

The Hindu Important News Articles & Editorial For UPSC CSE

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The Supreme Court, led by Chief Justice B.R. Gavai, recently raised concerns about Governors withholding assent to Bills passed by State legislatures for years, as in the case of Tamil Nadu where certain Bills remained pending for almost four years. The issue has triggered a constitutional debate on the limits of gubernatorial discretion, the scope of judicial review, and the principle of separation of powers.

Constitutional Background

- Article 200:** A can (i) give assent, (ii) withhold assent, (iii) return the Money Bill for reconsideration, or for the President's consideration.
- No explicit time** prescribed in the for these actions.
- Article 201:** Bills the President may pending indefinitely.
- Basic Structure** Ensures judicial cannot be curtailed (KesavanandaBharati case, 1973).

Should SC sit idly as Governors block Bills: CJI

Solicitor-General says the top court has encroached into the terrain of law-making

Krishnaswamy Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

Chief Justice of India B.R. Gavai on Thursday asked the Union government if the Supreme Court is supposed to suspend its role as the "custodian of the Constitution" and sit powerless while Governors make competent State legislatures defunct and thwart the democratic will of the people by sitting on Bills for years together.

The Chief Justice, heading a Presidential Reference Bench of five judges, referred to how the Tamil Nadu Governor had kept crucial State Bills pending for almost four years without a word explaining why.

The oral observations from the Chief Justice came in response to Solicitor General Tushar Mehta's submissions for the Union government that the top court, through its April 8 judgment, had encroached into the terrain of law-making and slighted high Constitutional authorities like the Governors and the Pre-

sident by imposing time limits on them.

Mr. Mehta said that inaction on the part of a Constitutional authority like the Governor was better addressed in the political sphere. The Supreme Court was not the only problem-solver in the country. Every problem cannot be resolved through a judicial order, he said.

The Solicitor General said the court should stick to its role declared in the National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC) judgment that each organ of governance – the legislature, executive, and judiciary – must stick to its turf.

"We do not intend to micro-manage the government. We will never interfere. But suppose, if a particular function is entrusted to the Governor, and for years together he withholds a Bill, will that also be beyond the power of judicial review of this court... When this Court has in the past set aside the very Constitutional Amendment (The Forty-second Constitutional

Is the court supposed to suspend its role and watch as the people's will is thwarted, asks CJI

Suppose a constitutional functionary entrusted with certain functions refuses to discharge those functions without any valid reasons, are the hands of the constitutional courts tied? Are we powerless?

JUSTICE B.R. GAVAI
Chief Justice of India



Amendment Act of 1976), which had limited the power of judicial review as a violation of the Basic Structure, can we say this Court is now powerless?" CJI Gavai asked Mr. Mehta.

Constitutional powers The Solicitor General responded that time limits may apply to statutory authorities like a District Collector, but not to Constitutional powers like the President and Governors. He said a Governor's position was *sui generis*, as they are appointed by the Union government but are also an integral part of the State legislature.

The law officer said there may be several reasons, at times political or democratic, for a Governor to delay assent to a State Bill. How could the Supreme Court step in and prescribe deadlines when none exist in the Constitution, he asked.

Justice P.S. Narasimha said State Bills would be left hanging in vacuum if no outer time limits were set for the Governor to grant assent.

"Though you cannot specify a time limit, but, at the same time, there should be some way by which the process [of assenting to Bills] works. Can

it be a situation when it means 'full stop' if the Governor chooses to not act on a Bill... there is nothing further?" Justice Narasimha asked.

Mr. Mehta responded that only "two or three States" have come to the Supreme Court complaining of their Governors. There was no flood of litigation against Governors.

To this, Justice Surya Kant observed that Governors' decisions to act or not act varied from State to State. He asked whether the Centre was shutting off aggrieved States from approaching the court against gubernatorial inaction.

The Centre's law officer maintained that the judiciary cannot tie down the President and Governors to three-month timelines as done in the April 8 judgment.

"But if there is a wrong, there must be a remedy... This court is a custodian of the Constitution," the Chief Justice reacted. Mr. Mehta said each organ was a custodian of the Constitution

The CJI refers to how the T.N. Governor had kept Bills pending for almost four years

in its own field. Justice Narasimha said seeking a solution in the political sphere each time would result in a logjam.

The Solicitor replied that issues like delays in assenting to Bills were not solvable by the court. The solution lay in the political sphere where elected representatives were answerable to the people, at least every five years.

"But the Governor is not answerable to the people," the CJI pointed out.

'Judicial restraint' Referring to the April 8 judgment's direction that pending State Bills would be deemed as approved if the President and Governors did not act within the three-month deadline, Mr. Mehta said that restraint in the exercise of judicial power, especially when it concerned high Constitutional authorities, was a facet of the separation of powers, which was a part of the basic structure of the Constitution.

The Chief Justice said that while the Bench could

quite appreciate the Centre's arguments against restricting Governors and the President to a "time-bound programme" and the grant of 'deemed assent', it could not accept a situation in which the Governor merely sat for four years on State Bills.

"Then what happens to the democratic set-up of the government? What happens to the will of the two-thirds of the majority of the legislature of a particular State? We are on the question of a Governor, however high he may be, sitting on Bills passed by a competent legislature," Chief Justice Gavai observed.

The Solicitor's reply was illustrative. He asked if the President could step in and decide long pending cases in the Supreme Court.

"It cannot be that every problem has a solution only at the doors of this court, and political and democratic solutions are not solutions," Mr. Mehta said, concluding his submissions for the Union government.

- Governor
(ii) withhold Bill (except
(iv) reserve it
limit is
Constitution
reserved for
remain
doctrine:
review

The Issue at Hand

- CJI's concern:** Governors' inaction paralyses legislatures and undermines the people's mandate.
- Union's stance (Solicitor General):** The court is overstepping into the legislative and executive domain by prescribing time limits; such issues should be resolved politically.
- Judicial dilemma:** Whether to respect the doctrine of separation of powers or intervene to prevent democratic deadlock.

Arguments in Favour of Judicial Intervention

- Democratic accountability:** Governors are unelected and not directly accountable to the people; prolonged inaction subverts democracy.
- Judicial review as safeguard:** Courts are guardians of the Constitution and must check arbitrary exercise (or non-exercise) of power.
- Basic structure:** Denial of judicial review would weaken constitutional balance.
- Comparative practice:** In countries like the UK and Canada, constitutional conventions ensure timely action on legislative measures.

Arguments Against Judicial Overreach

Daily News Analysis

1. **Separation of powers:** Judiciary prescribing timelines for Governors may encroach into legislative–executive domain.
2. **Political remedies exist:** State governments can politically mobilize or seek Union intervention.
3. **Flexibility in governance:** Governors may require time for wider consultations or constitutional considerations.
4. **Precedent of restraint:** In NJAC judgment, SC emphasized that organs must respect each other's domains.

Implications for Indian Federalism

- **Centre–State relations:** Allegations of Governors acting as “agents of the Centre” erode cooperative federalism.
- **Legislative paralysis:** Withholding assent indefinitely creates a “constitutional black hole” where the will of the legislature is nullified.
- **Judicial activism vs restraint:** The ongoing debate reflects the thin line between protecting democracy and judicial overreach.

Way Forward

1. **Constitutional clarity:** An amendment or law could specify a reasonable time frame for Governors to act.
2. **Codifying conventions:** Parliamentary guidelines may prevent arbitrary delays.
3. **Strengthening cooperative federalism:** Governor's office must act as a bridge, not a bottleneck.
4. **Judicial balance:** Courts should uphold constitutional morality without prescribing rigid deadlines that disrupt separation of powers.

Conclusion

The ongoing Supreme Court deliberations highlight the tension between judicial review and separation of powers in India's federal democracy. While judicial restraint is vital, indefinite withholding of Bills by Governors undermines representative democracy and the people's mandate. A balanced approach—where conventions, political accountability, and limited judicial oversight coexist—appears to be the most sustainable path for strengthening Indian federalism.

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques: Withholding of assent to Bills by Governors raises serious questions of democratic accountability and federal balance in India.” Critically examine in the light of recent Supreme Court observations. **(250 Words)**

The Group of Ministers (GoM) on GST rate rationalisation has endorsed the Centre's proposal to simplify the existing GST rate structure into **two slabs – 5% and 18%**, eliminating the current 12% and 28% rates. The recommendation now awaits approval from the GST Council. If implemented, this reform could mark a significant step towards a more streamlined indirect tax regime in India.

Background

- **Current GST Structure:** 5%, 12%, 18%, and 28% slabs + cess.
- **Proposal:**
 - Merge 12% items into 5%.
 - Move 90% of 28% items into 18%.
 - Retain a higher **40% slab** for a few luxury/sin compensation cess).
- **Rationale:** Simplification, ease of compliance, and consumption.

Potential Benefits

1. **Simplification & Transparency:** Easier compliance for especially MSMEs.
2. **Consumer Relief:** Many household items shifting from slab will reduce costs.
3. **Boost to Consumption:** Supports India's **consumption-model** amid global slowdown.
4. **Ease of Doing Business:** Fewer disputes over between 12% and 18% slabs.
5. **Taxpayer Morale:** Clearer structure enhances voluntary

Concerns & Challenges

1. **Revenue Loss for States:** Lowering rates risks revenue raising demand for **compensation mechanisms**.
2. **Inflationary Risks:** Some 28% items moving to 18% may reduce revenue; if 5% base widens too much, fiscal balance may be hit.
3. **Federal Tensions:** States wary of reduced fiscal autonomy and dependence on the Centre for compensation.
4. **Equity Concerns:** Luxury/sin goods at 40% may face evasion and black-market risks.
5. **Transition Costs:** Businesses and GSTN systems will need adjustments.

Implications

- **For Households:** Tangible relief in consumption expenditure, aiding middle-class affordability.
- **For MSMEs:** Lower costs improve competitiveness and compliance ease.

Simplified two-rate GST structure gets GoM's nod, awaits Council's approval

T.C.A. Sharad Raghavan
NEW DELHI

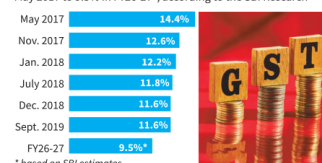
The Group of Ministers (GoM) on Rate Rationalisation, formed by the Goods and Services Tax (GST) Council, has decided to accept the Centre's two-rate structure proposal for GST and will be recommending this to the GST Council, the GoM chairperson and Bihar Deputy Chief Minister Samrat Choudhary said on Thursday.

This is the first of two steps the proposals must pass before implementation. The second step would be for the GST Council to accept the changes. "It was the Centre's proposal to end two slabs of GST, the 12% and 28% slabs," Mr. Choudhary told reporters. "We have recommended it, and now the GST Council will decide on this."

The Centre has not announced the date of the next GST Council meeting, although it is expected to take place in early September. Talking to *The Hindu*, Kerala Finance Minister K.N. Balagopal, a member of the GoM, said the proposal from the Union government was not discussed in detail by the GoM. "The discussion should happen within the GST Council, and the Council will take a final decision. The GoM has forwarded the proposal of the Centre with some observations that it should discuss the possibility of loss in revenue for the

Effective rate

After the rationalisation, the weighted average GST rate (effective rate) is expected to decline from the notional rate of 14.4% in May 2017 to 9.5% in FY26-27*, according to the SBI Research



States too. We have suggested that there should be a mechanism to compensate the States," Mr. Balagopal said.

In his Independence Day speech, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced that the "next-generation GST reforms" would be a "Deepavali gift" from the Centre.

The proposal involves retaining just the 5% and 18% slabs in the current GST structure and doing away with the 12% and 28% slabs. This would entail 99% of the items in the 12% slab moving to 5%, and 90% of the items in the 28% slab moving to 18%.

The remaining items in the 28% slab would be moved to a higher 40% slab. However, the compensation cess currently being levied on the items in the 28% slab would no longer apply.

Relief for households
"The proposed shift of most items promises tangi-

ble relief for households and MSMEs, while aligning with the government's broader agenda of growth and financial inclusion," said Manoj Mishra, Partner and Tax Controversy Management Leader at Grant Thornton Bharat.

However, he added that there needs to be "careful calibration" to preserve revenue neutrality and avoid inflationary pressures. According to Saurabh Agarwal, Tax Partner at EY India, the Centre's proposals are an acknowledgement of the importance of consumption to the Indian economy. "This is a clear signal of confidence in India's domestic consumer base as the primary engine of growth, especially amid global trade uncertainties," he said. "By easing costs for households and enhancing affordability, this framework is poised to strengthen our consumption-driven economy."

(With inputs from Jigesh A.M.)

compensation

goods (without

boosting

businesses,

12% → 5%

driven growth

classification

compliance.

shortfalls,

Daily News Analysis

- **For Centre–State Relations:** Likely revival of debate on **GST compensation**, especially post-2022 when the statutory 5-year compensation period ended.
- **For Economy:** Signals government's confidence in **domestic demand** as the growth driver.

Way Forward

1. **Revenue Neutrality:** Careful calibration to balance consumer relief with fiscal stability.
2. **Compensation Mechanism:** Revisit Centre–State revenue-sharing arrangements.
3. **Gradual Implementation:** Phased shift may help States adjust.
4. **Strengthening GSTN:** Ensure robust IT systems for compliance under new structure.
5. **Stakeholder Consultation:** Broader discussion in GST Council before final rollout.

Conclusion

The proposed **two-rate GST structure** represents a bold reform aimed at simplifying India's indirect tax regime, boosting consumption, and enhancing ease of compliance. While its potential for household and MSME relief is significant, concerns regarding **State revenues, fiscal balance, and federal consensus** must be addressed. A carefully calibrated approach, with safeguards for States and a phased transition, will be crucial to making this reform both **economically viable and politically acceptable**.

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Ques: With reference to the proposed GST reform in 2025, consider the following statements:

1. The proposal seeks to retain only the 5% and 18% GST slabs, eliminating the 12% and 28% slabs.
2. All items in the 28% slab will be shifted to the 18% slab.
3. A new 40% slab has been proposed for certain luxury and sin goods.
4. Compensation cess on items currently in the 28% slab will continue under the new structure.

Which of the above statements are correct?

- (A) 1 and 3 only
(B) 1, 2 and 3 only
(C) 2 and 4 only
(D) 1, 3 and 4 only

Ans: (A)

Daily News Analysis

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques: The proposed two-rate GST structure seeks to simplify India's indirect tax system but raises concerns over revenue neutrality and federal balance." Discuss. **(150 Words)**



Chinese Ambassador Xu Feihong's recent remarks in New Delhi ahead of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Summit signal Beijing's attempt to reset ties with India after years of border tensions. By criticizing U.S. tariff measures and pledging to "stand firmly" with India at the WTO, China is projecting itself as a partner in defending multilateralism while simultaneously seeking to mend strained bilateral relations.

Key Highlights of the Statement

'Silence will only embolden the bully'

Possibly setting the tone for the SCO Summit, Chinese Ambassador to India Xu Feihong says Beijing stands with India and criticised the U.S. over tariffs, terming it a 'bully'; he also made a pitch for better relations with New Delhi after a four-year military stand-off by pointing to growing trade ties

Sahasini Haidar
NEW DELHI

China will "firmly stand" with India to uphold World Trade Organization (WTO) principles, said Chinese Ambassador to India Xu Feihong, taking direct aim at the U.S. for imposing 50% tariffs on Indian goods.

In a speech about the upcoming Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Summit, where Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Russian President Vladimir Putin and leaders of Central Asia, Pakistan, Iran and Belarus will be hosted by Chinese President Xi Jinping, Mr. Xu was particularly

sharp on the "trade and tariff wars" that he said had disrupted the multilateral trading system, and referred to the U.S. as a "bully". The comments by a diplomat in India about a third country were unusual, possibly indicating that the SCO Summit in Tianjin on September 1 will be critical of the U.S.'s actions.

"The United States has long benefited greatly from free trade, but now it is using tariffs as a bargaining chip to demand exorbitant prices from various countries," Mr. Xu said at a discussion, organised by two Delhi-based think-tanks Chintan Research Foundation and the Centre for Glo-



The United States has benefited greatly from free trade, but now it is using tariffs as a bargaining chip to demand exorbitant prices from various countries

XU FEIHONG
Chinese Ambassador to India

bal India Insights, titled "SCO Summit & Resetting India-China relations".

Referring to U.S. President Donald Trump's announcement of 50% tariffs on Indian goods, which include 25% penalty tariffs for the import of Russian oil, due to come into effect next week, Mr. Xu said that China "firmly opposes" the

move. While the Chinese Foreign Ministry has opposed the U.S.'s reciprocal tariffs and China even imposed counter-tariffs on the U.S., this is the first such unequivocal support from China over the tariffs imposed on India.

"In the face of such acts, silence or compromise only emboldens the bully.

China will firmly stand with India to uphold the multilateral trading system with the World Trade Organization at its core," Mr. Xu continued.

Making a pitch for better India-China ties after the four-year military stand-off at the Line of Actual Control, the Chinese Ambassador pointed to the improvement in ties over the past 10 months since the Modi-Xi meeting in Kazan in October 2024, pointing to many more visas and high-level engagements as well as the re-opening of the Kailash Manasarovar Yatra. He also said that bilateral trade in 2025 had already crossed \$75 billion, indicating a 10% rise from

the previous year.

To a question about India's concerns over cross-border terrorism and China's support to Pakistan, Mr. Xu said that "not only China and India, Pakistan is also a victim of terrorism, so what we should do is to make joint efforts to fight against terrorism," in comments that would not be viewed as positively by New Delhi.

Speaking to journalists after the event, Mr. Xu said the 10-point consensus reached by Mr. Doval and Mr. Wang was important, adding that experts would now work on an "early harvest agreement for the proper management of border areas".

- Criticism of U.S. Tariffs:**
 - Ambassador Xu condemned Washington's 50% tariff on Indian goods and labeled the U.S. a "bully."
 - He argued that silence would only embolden unilateralism, positioning China as India's ally on trade issues.
- Pitch for India-China Rapprochement:**
 - Cited the Modi-Xi meeting (Kazan, 2024) as a turning point.
 - Mentioned progress in visa facilitation, reopening of Kailash-Manasarovar Yatra, and trade growth (\$75 billion in 2025, up 10%).
- Border Management:**
 - Referred to the 10-point consensus between NSA Ajit Doval and Wang Yi for better management of border disputes.
- On Terrorism and Pakistan:**
 - Framed terrorism as a shared challenge for India, China, and Pakistan—an approach unlikely to align with India's perception of Pakistan's role.

Strategic Implications

- India-China Relations**
 - The statement indicates Beijing's recognition that continued hostility undermines its regional standing.
 - Trade interdependence is being highlighted as a bridge, though core issues like **LAC stand-off** remain unresolved.
- India-U.S.-China Triangle**
 - By siding with India against U.S. tariffs, China seeks to weaken the growing **India-U.S. strategic partnership**.
 - New Delhi, however, may view this as tactical rhetoric, given China's simultaneous deep ties with Pakistan.
- Multilateralism vs Unilateralism**
 - China is positioning itself as a defender of WTO-led trade norms, contrasting itself against U.S. protectionism.
 - This narrative will likely shape the SCO Summit's discourse, projecting an anti-U.S. undertone.
- Regional Stability**
 - While pitching cooperation, China avoids acknowledging its own assertiveness at the LAC.
 - Linking India-China cooperation with Pakistan's role against terrorism may dilute India's concerns.

Way Forward for India

Daily News Analysis

- **Strategic Caution:** India should welcome multilateral support at WTO but remain wary of Beijing's tactical diplomacy.
- **Leverage Trade but Guard Security:** Expanding trade ties should not overshadow unresolved border disputes.
- **Diversify Partnerships:** Deepen economic and strategic engagement with the U.S. and other partners to balance Chinese overtures.
- **Push for Border Resolution:** Tie progress in bilateral relations directly to tangible de-escalation at the LAC.

Conclusion

China's outreach to India against U.S. tariffs reflects both opportunism and recognition of India's growing economic weight. While the promise of trade cooperation and multilateral alignment at WTO may appear attractive, India must balance such offers against the realities of border tensions and China-Pakistan ties. Ultimately, New Delhi's engagement with Beijing will remain conditional on progress in restoring trust at the LAC, even as both nations navigate shifting global alignments.

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques :China's recent pitch for closer ties with India, while opposing U.S. tariff measures, reflects both opportunity and caution for New Delhi. Critically examine in the context of India-China relations and shifting global geopolitics. **(150 Words)**



Clean electoral rolls form the backbone of free and fair elections. However, recurring irregularities—duplicate entries, ghost voters, and ineligible names—have raised serious questions about the credibility of India's electoral process. While much blame falls on the Election Commission of India (ECI), political parties too share responsibility, given their weakening presence at the grassroots and neglect of institutional mechanisms designed for electoral scrutiny.

ECI: From Credibility to Crisis

Poll integrity and self-sabotage, parties and the ECI

- **Era of Reform (1990s):** Under the ECI transformed into a independent body curbing and building credibility through expenditure monitoring, and of the Model Code of Conduct.
- **Erosion of Trust:** In recent opacity, delayed responses to discrepancies, and perceived raised doubts about the ECI's and effectiveness.

Much has been written about the numerous discrepancies in voting lists, including inaccurate details, duplication, ineligible entries, ghost voters, and how these slips aid electoral fraud, such as impersonation and multiple voting. Almost everyone agrees that flawed electoral rolls erode public trust and will ultimately undermine representative democracy. While much of the erosion of public trust rightly falls on the Election Commission of India (ECI), we must also examine the complicity of political parties in enabling this institutional decay.

ECI's credibility, changes in parties
The ECI has the primary duty to maintain clean electoral rolls. Not surprisingly, the ECI has faced sharp criticism. The ECI, it appears, believed that greater opacity would shield it from scrutiny and accountability. Therefore, instead of addressing the inconsistencies, the ECI attempted to make inspection more difficult and raise a fog over its failures, only to face further questions and deepening suspicion about its functioning and institutional integrity.

For the ECI, it has been a mighty fall. In the 1990s, during the tenure of T.N. Seshan as Chief Election Commissioner, the ECI acquired greater teeth to curb electoral malpractices and transformed itself into one of the most powerful electoral regulatory bodies in the world. The ECI proactively implemented the model code of conduct, monitored poll expenses, and mandated issuing the Electoral Photo Identity Card (EPIC) to prevent bogus voting. Not surprisingly, numerous citizen surveys in the subsequent decades showed that the ECI was among the country's most credible and trustworthy institutions. Today, that credibility stands eroded, and its legacy is in question.

While the ECI has steadily eroded its own credibility, political parties, in their race to become more efficient electoral machines, have weakened their role as democratic counterweights. Traditional local level campaigning, which was labour-intensive, included house visits and street corner meetings. However, it is increasingly being supplemented and may even be replaced by digital communication, which includes social media campaigns, phone calls and even Artificial Intelligence-driven chatbots. Newer technological advances have pushed parties to rely less on the party on the ground.

These newer forms of communication are more intrusive, allowing parties to appear to be engaging with the voters personally and not constrained by time or space. So, it is possible for a Prime Minister, Chief Minister or the top party leader to connect with a voter. These forms of communication have also encouraged parties to trade enduring political linkages built by local



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organisations for the illusion of connection, leading to the neglect of local party infrastructure.

Simultaneously, parties have also begun to rely on professional consultants, who shape their campaign strategy, messaging, and sometimes even the choice of candidates. These professional agents rely on local party workers, if at all, only to gather information to feed their data analytic models. Professional campaign consultants work best when there is a clear chain of command. Consequently, this has only aided the centralisation of power in parties and drastically reduced the role of local workers, once at the heart of the political party on the ground.

While technology and consultants have enhanced or appear to have enabled parties to use resources more efficiently, they also have weakened the party's foundations at the local level. This neglect of the local level may help explain why systemic failures such as electoral roll mismatches go unchecked.

Close interaction is the key

The ECI manual on electoral rolls states that during the electoral roll revision period, or when there is a modification and rationalisation of polling stations, the local election officers and the electoral registration officer should meet and consult recognised political parties. Further, parties are supposed to scrutinise draft rolls and point out discrepancies. Therefore, the integrity of the electoral roll hinges on the close working of the local-level party organisation with the ECI.

To enhance the participation of parties at the local level, the ECI had introduced the concept of Booth Level Agents (BLAs). These representatives of recognised political parties were tasked with assisting the Booth-level officers. To qualify as BLAs, they had to be registered voters in the same electoral roll where they had been appointed. Their primary task was in scrutinising draft rolls during the revision period and aiding corrections, including deletion, inclusion and transposition of voters. Therefore, the BLA is the key link between the party, voters, and the ECI at the local level.

The ECI manual has numerous provisions that prevent the bending of rules and to ensure that the electoral field is not manipulated. For instance, it prohibits bulk applications unless they are from the same family, restricting mass enrolment. Likewise, BLAs can only file a maximum of 10 applications (corrections, deletions, additions) every day. If they submit more than 30 applications during the revision period, the Electoral Registration Officer must personally cross-verify such applications. On paper, these mechanisms establish a robust system of checks and balances that is designed to ensure transparency and prevent fraudulent manipulations. In theory, these safeguards make

widespread electoral fraud impossible or at least difficult.

The reported large-scale irregularities in the Mahadevapura Assembly constituency in Karnataka push us to ask uncomfortable questions. Are some BLAs more influential than others? Has the ECI ignored BLAs manipulating the system? Is there a systematic institutional bias favouring the incumbent? At the same time, it is fair to ask whether some BLAs were asleep at the wheel during the revision period. Why was the local party organisation not vigilant? Did they not participate in the exercise to keep the "electoral roll healthy"?

An opportunity to revive

This controversy has presented an unexpected opportunity. Political parties can redeem themselves. They have a chance to revitalise their dormant local units, which have been sidelined by the increased use of technology and professional consultants. It is a wake-up call telling parties that they need to look beyond elections if they want to remain relevant and meaningful.

The politics between elections often shape electoral outcomes. The task of electoral roll revisions may appear to be a mundane task, but they show how local organisations are crucial for a healthy democratic functioning.

We already see parties waking up. The heightened awareness around accurate voter lists, for instance, in Kerala has prompted parties to scrutinise the draft rolls for local body elections more diligently. Parties are now actively flagging issues such as duplicate voters on the same ID card or individuals holding multiple voter IDs. Although parties argue that these concerns were raised earlier, their current efforts appear more consistent and determined.

History warns us how weak local organisations can distort democracy's promise. Immediately after independence, the Congress party units and local activists allied with the dominant sections to subvert land reforms, leaving no chance for the institutional strategy for agrarian reform to succeed. Today, parties without vigilant local organisations risk more than electoral losses. They may be surrendering democracy. And there may be no fair electoral arena left to contest.

We have seen above that a robust democracy-saving system is in place. There are adequate mechanisms to ensure electoral integrity and prevent rule manipulation in favour of the incumbent. However, when institutional leaders prioritise short-term goals over constitutional norms (not all written), abandon self-restraint and violate neutrality, they erode citizen trust and hollow out institutions from within.

The views expressed are personal

T.N. Seshan, proactive, malpractices EPIC, enforcement

years, bias have neutrality

via door-to-meetings digital campaigns, consultants. local party keeping

Political Parties and Self-Sabotage

1. Shift from Ground to Digital

- Traditional canvassing door contact and street has been replaced by outreach, AI-driven and professional
- This has hollowed out units, once critical for voter lists clean and engaging with citizens.

2. Weak Role in Electoral Rolls

- ECI's system depends on **Booth Level Agents (BLAs)** from parties to scrutinize rolls, point out errors, and ensure fairness.
- However, many parties neglect this responsibility—either due to over-centralisation of campaigns or overreliance on technology.

3. Institutional Capture and Neglect

- Reports (e.g., Mahadevapura constituency in Karnataka) suggest both manipulation of rolls and party indifference.
- This raises doubts whether BLAs collude, remain passive, or lack capacity, undermining the system of checks and balances.

Democratic Implications

Daily News Analysis

- **Erosion of Trust:** Inaccurate rolls undermine citizens' faith in democracy.
- **Weak Local Organisations:** Just as weak Congress units after Independence subverted land reforms, weak party structures today risk subverting electoral integrity.
- **Unfair Electoral Arena:** If both the ECI and parties abdicate responsibility, electoral competition itself may become distorted.

Opportunities for Revival

- Parties must **reinvest in grassroots organisations**, empowering BLAs to actively safeguard voter rolls.
- ECI should **enhance transparency**, enabling easier public scrutiny instead of restricting access.
- Civil society and media must act as watchdogs, keeping pressure on both parties and the Commission.
- Institutional reforms such as **independent voter list audits** may strengthen accountability.

Conclusion

The health of Indian democracy depends not just on strong institutions but also on vigilant political actors. While the ECI must restore its credibility through transparency and neutrality, political parties must look beyond short-term electoral gains and rebuild their **local organisational capacity**. Electoral rolls may appear mundane, but their integrity decides whether citizens trust the system itself. Without this, parties risk not just electoral setbacks but the very erosion of India's democratic promise.

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques: Electoral integrity depends not only on strong institutions like the Election Commission of India (ECI) but also on the active role of political parties at the grassroots. In light of recurring irregularities in electoral rolls, critically examine the role of both the ECI and political parties in safeguarding free and fair elections. **(150 Words)**

Classes
Quality education

China and Pakistan have agreed to launch new projects under the **China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)**, a flagship programme of the **Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)**. The announcement, following the meeting of Foreign Ministers Wang Yi and Ishaq Dar in Islamabad, highlights Beijing's sustained commitment to Pakistan despite economic challenges and security concerns.

Background

- **CPEC:** Connects **Xinjiang (China)** with **Gwadar Port (Pakistan)** on the Arabian Sea.
- Investment worth **\$60+ billion** has been made in power plants, roads, and infrastructure.
- Pakistan faces recurring economic crises, making Chinese support critical.
- CPEC is part of China's broader **BRI strategy** to expand connectivity and influence across Asia, Africa, and beyond.

China, Pakistan Foreign Ministers agree to launch new economic corridor projects

Associated Press
 ISLAMABAD

Pakistan and China pledged to expand economic cooperation and investment under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a flagship programme of China's Belt and Road Initiative, officials said.

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi met with his Pakistani counterpart, Ishaq Dar, at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Islamabad on Thursday. The two sides agreed to launch new projects through the CPCC,

a Pakistani government statement said. The countries did not share details of the proposed projects immediately.

The Belt and Road Initiative has built power plants, roads, railroads and ports around the world and deepened China's relations with Africa, Asia, Latin America and West Asia. It is a major part of Chinese President Xi Jinping's push for China to play a larger role in global affairs.

Beijing has invested billions of dollars in Pakistan through CPEC, to connect China's western Xinjiang

Wang Yi urged Pakistan to ensure the safety of Chinese workers and engineers

region with the Arabian Sea port of Gwadar in southwest Pakistan, where some Chinese have been attacked by insurgents.

The Foreign Ministers vowed to deepen collaboration in science, technology, industry and agriculture.

Mr. Wang urged Pakistan to ensure the safety of

Chinese workers and engineers, who have come under attack by separatists in Balochistan province and elsewhere in recent years. Pakistan already has increased security for Chinese working on CPEC-related projects.

China has long been one of Pakistan's key ally and financial backer, especially as Islamabad struggles with a prolonged economic crisis.

The meeting came a day after Mr. Wang and Mr. Dar travelled to Kabul for a trilateral dialogue with Afghanistan's Taliban rulers.

Strategic Implications

1. **For Pakistan**
 - Economic lifeline: FDI, infrastructure development, and energy projects.
 - Political leverage: Deepening ties with China amidst strained relations with the West.
 - Security challenge: Rising attacks on Chinese nationals by Baloch separatists and insurgents.
2. **For China**
 - Strategic access to the Arabian Sea and West Asia via Gwadar.
 - Energy security: Alternative route bypassing the Strait of Malacca.
 - Expansion of influence in South Asia as part of BRI.
 - Concerns over security of workers and projects in unstable regions.
3. **Regional Context**
 - **India's concerns:** CPEC passes through **Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK)**, infringing on India's sovereignty.
 - **Afghanistan factor:** Wang and Dar also met Taliban leaders, signalling possible integration of Afghanistan into CPEC.
 - **Geopolitical competition:** CPEC viewed by the U.S. and its allies as China's attempt to expand its sphere of influence.

Challenges

- **Security Risks:** Attacks on Chinese nationals in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.
- **Debt Dependency:** Pakistan's growing reliance on Chinese loans amid IMF negotiations.

Daily News Analysis

- **Local Discontent:** Perceptions of unequal benefits fueling protests in Gwadar and elsewhere.
- **Geopolitical Tensions:** India's opposition and U.S. scepticism of BRI projects.

Conclusion

The renewed push for **CPEC expansion** underscores the enduring strategic partnership between China and Pakistan, blending infrastructure development with geopolitical ambition. However, security risks, debt vulnerabilities, and regional opposition pose major hurdles. For India, CPEC remains both a **sovereignty challenge** and a **strategic reminder** of China's deepening footprint in South Asia.

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques: The expansion of the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) reflects both opportunities and challenges for regional connectivity. Critically analyse with reference to India's concerns. **(150 Words)**



Page : 08 Editorial Analysis

Justice is not about 'teaching someone a lesson'

In a recent judgment on a custodial death case from Chhattisgarh, the Chhattisgarh High Court made an observation that should unsettle anyone who believes in the rule of law. The High Court noted that the police officers involved in the death of a man in custody appeared to have intended "to teach a lesson" to the victim for misbehaving in public.

The facts of the case are as troubling as the language used. In this case, a Dalit man, arrested for alleged public misbehaviour, died in custody just hours after a medical check found no injuries. However, the postmortem revealed 26 wounds. Four police officers were convicted of murder by the trial court, but the High Court reduced it to culpable homicide, citing lack of intent but knowledge that the assault could cause death.

Violence cannot be framed as deterrence

The statement, quietly embedded in a detailed legal opinion, is not just an off-hand remark. It is the reflection of a deeply problematic institutional mindset, one that rationalises state violence not as a constitutional aberration but as a tolerable, even necessary, tool for discipline.

The judiciary must resist the temptation to rationalise police brutality, especially under the moral guise of correction or deterrence. "Teaching a lesson" is neither a principle found in the Constitution of India nor a recognised standard of justice. Rather, it is a phrase rooted in vigilante logic, a framework where violence is met with greater violence; where the law is enforced not through rights and procedures but through fear and punishment.

The real concern lies not in the commutation of the sentence, but in the conceptual framing of what happened. By stating that the officers intended to "teach a lesson", the High Court inadvertently reinforces the very logic that normalises custodial torture in India. It suggests that the High Court views the violence not as a product of systemic rot but as a misguided form of discipline, excessive, perhaps, but still



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The judiciary must resist the temptation to rationalise custodial brutality, especially under the moral guise of correction or deterrence

anchored in purpose. This is not a matter of semantics. Language shapes legal reasoning, and legal reasoning shapes policy. When a constitutional court appears to accept teaching a lesson as a partial justification or explanation for custodial violence, it reinforces a culture where officers feel emboldened to act as both enforcer and judge. It invites future violators to believe their actions will be read not as unlawful, but as excessive zeal.

Violence as a caste-coded enforcement

What gets erased in this framework is the identity of the victim, in this case a member of a Scheduled Caste. The trial court acquitted the prime accused under the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 (SC/ST Act) and the High Court did not interfere. By demanding specific proof that the violence was caste motivated, the High Court ignored the lived reality of caste power. A Dalit man beaten to death in police custody by upper caste officers in rural India is not an incidental tragedy. It reflects a broader pattern of caste-coded enforcement.

India's jurisprudence around the SC/ST Act remains trapped in a narrow reading. Courts tend to interpret the law as requiring explicit evidence that the assault occurred because of caste, ignoring that structural power itself often motivates and enables the violence. As long as the legal system demands overt slurs or declared caste intent to invoke the Act, it will continue to deny justice in most of the very cases the law was designed to address.

That India has a custodial violence problem is no longer in dispute. Multiple judgments by the Supreme Court of India, from *Shri D.K. Basu*, *Ashok K. Johri vs State of West Bengal*, *State of U.P. to Munshi Singh Gautam (D) and Ors. vs State of M.P.*, have emphasised the need for procedural safeguards, transparency in detention and strict limits on police force. Yet, deaths in custody continue at an alarming rate, disproportionately affecting Dalits, Adivasis and the poor. Despite

clear judicial guidelines, compliance remains sporadic and enforcement weak. Investigations are often conducted by the very institutions implicated in the abuse.

The path for judicial integrity

This is why judicial language matters. Courts must not only hold individuals accountable but also interrogate the institutional norms that enable violence. Every time a court suggests that violence was used "to teach a lesson", it sends a subtle but powerful message that state brutality is regrettable, but sometimes understandable. That some people, under some circumstances, may deserve it.

This is a dangerous path. The police are not agents of correction through coercion, but constitutional functionaries bound by the law. Justifying custodial violence for a minor offence such as public nuisance blurs that line dangerously. "Teaching a lesson" is not justice. It undermines a system built on proportionality, dignity and due process. Deterrence comes from legal punishment, not from state-sanctioned force. When courts validate such reasoning, they weaken the very constitutional order they are meant to uphold.

What is needed is not symbolic outrage but structural change. Courts must reinforce that violence in custody is never disciplinary. It is, in fact, criminal. The SC/ST Act must be robustly applied in every case where social power is weaponised. Independent accountability mechanisms must be strengthened and procedural safeguards made enforceable.

Most of all, the judiciary must not give moral shelter to extra-legal instincts. The idea that public misbehaviour deserves private punishment is not justice but authoritarianism in slow motion. A Constitution built on dignity, equality, and the rule of law cannot coexist with a justice system that tolerates "lessons" written in bruises.

The views expressed are personal

GS. Paper 02 Indian Polity

UPSC Mains Practice Question: Custodial violence in India reflects both systemic institutional failures and social inequalities. Critically examine how judicial reasoning, political accountability, and structural safeguards can prevent custodial deaths and uphold constitutional rights. **(150 words)**

Context :

Custodial deaths remain a persistent challenge in India's criminal justice system, disproportionately affecting Dalits, Adivasis, and the poor. A recent Chhattisgarh High Court judgment, which observed that police officers intended "to teach a lesson" to a victim, highlights a deeper concern: the normalization of state violence and the subtle reinforcement of authoritarian attitudes through judicial language. This raises fundamental questions about the rule of law, proportionality, and the constitutional mandate to uphold human dignity.

Daily News Analysis

Key Issues

1. Judicial Framing of Violence

- The High Court reduced convictions from murder to culpable homicide, citing lack of intent.
- By suggesting officers aimed to “teach a lesson,” the Court risked legitimizing custodial violence as a form of discipline, undermining the deterrent purpose of legal punishment.

2. Caste-Coded Violence

- The victim’s identity as a Dalit highlights systemic inequalities in law enforcement.
- Courts often demand explicit evidence of caste motivation under the SC/ST Act, ignoring structural power dynamics that perpetuate abuse.

3. Persistent Custodial Abuses

- Despite Supreme Court guidelines in cases such as **DK Basu v. State of West Bengal**, deaths in custody remain high.
- Investigations are often conducted by implicated agencies, weakening accountability.

4. Institutional and Structural Concerns

- Police are constitutional functionaries, not instruments of private correction.
- Judicial tolerance of “teaching a lesson” reasoning blurs the line between enforcement and authoritarianism.

Implications

- **Rule of Law:** Accepting extra-legal rationales for violence erodes public trust in justice.
- **Human Rights:** Custodial torture violates the right to life and dignity under Articles 21 and 14.
- **Judicial Responsibility:** Language shapes societal norms; courts must reinforce accountability and uphold constitutional values.

Way Forward

1. **Robust Enforcement of SC/ST Act:** Structural violence against marginalized communities must trigger strict legal action.
2. **Independent Oversight:** Strengthen mechanisms for investigating custodial deaths outside police influence.
3. **Judicial Prudence:** Courts should reject moral justifications for violence and reinforce the principle of proportionality in punishment.
4. **Preventive Measures:** Procedural safeguards such as mandatory medical checks, CCTV in custody, and timely reporting must be enforced.

Conclusion

Custodial violence cannot be rationalized as corrective or deterrent. Judicial statements implying “teaching a lesson” risk normalizing authoritarian instincts, undermining constitutional protections, and perpetuating systemic oppression. Upholding justice in India requires both **accountability for individual acts of violence** and **structural reforms** to safeguard human dignity, equality, and the rule of law.