or incapacity".

Impeachment Process:

- Can be initiated in either House of Parliament.
- Requires support of 100 Lok Sabha MPs or 50 Rajya Sabha MPs to admit the motion.
- An inquiry committee is formed under Judges (Inquiry) Act, 1968.
- If found guilty, the motion must be passed by two-thirds majority in both Houses.

Significance and Issues:

- **Judicial Accountability vs. Independence:**
  - The case highlights the delicate balance between holding judges accountable and preserving the judiciary's independence from political influence.
- **Political Consensus and Ethics:**
  - Government's effort to build all-party consensus underscores the non-partisan nature of the judiciary and the seriousness of impeachment motions.
- **Rarity of Impeachment:**
  - Only a few impeachment motions have reached advanced stages in Indian history (e.g., Justice V. Ramaswami in 1993), and none have resulted in actual removal so far, making this a significant constitutional development.

Conclusion:

- The impeachment proceedings against Justice Varma mark a rare instance of invoking constitutional mechanisms for judicial accountability. While such action reinforces the integrity of the judiciary, it must be conducted with utmost transparency, bipartisan support, and respect for due process to avoid setting a politically motivated precedent.

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Ques:Consider the following statements regarding judicial impeachment in India:

1. No judge has ever been impeached successfully in India.

2. Justice V. Ramaswami was removed through the impeachment process in 1993.

3. Impeachment can only be initiated in the Lok Sabha.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

a) 1 only

b) 2 and 3 only

c) 1 and 3 only

d) 1, 2 and 3

Ans : a)

A high-powered committee led by the Principal Scientific Adviser has recommended relaxing the mandatory installation of Flue Gas Desulphurisation (FGD) units in most of India's coal-based thermal power plants (TPPs). The recommendation comes amid long-standing delays, high costs, and limited impact of FGDs on ambient air quality. The move may significantly alter India's pollution control strategy for its power sector.

'Sulphur-cleaning device in coal plants not necessary'

92% of India's 600 coal plant units are yet to install FGDs; panel recommends exemption of 80% which are not near major population centres; panel says it will not adversely impact public health

Jacob Koshy
NEW DELHI

A high-powered committee of experts, chaired by Principal Scientific Adviser (PSA) Ajay Sood, has recommended that India do away with a decade-long policy of mandating equipment, called Flu Gas Desulphurisation (FGD) units, in all coal-fired thermal power plants (TPP), according to documents perused by *The Hindu*.

These FGD units are required to be retro-fitted in TPPs to cut harmful sulphur dioxide (SO2) emissions. While 92% of India's 600 TPPs have not yet installed FGD units, the recommendation would exempt about 80% of them from needing to install such equipment.

The limited number of vendors capable of installing such equipment in India, the high installation costs, the potential rise in electricity bills, and disruptions due to the COVID-19 pandemic have been some of the reasons historically cited by the Power Ministry, the overseer of India's TPPs, for plants' inability to adhere to previous deadlines.

Changing horizons: Workers use heavy machinery to sift through coal at the Mundra Thermal Power Station in Gujarat. AFP

However, this was the first time that multiple arms of the government congregated to deliberate on whether FGDs were required in the first place. Their verdict draws on three reports by the CSIR-NEERI, the National Institute of Advanced Studies, and the Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi.

The lead scientists of these three institutions – each "supported" by different arms of the government - were at the meeting on April 23, along with representatives from the Office of the PSA, the Union Power Ministry, and the NITI Aayog. They were all largely unanimous that FGD "was not necessary".

The guiding principles informing the committee's recommendation are that: SO2 levels in ambient air across the country are around 10-20 micrograms/cubic metre, well below India's air quality norms of 80; Indian coal is low in sulphur; SO2 levels in cities near plants with operational FGD units do not differ significantly from those without these units, and all of these were anyway well below permissible levels.

Major population hubs

The committee, according to the minutes of the meeting seen by *The Hindu*, will "recommend" to the Power and Environment Ministers that only power plants located within a 10-km radius of the National Capital Region and other cities with a million-plus population be required to install FGDs. These are called Category A plants. There are 66 such plants, and only 14 of them have installed FGDs. Currently, all these plants are required to comply by 2027.

"The key common point in these studies is that fitment of FGDs in all TPPs in India is not necessary to comply with the NAAQ (National Ambient Air Quality) standards whose compliance is essential to safeguard public health. While all TPPs must comply with the December 2015 stack emission standards for PM pollution and freshwater consumption, the SO2 stack emission standards can be relaxed to ensure that they are in conformance with the NAAQ standards which are notified by CPCB, keeping in mind the human health and other aspects Since the existing NAAQ standards (for ambient SO2) must be complied with, this change will not affect human health in India," the committee concludes.

Key Points:

- **What are FGD Units?**

- FGD systems remove sulphur dioxide (SO_2) from exhaust flue gases of fossil-fuel power plants, reducing air pollution and acid rain.

- **Background:**
  - In 2015, India mandated FGD installation across all thermal power units to control SO_2 emissions, with phased deadlines (latest by 2027).
  - However, 92% of the 600 TPP units have still not installed FGDs due to:
    - High capital costs
    - Limited vendor capacity
    - COVID-19 disruptions
    - Fear of rising electricity prices
- **New Recommendations:**
  - FGDs may be exempted for about 80% of the plants, especially those not located near dense population centres.
  - Only Category A plants (within 10 km of NCR or cities with 1 million+ population) must install FGDs.
  - Just 14 out of 66 such plants have done so till now.
- **Scientific Justification:**
  - Ambient SO_2 levels are already well below India's permissible limit (80 µg/m^3); actual readings hover between 10-20 µg/m^3.
  - Indian coal is naturally low in sulphur.
  - FGDs don't show significant difference in air quality near plants with or without them.
- **Caveat:**
  - Plants must still comply with Particulate Matter (PM) and water usage standards.

Conclusion:

- The recommendation to exempt most thermal power plants from installing FGDs marks a shift towards cost-effective pollution control, based on empirical ambient air quality data. While it may ease economic and logistical burdens, it raises questions about India's long-term climate and health commitments, especially under international environmental agreements.

UPSCMainsPractice Question

Ques:What are Flue Gas Desulphurisation (FGD) units, and why were they mandated in Indian thermal power plants? Critically examine the recent recommendation to exempt most coal plants from installing FGDs in the context of environmental protection and public health. (250 Words)

India's edible oil policy has come under scrutiny due to two key decisions:

- FSSAI's 2021 ban on blended mustard oil to prevent adulteration and support local mustard farming.
- Supreme Court's 2024 split verdict on the environmental release of genetically modified (GM) mustard – DMH-11, citing concerns over insufficient health impact studies.
- Though both aimed to protect consumer health, concerns about erucic acid levels in mustard oil suggest that these decisions may be inadequate or misdirected.

A ban, a split verdict, and a health concern

Sthanu R Nair

Professor of Economics, Indian Institute of Management Kozhikode. Views are personal

Rapeseed-mustard oil (hereafter 'mustard oil') is the third-largest edible oil consumed in India. Two executive and judicial decisions on mustard oil – one from 2021 and another from 2024 – have major public health implications, but have hardly received the public attention and scrutiny they deserve. In the first decision, the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) prohibited the manufacturing and sale of blended mustard oil in India, effective from June 8, 2021. As per Indian food safety laws, selling an edible oil mixed with another edible oil is permitted, provided the proportion of an oil blended with another oil is within 20%. Reports suggest that FSSAI's ban decision was aimed at preventing the adulteration of mustard oil and boosting domestic mustard crop output. In the second, the Supreme Court ruled on July 23, 2024, against approval granted by the Central government for the environmental release of India's indigenously developed genetically modified (GM) mustard named Dhara Mustard Hybrid-11 (DMH-11). A major ground on which one of the two judges pronounced a judgment against DMH-11 was the insufficient assessment of the impact on human health of DMH-11. A common policy goal behind these two decisions was to protect the health of Indian mustard oil consumers. However, a closer look at the facts shows that this goal cannot be fully achieved through these two decisions.

Erucic acid

The mustard oil extracted from the Indian mustard crop contains high levels of a unique fatty acid called erucic acid (40% to 54% of total fatty acid). This is significantly higher than the internationally accepted level of <5%. Mustard oil containing high erucic acid is considered undesirable for human consumption, particularly in advanced countries such as the U.S., Canada, and Europe. Lab experiments demonstrated that animals fed with high erucic acid-containing mustard oil suffered from heart diseases, retarded growth, premature tissue death, and adverse changes to the liver, kidney, skeletal muscle, and adrenal glands. Though there is no conclusive evidence of a similar health impacts on humans, the stigma of the high erucic acid in mustard oil prevails in advanced economies. In those countries, the erucic acid content of mustard oil is strictly controlled by using canola oil for culinary purposes. Canola crop (oil), developed by Canada, contains less than 2% erucic acid content.

The erucic acid-reducing property of DMH-11 and the associated health and economic benefits need to be factored in while deciding on the approval of the GM mustard crop

Edible oil blending

Due to unfavourable climatic conditions, India has not succeeded in developing a high-yielding canola-quality mustard crop. Hence, the easiest way to reduce the high erucic acid content in mustard oil is to blend it with other edible oils. Several scientific studies have proved the lower presence of erucic acid in blended mustard oil. Also, since blended mustard oil is rich in unsaturated fatty acid, consuming it lowers LDL cholesterol and increases HDL cholesterol. One primary concern with edible oil blending is adulteration with artificial flavours and poisonous substances. A nationwide survey by FSSAI in August 2020 found that 24.21% of the 4,461 edible oil samples collected did not meet the quality parameters criteria. A maximum number of adulteration and contamination was found in mustard oil.

Instead of a ban, the sale of blended mustard oil can be allowed but in packaged/branded form with an explicit declaration regarding the oils that have been blended. The share of branded edible oil consumed in India is less than 30%. Strict implementation of the food safety and standards laws and strengthening of food safety infrastructure are also essential in preventing adulteration. Since health is a State subject, the food safety administration at the State level has to play a vital role in this regard. As per industry sources, the proportion of other oils blended with mustard oil in India ranges from 5% to 50%. Though this does not conform with the law, which allows blending up to 20%, it has the unintended positive consequence of reducing the erucic acid content. Hence, the sale of blended mustard oil should not be banned entirely.

GM mustard

Alternatively, the erucic acid content in Indian mustard oil can be reduced by cultivating the indigenous GM mustard crop DMH-11, which, apart from higher yield, has a lower erucic acid content (30-35%) compared to the traditional Indian mustard crops (40-54%). As a result, the oil extracted from DMH-11 requires a lower quantity of other edible oils for blending to reduce erucic acid content. This, in turn, helps to reduce the imports of other edible oils. India is the world's largest importer of edible oils. Its edible oil import bill is pegged at $20.56 billion by NITI Aayog.

Therefore, the erucic acid-reducing property of DMH-11 and the associated health and economic benefits (in terms of reduced edible oil imports) need to be factored in by all the stakeholders while deciding on the approval of the GM mustard crop. The development of the indigenous DMH-11 with a lower erucic acid content is by no means a notable achievement by Indian genetic scientists. After years of research, Canada and Europe have successfully introduced low-erucic acid traits into their rapeseed cultivars. Hence, plant breeding programmes aimed at reducing the erucic acid content in the mustard crop to an internationally accepted level of <5% should be given top priority in India's indigenous GM mustard crop development programmes.

Key Issues:

- **Erucic Acid in Mustard Oil:**
  - Indian mustard oil contains 40–54% erucic acid, much higher than the globally accepted standard of <5%.
  - High erucic acid levels are linked to heart and organ toxicity in animals, though human evidence is inconclusive.
- **Blended Oil Ban (2021):**
  - FSSAI banned blended mustard oil to curb adulteration.
  - However, blending (within legal limits) helps dilute erucic acid, improving the oil's health profile.
  - The ban could be counterproductive unless packaged and labelled blended oils are permitted under regulation.
- **GM Mustard (DMH-11):**
  - DMH-11 has lower erucic acid (30–35%) and higher yields.
  - One Supreme Court judge opposed its release over lack of health impact data.
  - Wider GM adoption could reduce edible oil imports and health risks if safety is assured.
- E**dible Oil Imports:**
  - India imports over $20 billion worth of edible oils annually.
  - Promoting low-erucic acid mustard (via GM crops or breeding) can reduce this dependency.

Conclusion:

- India's dual strategy—banning blended mustard oil and blocking GM mustard—may undermine both health and economic goals. A balanced policy allowing regulated blending and scientifically approved GM crops could offer a better path forward. Strengthening food safety enforcement and investing in low-erucic acid breeding programmes is essential for long-term public health and self-reliance in edible oils.

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques: India's policy decisions on edible oil blending and genetically modified mustard reflect a tension between food safety, public health, and agricultural innovation. Critically examine this statement with reference to erucic acid content in mustard oil. **(250 words)**

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The structure of the Civil Services Examination (CSE), governed by the UPSC, is a legacy of the Macaulay Report (1854) and further institutionalized through the Kothari Committee Report (1975) which led to the present three-stage model — Prelims, Mains, and Interview.

Does the civil services examination need reform?

What changes are needed to make the three-tier exam system a less cumbersome process?

Gopalakrishna. V

The foundations of the present format of the civil services examination can be traced to the Macaulay Report of 1854 which introduced selection by merit and designed an examination on the principle of 'transferability of academic talent to administration'. After Independence, the Kothari Committee (1975) recommended a three-tier examination comprising a preliminary exam, a descriptive main examination and an interview.

The initial format

The preliminary exam comprised of an optional subject and a common general studies paper with a weightage of 2:1 respectively. After the preliminary exam, only the names of the shortlisted aspirants for the main examination were released by the UPSC. The question paper, the marks scored by the aspirants, and the minimum qualifying mark were kept classified and not made public. For many years this 'black box' nature of the preliminary exams ensured its smooth conduct as there was no 'locus standi' for an aspirant to question the result.

In 2005, with the passing of the Right to Information Act, aspirants flooded the UPSC with queries regarding the rationale of the exams and the UPSC had to disclose its methods which were raised for judicial scrutiny. To resolve this issue, the government appointed the S. K. Khanna Committee in 2010. In 2011, based on its recommendations, the optional paper was replaced with a common paper and the preliminary examination was reconstituted to comprise two papers – Paper-I , covering all conventional areas in General Studies, and Paper-II comprising questions on quantitative aptitude, reasoning and English comprehension. However, this format favoured students from urban centres with a good foundation in English. As only the combined score of Paper- I and Paper-II were taken, they could qualify at the prelims even though they scored relatively less in Paper-I. This led to more protests and consequently the government made Paper-II a qualifying paper and the marks were not added to determine merit. The preliminary exam continues in the same format.

Further reform

In 2012, the Government appointed the Arun Nigverkar Committee to suggest a new model. The Committee made many recommendations with the aim of making the exams a less cumbersome process. The accepted changes were incorporated from 2013. The new scheme comprised restructured papers in General Studies covering diverse areas like Indian Polity, Governance, Economy, Science and Technology etc. The scheme continues to date. However, there are still distortions that must be addressed. First, the preliminary examination, which was designed to select the most deserving, has now become a 'jealous gatekeeper' with the sole objective of reducing over five lakh aspirants to around 10,000. Paper-II, which is a qualifying paper, favours students with a background in Sciences and Engineering and is a challenge for Humanities students. Paper-I, which comprises questions that test knowledge in areas that are needed for a career in the administrative services has become increasingly unpredictable. Due to this an aspirant who appears for the exam with a genuine desire to serve the country and is devoting his prime time to prepare for the same, incurs a huge opportunity cost.

The main examination also needs a few changes. The General studies papers have 20 short answer questions and feedback from aspirants indicates that marks are being awarded for factual points than analyses. There are no 'long form questions' which test the much required analytical skills of the future civil servant. Also, the Annual reports of the UPSC indicate that majority of the aspirants select optionals that are more scoring than their own domain. This aberration needs to be corrected and the optional may be replaced by two papers which cover governance and policy. It is high time that the exam scheme is revisited.

Gopalakrishna. V is the Director of Brain Tree Hyderabad.

THE GIST

- After Independence, the Kothari Committee (1975) recommended a three-tier examination comprising a preliminary exam, a descriptive main examination and an interview.
- In 2005, with the passing of the Right to Information Act, aspirants flooded the UPSC with queries regarding the rationale of the exams and the UPSC had to disclose its methods which were raised for judicial scrutiny.
- The preliminary examination, which was designed to select the most deserving, has now become a 'jealous gatekeeper' with the sole objective of reducing over five lakh aspirants to around 10,000.

- **However, over time, multiple concerns have emerged regarding:**
  - Opaque processes in the prelims stage (until RTI in 2005),
  - Bias towards certain educational backgrounds (especially in CSAT/Paper-II),
  - Lack of analytical depth in Mains GS papers,
  - Strategic selection of optionals rather than domain-based choices.

  Several reform committees (e.g., S.K. Khanna Committee, Nigavekar Committee) have made structural changes, but the process still remains mentally taxing, highly competitive, and arguably disconnected from the actual administrative aptitude required in service.

Key Issues Raised:

- **Prelims as a 'jealous gatekeeper':** From over 5 lakh aspirants, only ~10,000 make it to Mains. Paper-I is highly unpredictable, while Paper-II still indirectly favours science/engineering students.

- **Lack of analytical depth in Mains:** 20 short-answer format restricts nuanced expression; factual responses are often rewarded over thoughtful analysis.
- **Optional subject dilemma:** Many aspirants choose scoring subjects rather than their academic background — defeating the purpose of domain expertise.

Recommendations for Reform:

- **Revise the Preliminary Structure:**
  - Make Paper-II more inclusive or replace it with a universally accessible aptitude test.
  - Introduce transparency in question setting and answer key validation.
- **Revamp the Mains General Studies:**
  - Include long-form analytical questions to test reasoning and decision-making.
  - Rebalance the question paper to test both factual and interpretive skills.
- **Replace Optionals:**
  - Introduce two compulsory papers on Governance, Public Policy, and Ethics to ensure relevance to administrative work.
- **Ensure accessibility and fairness:**
  - Consider digital options and regional language parity.
  - Reduce the opportunity cost of aspirants by limiting attempts or exam duration cycle.

Conclusion:

- The Civil Services Exam, while serving as a robust filter for administrative talent, needs modernization to align with India's dynamic governance needs. Reforms should aim at inclusivity, relevance, and reduced psychological stress on aspirants. The focus must shift from rote memorization and strategy-based elimination to analytical, ethical, and governance-oriented evaluation.

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques: Discuss the constitutional safeguards and judicial interventions related to the imposition of President's Rule under Article 356. In light of recent developments, evaluate the relevance of the S.R. Bommai judgment in protecting India's federal structure.**(250 words)**

A strategy fuelled by vision, powered by energy

Hardeep S. Puri

is Union Minister of Petroleum and Natural Gas in the Government of India

A few days ago, India overtook Japan to become the world's fourth largest economy. Since 2014, under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership, India's GDP has more than doubled to $4.3 trillion in 2025. This is the result of a decade-long strategy centred on reforms, resilience and relentless pursuit of self-reliance.

India has not only become the world's fastest-growing major economy but is also a strategic force. The energy sector, integral to this rise, has undergone a structural transformation during the first year of Modi 3.0, building on 10 years of foundational change.

More importantly, India's growth rate of 6.7% in the last quarter places it on a fast trajectory that none of the other countries can remotely hope to achieve in the coming years.

Outlining an energy strategy

India is now the third largest energy and oil consumer, fourth-largest refiner, and fourth-largest LNG importer globally. With energy demand expected to grow two and a half times by 2047 and 25% of incremental global demand set to come from India, the road map is clear: energy security is development security.

The Modi government's energy strategy addresses the energy trilemma of availability, affordability, and sustainability through a four-pronged approach –diversification of sources and suppliers, expansion of domestic production, transition to renewables, and affordability. In the upstream oil and gas sector, India's exploration acreage has doubled from 8% in 2021 to 16% in 2025. With a goal of covering one million square kilometres by 2030, the government aims to unlock 42 billion tonnes of oil and oil-equivalent gas. This expansion has been enabled by landmark reforms such as the reduction of 'No-Go' areas by 99%, streamlined licensing through Open Acreage Licensing Policy (OALP) rounds, and attractive pricing incentives for new gas wells.

The revised gas pricing mechanism – linking prices to 10% of the Indian crude basket and offering a 20% premium for new wells – has enhanced gas availability for city gas networks and industrial usage. To reduce costs and accelerate monetisation, new revenue-sharing contracts allow shared infrastructure among Exploration and Production (E&P) players.

Technological and geophysical efforts have complemented policy reforms. The National Seismic Programme, Mission Anveshan, airborne gravity gradiometry (AGG) surveys, and continental shelf mapping have expanded data and exploration confidence, especially in frontier basins such as the Andamans, the Mahanadi, and the Cauvery.

India's energy sector can be defined in three words — confidence, self-reliance and strategic foresight

The Oil and Natural Gas Corporation Limited (ONGC) and Oil India have together made over 25 hydrocarbon discoveries across the Mumbai Offshore, Cambay, Mahanadi, and Assam basins in the last four years. Noteworthy among these are the Suryamani and Vajramani wells on the west coast offshore and the Utkal and Konark fields on the east coast deep waters. These discoveries add over 75 MMtoe (million metric tonnes of oil equivalent) and 2,700 MMSCM (million metric standard cubic metres) of gas to India's reserves.

Collaborations with global majors are bearing fruit. ONGC's partnership with bp is projected to boost output from Mumbai High by 44% for oil and 89% for gas. A data centre at the University of Houston now facilitates access to India's exploration datasets for international investors.

Downstream infrastructure has seen parallel expansion. India now operates 24,000 kilometres of product pipelines, nearly 96,000 retail outlets, and has significantly strengthened its strategic reserves and LPG storage. Over 67 million people visit petrol pumps daily, which is testimony to the scale and efficiency of India's fuel supply ecosystem.

India's city gas network has grown from 55 geographic areas in 2014 to 307 in 2025, with piped natural gas (PNG) connections up from 25 lakh to 1.5 crore and over 7,500 compressed natural gas (CNG) stations in operation. Unified pipeline tariffs and city gas expansions have ensured affordable access even in distant States.

The focus of the green strategy

Biofuels have emerged as a cornerstone of India's green strategy. Ethanol blending in petrol has surged from 1.5% in 2013 to 19.7% in 2025. Blending quantities have expanded from 38 crore litres to 484 crore litres. This has saved 1.26 lakh crore in foreign exchange, reduced emissions by 643 lakh MT, and paid ₹1.79 lakh crore to distillers and over ₹1 lakh crore to farmers.

Feedstock diversification ranging from molasses to maize has created a robust ethanol ecosystem. Parallelly, the Sustainable Alternative Towards Affordable Transportation (SATAT) initiative has commissioned over 100 compressed biogas (CBG) plants and aims for a 5% CBG blending mandate by 2028. Central support for biomass procurement and CBG-pipeline connectivity is accelerating circular energy adoption.

Green hydrogen has been given a massive thrust with 8.62 lakh tonnes of production and 3,000 MW of electrolyser tenders awarded. Oil public sector undertakings are leading from the front – Indian Oil Corporation Ltd. (IOCL) recently awarded a landmark 10 kilo-tonnes per annum (KTPA) green hydrogen tender to Larsen & Toubro for its Panipat refinery. Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited (BPCL), Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Limited (HPCL), and GAIL India Limited are similarly progressing with large-scale hydrogen projects, while the Numaligarh Refinery Limited (NRL)'s green hydrogen unit in Assam is poised to become a first in the northeast.

India's natural gas pipeline network now spans over 25,000 km; it targets 33,000 km by 2030. Strategic pricing reforms and inclusion of gas in the 'No Cut' category for transport and domestic segments are ensuring supply stability. Gas production has increased steadily from 28.7 billion cubic metre (BCM) in 2020-21 to 36.4 BCM in 2023-24, with further growth projected.

No other country has so drastically altered its 'Systems' as India, as evinced by the Oilfields (Regulation and Development) Amendment Act 2024 which has enabled hybrid leases, allowing renewables alongside hydrocarbons. Discovered small fields (DSF) fields now operate under simplified contracts with minimal compliance burdens, unlocking marginal fields across basins. These sweeping policy reforms show that we are ready to tweak and do more to make India's upstream sector as competitive as any in the world.

Through PM Gati Shakti, the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas has digitally mapped over one lakh assets and pipelines. Integration with the National Master Plan ensures real-time project visibility and synergy across ministries. Key projects such as the Indo-Nepal pipeline and Samruddhi Utility Corridor have benefited from route optimisation and cost savings of over ₹169 crore.

A consumer outlook

Affordability remains central. Despite global LPG prices rising by 58%, Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY) beneficiaries pay ₹553 per cylinder, supported by targeted subsidies and compensation to oil companies. Fuel prices in India have been kept stable through excise cuts, insulating citizens from volatility seen in neighbouring countries.

Eleven years into the Prime Minister's transformative leadership, India's energy sector is no longer defined by anxiety. It is now marked by confidence, self-reliance and strategic foresight. Energy is not just a commodity. It is a catalyst for sovereignty, security and sustainable development.

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UPSC Mains Practice Question:India's energy transition is not just about sustainability, but sovereignty." In the light of this statement, critically examine the key pillars and challenges of India's energy policy in the last decade.(250 words)

Context :

- India has recently become the world's fourth-largest economy and is now a global energy powerhouse — the 3rd largest energy and oil consumer, and 4th in refining and LNG imports. With energy demand expected to grow 2.5x by 2047, India's energy strategy under the Modi government is built around four pillars: diversification, domestic production, renewables transition, and affordability.
- This strategic shift is backed by major policy, technological, and structural reforms in upstream exploration, downstream infrastructure, clean fuels, and consumer-focused pricing.

Key Strategic Highlights:

- **Upstream Reforms:**
  - Exploration acreage doubled; 'No-Go' areas reduced by 99%.
  - Pricing reforms offer incentives and shared infrastructure to boost output.
  - Discoveries across key basins (Mumbai, Assam, Mahanadi) with ONGC and Oil India adding over 75 MMtoe of reserves.
- **Technological Advancements:**
  - Missions like Anveshan and AGG surveys boost basin mapping.
  - International collaborations (e.g., with BP, University of Houston) attract global investment.
- **Clean Fuel Push:**
  - Ethanol blending at 19.7% in 2025 (up from 1.5% in 2013), saving forex and boosting farmer income.
  - Over 100 compressed biogas plants set up under SATAT.
  - Green hydrogen production and electrolyser tenders initiated.
- **Gas Infrastructure:**
  - PNG connections rose from 25 lakh to 1.5 crore.
  - Gas pipelines expanded to over 25,000 km, aiming for 33,000 km by 2030.
- **Downstream Growth:**
  - 24,000 km product pipelines; 96,000 retail fuel outlets operational.

  - Digital mapping via Gati Shakti ensures seamless integration of energy assets.
- **Affordability & Equity:**
  - PMUY ensures subsidized LPG for poor households.
  - India shields citizens from global fuel price shocks via policy interventions.

Conclusion:

- India's energy policy has transformed from being import-dependent and reactive to becoming proactive, self-reliant, and green-focused. With structural reforms, tech-driven exploration, and bold renewable targets, India is well-positioned to balance energy security, economic growth, and climate sustainability in the coming decades. The energy sector is now not just a service but a strategic pillar of India's rise as a global power.