

The Hindu Important News Articles & Editorial For UPSC CSE

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The Supreme Court of India, through a five-judge Bench, recently addressed the 16th Presidential Reference under Article 143, clarifying the scope of judicial intervention in the functions of the President and Governors concerning State Bills. The Court emphasized the constitutional principle of separation of powers, reaffirming that neither the judiciary nor any external authority can impose "one-size-fits-all" timelines or assume "deemed consent" for Bills pending with these constitutional functionaries.

Courts cannot fetter President, Governor: SC

'Deemed consent' will usurp the function of the gubernatorial functionaries, court says

Court states that it is against sitting on Bills through 'prolonged and evasive inaction'

Delaying bills would thwart the people's will expressed through legislatures, the court says

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

A five-judge Bench of the Supreme Court on Thursday answered the 16th Presidential Reference the country has witnessed by opining that the judiciary cannot fetter Governors and the President to "one-size-fits-all" time-tables to dispose of State Bills or usurp their functions by assuming "deemed consent" of the proposed laws at the expiry of a court-ordered time frame.

"Such a usurpation of the gubernatorial function of the Governor, and similarly of the President's functions, is antithetical not only to the spirit of the Constitution, but also specifically, the doctrine of separation of powers – which is a part of the basic structure of the Constitution," a Bench of Chief Justice of India B.R. Gavai, Chief Jus-

Supreme Court's advisory opinion

Breaking down the court's response to **14 questions raised by the President** asking if a constitutional court can impose timelines for Governors and the President to give assent to Bills passed by legislatures

Governor's discretion under Article 200

- May assent to the Bill
- May withhold assent, but must communicate reasons to the State legislature
- May refer the Bill to the President for consideration under Article 201

Judicial limits

- SC cannot impose timelines for assent or create a concept of 'deemed assent' under Article 142

President's role under Article 201

- When a Bill is referred, the President need not seek SC's advisory opinion under Article 143 every time

Governor's accountability

- Governors cannot indefinitely sit on a Bill; if they do, limited judicial review applies

- Courts can direct Governors to decide within a reasonable time frame, but not dictate the outcome



tice-designate Surya Kant, and Justices Vikram Nath, P.S. Narasimha and A.S. Chandurkar underscored in their answer.

'Evasive inaction'

However, the court clarified that the President and Governors cannot resort to "prolonged and evasive in-

action" by sitting endlessly on State Bills awaiting their approval. The Reference under Article 143 of the Constitution came merely a month after a two-judge Bench of the Supreme Court, in a judgment in the Tamil Nadu Governor case on April 8, plugged a constitutional silence by fixing

a three-month time limit for Governors and the President to dispose of State Bills pending with them.

Addressing a preliminary objection raised by Tamil Nadu and Kerala that the Presidential Reference was only an "appeal in disguise" against the binding April judgment of the

SC counters States' 'disguised plea' argument

NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Thursday countered the objection of States ruled by non-BJP parties that the Presidential Reference was an "appeal in disguise". It said an advisory opinion "can overrule, if necessary". It was a thinly veiled "appeal" against the judgment that fixed timelines for Governors and the President to decide on Bills, Tamil Nadu argued. » **PAGE 5**

court, the Bench said nothing stopped it from clarifying "general questions of law referred to it by the President".

The Bench termed the set of 14 questions posed by the President on May 13 as a unique "functional reference" touching upon the day-to-day functioning

of constitutional functionaries and the interplay among State legislatures, Governors, and the President.

"It is an institutional responsibility to tender its opinion on this functional reference sought by the highest constitutional functionary of the country. The court cannot shirk away from its responsibility to iron out constitutional creases," the Bench said. It clarified that a Governor has actually three options before him under Article 200 – to grant assent to the Bill, reserve it for the consideration of the President, or withhold assent and return the Bill to the State legislature with comments if it is not a Money Bill. A Governor cannot stall a Bill without returning it to the State Assembly along with his reasons for doing so.

"It would be against the principle of federalism and a derogation of the powers

of the State legislatures to permit the Governor to withhold a Bill without following the dialogic process..." the Reference Bench advised.

The Bench propounded that the Supreme Court cannot judicially review the merits of the decision taken by the Governor under Article 200. "However, in glaring circumstances of inaction that is prolonged, unexplained, and indefinite, the court can issue a limited mandamus for the Governor to discharge his function within a reasonable time period," it said.

But the restricted review of the Governor's inaction would not entail subjecting him personally to judicial proceedings. The Governor enjoyed absolute immunity from court proceedings under Article 361.

The Bench clarified that the courts had no power to review the merits of Bills.

Key Analysis:

1. Separation of Powers & Federalism:

- The Court underlined that Governors and the President perform essential constitutional functions under Articles 200 and 111, respectively.
- Any attempt by the judiciary to impose a deemed approval or rigid timeline would encroach upon the executive domain, violating the doctrine of separation of powers—a basic structure of the Constitution.
- Federal principles were also highlighted: the Governor's actions should respect the legislative supremacy of the State Assemblies and the dialogic process envisaged in the Constitution.

2. Scope of Governor's Powers under Article 200:

- A Governor has three options regarding a State Bill (other than Money Bills):
 1. Grant assent.
 2. Reserve the Bill for the President's consideration.
 3. Withhold assent and return it to the State legislature with comments.
- The Court clarified that the Governor cannot indefinitely stall a Bill without providing reasons, as that would amount to "prolonged and evasive inaction" against the spirit of democracy.

Daily News Analysis

3. Judicial Review:

- The Supreme Court cannot review the **merits** of the Governor's decision or the content of the Bills.
- However, in cases of prolonged inaction that is unexplained and indefinite, the Court can issue a limited mandamus to ensure timely discharge of constitutional duties.
- Importantly, the Governor enjoys **absolute immunity** under Article 361, and judicial intervention cannot subject them to personal proceedings.

4. Implications for Governance:

- The judgment strikes a balance between ensuring timely legislative processes and preserving the autonomy of constitutional functionaries.
- It prevents misuse of judicial authority while also discouraging constitutional functionaries from stalling Bills, thus protecting the people's will expressed through their elected representatives.
- The Court's decision also clarifies the operational boundaries of the President and Governors, providing a framework for smooth legislative-executive interaction in States.

Conclusion:

The Supreme Court's ruling reinforces the core principles of the Constitution—separation of powers, federalism, and democratic accountability—by delineating the scope of gubernatorial and presidential discretion. While the judiciary cannot fetter these functionaries through rigid timelines or assumed approvals, it retains the authority to prevent indefinite inaction, thereby ensuring that legislative intent and people's mandate are not thwarted. The judgment reflects a nuanced approach, balancing institutional autonomy with democratic accountability.



UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Ques: Consider the following statements regarding the powers of a State Governor under Article 200 of the Indian Constitution:

1. The Governor can grant assent to a Bill, reserve it for the President, or return it with comments (except Money Bills).
2. The Governor can indefinitely withhold assent to a Bill without returning it to the legislature.
3. The Governor enjoys absolute immunity from court proceedings under Article 361.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- (A) 1 and 2
- (B) 1 and 3
- (C) 2 and 3
- (D) All of the above

Ans : b)

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques: Prolonged and unexplained inaction by Governors undermines the democratic process, but judicial overreach can threaten executive autonomy." Critically examine in the context of the Supreme Court's recent 16th Presidential Reference judgment. **(250 Words)**



The seventh National Security Adviser-level meeting of the Colombo Security Conclave (CSC) was hosted in New Delhi by India's NSA, Ajit Doval, with participation from the NSAs and defence officials of Maldives, Mauritius, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Seychelles, and Malaysia (as a guest). The conclave focused on strengthening regional security and cooperation in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), highlighting India's central role in regional maritime and security diplomacy.

Ajit Doval hosts seventh meeting of Colombo Security Conclave in Delhi

Kallol Bhattacharjee
NEW DELHI

At the seventh National Security Adviser-level meeting of the Colombo Security Conclave held here on Thursday, the member states focused on five pillars of cooperation that included radicalisation and organised crime.

The member states also agreed to enhance cooperation through training and capacity building.

The meeting, hosted by National Security Adviser Ajit Doval, included a comprehensive review of the security situation in the Indian Ocean Region and called for cooperation under five pillars of cooperation: "maritime safety and security, countering terrorism and radicalisation, combating trafficking and transnational organised crime, cyber security and protection of critical infrastructure and technology and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief," the Ministry of External Affairs said in a statement.

The member states at the event were led by Ibrahim Latheef, National Security Adviser of Maldives, Rahul Rasgotra, National Security Adviser of Mauritius, Air Vice Marshal Sampath Thuyacontha (Retd.), Secretary of Ministry of Defence of Sri Lanka, and Dr. Khalilur Rahman, National

Security Adviser of Bangladesh. Major General Michael Rosette, Chief of Defence Forces of Seychelles Defence Forces, led the delegation from the Seychelles that joined the Colombo Security Conclave as a full member. The Malaysian team that participated as a guest country for the first time was represented by Badrul

Shah Mohd. Idris, Deputy Director-General of the Malaysian National Security Council.

"The CSC member states also discussed enhancing cooperation under identified pillars, including through training and capacity building. They reiterated their commitment to the vision and objectives of CSC," the MEA said.

The MEA said.



National Security Adviser Ajit Doval, with NSAs of other countries, including the Maldives, Mauritius, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, at a meeting in New Delhi on Thursday. ANI

Key Analysis:

1. Objectives and Pillars of Cooperation:

- The CSC meeting focused on five pillars:
 1. Maritime safety and security – crucial for protecting vital sea lanes and countering piracy in the IOR.

Daily News Analysis

2. Countering terrorism and radicalisation – tackling threats that can destabilize the region.
 3. Combating trafficking and transnational organised crime – addressing drug, arms, and human trafficking networks.
 4. Cyber security and protection of critical infrastructure and technology – to safeguard against growing cyber threats.
 5. Humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) – enhancing regional resilience against natural and man-made disasters.
- Emphasis was also placed on training and capacity building, reflecting the importance of institutional strengthening and knowledge sharing among member states.

2. Strategic Significance:

- The Indian Ocean Region is geopolitically vital, hosting key sea lanes of communication and trade.
- By leading the CSC, India strengthens its position as a security provider in the IOR, fostering multilateral cooperation with smaller regional states.
- Inclusion of Seychelles as a full member and Malaysia as a guest signals the Conclave's expanding scope and inclusivity, enhancing regional strategic partnerships.

3. India's Role in Regional Security Architecture:

- India's hosting of the CSC and active engagement underscores its Vision of SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) policy, aimed at promoting maritime security and regional stability.
- Through initiatives like CSC, India seeks to counterbalance extraregional powers' influence, strengthen regional connectivity, and address non-traditional security threats collectively.

Conclusion:

The seventh Colombo Security Conclave reaffirms India's commitment to multilateral security cooperation in the IOR. By focusing on maritime safety, counter-terrorism, organised crime, cyber security, and disaster response, the conclave enhances regional resilience and operational coordination. India's proactive leadership demonstrates its strategic vision of a secure, stable, and cooperative Indian Ocean Region, aligning with broader regional and global security interests.

Daily News Analysis

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Ques : Consider the following statements about the Colombo Security Conclave (CSC):

1. It is a regional security grouping of Indian Ocean littoral states.
2. Its key areas of cooperation include maritime security, counter-terrorism, cyber security, and humanitarian assistance.
3. China is a member of the CSC.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

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

Ans: a)

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques : Explain the role of multilateral security frameworks in enhancing regional stability in the Indian Ocean Region. How do forums like the Colombo Security Conclave contribute to India's SAGAR vision? **(250 words)**



The Supreme Court's advisory opinion on the 16th Presidential Reference has clarified several constitutional ambiguities linked to Articles 200 and 201, which govern the role of Governors and the President in the assent of State Bills. This reference came in the backdrop of the Court's April 8 judgment granting 'deemed assent' to 10 Tamil Nadu Bills, raising crucial questions about executive discretion, judicial review, and separation of powers. The Court has now provided a structured interpretation of constitutional options, limitations, and judicial boundaries.

Fourteen questions and court's responses

The Presidential Reference came after the April 8 judgment of the Supreme Court that granted 'deemed assent' to 10 Tamil Nadu Bills

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

While it is not appropriate for the judiciary to impose timelines on the President and Governors, in glaring circumstances of indefinite inaction, the court can intervene, the Supreme Court said in its advisory to the Presidential Reference. Here are the 14 questions posed by the President and the court's responses:

What are the constitutional options before a Governor when a Bill is presented to him under Article 200 of the Constitution?

To assent, reserve the Bill for the consideration of the President, or withhold assent and return the Bill to the legislature with comments if the Bill is not a Money Bill.

Is the Governor bound by the aid and advice tendered by the Council of Ministers under Article 200?

The Governor enjoys discretion and is not bound by the aid and advice of the Council of Ministers.

Is the exercise of constitutional discretion by the Governor under Article 200 justiciable?

The discharge of the Governor's function under Article 200, is not justiciable.

However, in glaring circumstances of indefinite inaction, the court has a limited power to issue a mandamus to the Governor to decide within a reasonable time period.

Is Article 361 an absolute bar to judicial review in relation to the actions of a Governor under Article 200?

Article 361 is an absolute bar on judicial review in relation to personally subjecting the Governor to judicial proceedings.

Can timelines be imposed under Article 200?

It is not appropriate as the Constitution is silent.

Is exercise of constitutional discretion by the President under Article 201 justiciable?

For the same reasoning as held with respect to the Governor, the President's assent too is not justiciable.

Can the President be bound to timelines while exercising power under Article 201?

For the same reasons as indicated in the context of the Governor, the President, too, cannot be bound by judicially prescribed timelines.

Is the President required to seek advice of the Supreme Court whenever a Governor reserves a Bill for assent?

The President is not required to seek SC's advice. Subjective satisfaction of the President is sufficient.

Are decisions of the Governor and President under Article 200 and Article 201 justiciable at a stage anterior into the law coming into force?

The decisions of the Governor and President under Articles 200 and 201 are not justiciable at a stage anterior into the law coming into force.

It is impermissible for courts to undertake judicial adjudication over the contents of a Bill before it becomes law.

Can the exercise of constitutional powers and the orders of/by the President/Governor be substituted in any manner under Article 142?

The exercise of constitutional powers and the orders of the President/Governor cannot be substituted in any manner under Article 142 nor does it allow for the concept of 'deemed assent' of Bills.

Is a law made by the State legislature a law in force without the assent of the Governor granted under Article 200 of the Constitution?

There is no question of a law made by a State legislature coming into force without assent of the Governor under Article 200.

In view of the proviso to Article 145(3), is it not mandatory for any Bench of the court to first decide whether a case involves substantial questions of law and has to be referred to a Bench of minimum five judges?

Returns unanswered. Irrelevant to this reference.

Do the powers of the Supreme Court under Article 142 of the Constitution limited to matters of procedural law?

Not possible to answer in a definitive manner. Scope of Article 142 answered as a part of earlier question.

Does the Constitution bar the Supreme Court from resolving Centre-States disputes except by way of a suit under Article 131?

Irrelevant to the functional nature of the reference. Hence, returned unanswered.

Key Analysis

1. Constitutional Options Under Article 200

The Court reaffirmed that the Governor has three options:

- Grant assent,
- Reserve the Bill for the President,
- Return the Bill (if it is not a Money Bill) with comments. Withholding assent without returning the Bill is unconstitutional, as it bypasses the dialogic legislative process.

2. Aid and Advice : The Court held that the Governor has constitutional discretion under Article 200, and is not bound by the aid and advice of the Council of Ministers on this specific function. This reinforces the Governor's independent constitutional role.

3. Judicial Review and Governor's Inaction

- The merits of the Governor's decision are not justiciable.
- However, if the Governor engages in prolonged, indefinite, and unexplained inaction, the Court can issue a limited mandamus directing the Governor to take a decision within a reasonable time.
- This balances constitutional autonomy with democratic accountability.

4. Protection Under Article 361 : Article 361 provides the Governor absolute immunity from being personally subjected to judicial proceedings. Courts may review the effect of inaction but not initiate action against the Governor personally.

5. Timelines for Assent : The Court categorically rejected the imposition of judicially crafted timelines, stating that the Constitution is silent and courts cannot insert procedural requirements.

6. President's Powers Under Article 201

- The President enjoys similar discretion as the Governor.
- Their decisions are not justiciable.
- Courts cannot impose timelines on the President either.
- The President is not required to seek the Supreme Court's advice when a Bill is reserved.

7. Justiciability Before a Law Comes Into Force

Courts cannot review:

- The Governor's or President's decision-making stage,
- The contents of a Bill before it becomes law. This prevents premature judicial interference in the legislative process.

8. Article 142 and Deemed Assent : The Court clarified that Article 142 cannot be used to:

- Replace the constitutional functions of the Governor or President,
- Introduce the concept of "deemed assent." This reverses the spirit of the April 8 judgment and firmly places these functions outside judicial substitution.

9. State Laws Come Into Force Only After Assent : The Court reiterated that a State law requires the Governor's assent to come into force; there is no constitutional mechanism for bypassing this.

10. Miscellaneous Questions : Certain queries—such as Article 145(3) on Constitution Bench references and Article 131 on Centre-State disputes—were deemed irrelevant to the functional nature of this reference and returned unanswered.

Conclusion

The Supreme Court's opinion upholds a nuanced equilibrium between judicial oversight and executive discretion. While refusing to impose rigid timelines or promote deemed assent, the Court preserves democratic accountability by enabling intervention against indefinite inaction. The advisory reinforces separation of powers, respects the autonomy of constitutional functionaries,

and clarifies the operational contours of Articles 200 and 201. This ruling strengthens constitutional clarity and safeguards the legislative process from procedural paralysis while preventing judicial overreach.

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Ques: Consider the following statements:

1. Under Article 200, a Governor may withhold assent to a Bill and is not required to return it to the State Legislature.
2. The Governor's decision under Article 200 is subject to judicial review on merits.
3. The Governor may reserve a Bill for the consideration of the President.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 3 only
- B. 1 and 2 only
- C. 2 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

Ans: a)

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques : Courts cannot fetter Governors and the President with rigid timelines; yet constitutional inaction cannot be allowed to defeat legislative intent. Analyse in the context of Articles 200 and 201. **(150 words)**

A new study by the India Justice Report (IJR) has highlighted significant systemic deficiencies in India's juvenile justice machinery, particularly the functioning of Juvenile Justice Boards (JJBs) under the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection) Act, 2015. The report shows that over 55% of cases remain pending across 362 JJBs as of October 31, 2023, largely due to staff shortages, infrastructural gaps, and lack of data transparency. These findings underline deep-rooted administrative weaknesses affecting children in conflict with the law.

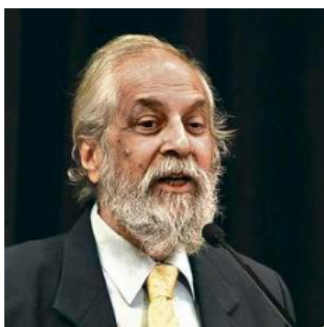
'Over 50% cases pending in Juvenile Justice Boards amid staff shortage'

Bindu Shajan Perappadan
NEW DELHI

More than half (55%) of the cases before 362 Juvenile Justice Boards (JJBs) across the country remained pending as of October 31, 2023, says a first-of-its-kind study by the India Justice Report (IJR) which was released on Thursday.

While 92% of 765 districts in India have constituted JJBs, the authority dealing with children in conflict with law, the pendency rate varies widely, from 83% in Odisha to 35% in Karnataka,

Unlike the National Judicial Data Grid, there is no Central and public repository of information on the JJBs. For the study titled "Juvenile justice and children in conflict with the law: a study of capacity at the frontlines", the IJR filed more than 250 RTI requests and responses from 21 States, revealing that as



It is worrying to find that a quarter of JJBs did not have a full Bench and evidence of a substantial number of staff vacancies in child care institutions.

MADAN B. LOKUR
Former Supreme Court judge

of October 31, 2023, JJBs had only disposed of fewer than half the 1,00,904 cases.

Additionally, vacancies in the juvenile justice system (24% of the JJBs were not fully constituted), and inadequate legal aid (30% JJBs do not have an attached legal services clinic) have led to high workload in crucial functions.

On an average, 154 cases remained pending with each JJB annually. Additionally, inadequate data monitoring and funds have created severe constraints

in the implementation of juvenile justice. According to the 2023 Crime in India data, 40,036 juveniles were apprehended in 31,365 cases under the Indian Penal Code and Special and Local Laws in India.

In a decade since the passing of the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection) Act, 2015, the study finds that the decentralised architecture meant to deliver child-centric services suffers from systemic gaps, including a lack of inter-agency coordination and

data-sharing. Over 500 responses were received from 28 States and two Union Territories, covering 530 districts. Of these responses, 11% were rejected outright, 24% received no reply, 29% were transferred to districts, and 36% were provided by State nodal authorities, indicating a weak culture of public data transfer and transparency.

Former Supreme Court judge Madan B. Lokur said the report exposed the gaps in our juvenile justice system. "Despite the passage of 10 years since the implementation of the JJ Act, 2015, it is worrying to find that a quarter of JJBs did not have a full Bench and evidence of a substantial number of staff vacancies in child care institutions. This has a detrimental effect on children who fall under its purview," he said, adding that the inadequate data from the RTIs was concerning.

Key Analysis

1. High Pendency and Uneven Performance

- Out of 1,00,904 cases before JJBs, more than half remain unresolved.
- Pendency varies sharply:
 - Odisha: 83%
 - Karnataka: 35%
- On average, each JJB handles 154 pending cases annually, indicating a significant case burden.

2. Structural Issues: Understaffing & Vacancies

- 24% of JJBs are not fully constituted, meaning many lack the mandated Principal Magistrate or social worker members.
- 30% of JJBs lack a legal services clinic, depriving juveniles of necessary legal aid.
- Vacancies in Child Care Institutions further weaken rehabilitation efforts.

3. Transparency and Data Deficit

- Unlike regular courts, no national data repository exists for JJBs.
- IJR had to file over 250 RTIs; yet:
 - 11% were rejected,
 - 24% received no reply,
 - 29% were transferred,
 - only 36% provided usable data.
- This reflects a poor culture of information-sharing, hindering policy evaluation.

4. Systemic and Inter-agency Gaps

- Even after 10 years of the JJ Act, the system suffers from:
 - weak coordination between police, CWC, JJBs, and Child Care Institutions,
 - insufficient funding,
 - poor data monitoring mechanisms.
- Former SC judge Justice Madan B. Lokur noted that such gaps "have a detrimental effect on children", pointing to the urgent need for institutional reforms.

5. Broader Context

- According to Crime in India 2023, 40,036 juveniles were apprehended in 31,365 cases—placing enormous responsibility on an overstretched system.
- Without robust JJBs, the core principles of juvenile justice—rehabilitation, child rights, and reformatory justice—cannot be realistically enforced.

Conclusion

The IJR findings expose critical deficiencies in India's juvenile justice delivery, especially concerning pendency, staffing shortages, and transparency failures. Despite the intent of the JJ Act, 2015 to create a child-centric, decentralised justice system, the ground realities reveal significant administrative and institutional weaknesses. Strengthening manpower, building data systems, ensuring

Daily News Analysis

timely appointments, and improving legal aid are essential to uphold the rights of children in conflict with the law and to build a credible juvenile justice ecosystem.

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques: The India Justice Report 2024 reveals serious structural and administrative gaps in the functioning of Juvenile Justice Boards (JJBs). In this context, critically examine the challenges facing India's juvenile justice system and suggest reforms to strengthen child-centric justice delivery. **(250 Words)**



Air pollution in South Asia has evolved from being a country-specific problem to a regional environmental and public health crisis. The 2024 India-Pakistan Smog illustrated how pollution ignores political borders and spreads across the shared Indo-Gangetic air basin. Reports such as the Greenpeace 2023 World Air Quality Report and the World Bank's 2023 study highlight that South Asia hosts the world's most polluted cities, signalling a cross-border ecological emergency intertwined with patterns of economic development, climate change, and weak governance.

Is air pollution a South Asian crisis?

What was the 2024 India-Pakistan Smog? How has air pollution become rampant across the South Asian region? What does the Greenpeace 2023 World Air Quality Report state? How do deteriorating AQI levels affect India economically? What should be the way ahead?

EXPLAINER

Dev Nath Pathak
Vibha Bharadwaj

The story so far:

Delhi is in the spotlight once again for its consistently deteriorating AQI levels. And like every year there has only been a knee-jerk reaction to the problem, rather than a sustainable solution. The Commission for Air Quality Management has gradually switched from stage 1 and 2 to stage 3 of the Graded Response Action Plan, and advisories have been issued for citizens who battle serious health risks. However, there is a dire need to understand the collusion of natural and man-made reasons for air pollution, for Delhi's air pollution crisis goes beyond India's sovereign borders.

What is happening in South Asia?

In November 2024, eastern and northern Pakistan and north India faced a severe pollution event that came to be known as the '2024 India-Pakistan Smog'. Lahore and Delhi virtually competed on the scale of the most polluted city with the highest AQI reading globally. 'Brown clouds' formed in swathes over the cities distinctly visible in satellite images. While Lahore was faced with the worst AQI, Delhi's air gradually deteriorated due to a shift in wind patterns that carried pollutants across borders and within the region. Now in 2025, Delhi is once again followed by Lahore. *The Dawn* from Karachi reported that local pollution and smoke drifted in from India due to low-speed winds.

Bangladesh also has a significant share in the air pollution crisis. Dhaka is witnessing worsening AQI in the range from moderate to very poor during the winter season, as reported by the U.S. thinktank Atlantic Council. Likewise in the capital of Nepal, AQI remains alarmingly high every year, between moderate and unhealthy.



Not the only one: Commuters ride along a road amid dense smog in Lahore on October 30. AFP

What are the reasons?

The Greenpeace 2023 World Air Quality Report underlined that poor air quality in South Asia is due to anthropogenic sources such as industrial and vehicular emissions, and burning of solid fuel and wastages. The shared air pollution across the Indo-Gangetic Plain and beyond, with tier-1 cities facing the consequences, can be accounted by for factors such as the fixed topography of the region. Although separated by cartography, the regional topography of South Asia causes fixed ventilation of natural air and dispersal of pollutants. A trans-national and regional haze surfaces due to the complex composition of air particulates. Alongside the natural geography, there is a transnational and regional commonality – the failure in managing such crises due to abysmal political will.

The World Bank report on 'Air Pollution and Public Health in South Asia' in 2023 informed that nine out of the world's 10 cities with the worst air pollution are in South Asia. Sri Lanka, Maldives and Bhutan are known to be relatively less affected by transregional air pollution in the region of South Asia. This interplay of factors shows that mitigation requires attention to not only short-term solutions but also long-term strategies that focus on strong decarbonisation measures and structural reforms in agricultural practices and industry emissions across national borders.

Is this a crisis of development?

Air pollution is related to larger issues of development and its adverse consequences for the environment. A World Bank study estimates that high AQI

levels in India results in about 3% of its GDP being spent on healthcare and lost labour capital. *The Lancet* Health Journal highlighted that in 2019 India's GDP reduced by 1.36% due to premature morbidity and mortality as a result of air pollution. A steep rise in the sale of automobile vehicles, lack of public transport, negligible support for non-vehicular mobility, and building concrete structures at the expense of urban greenery are some of the reasons which lead to deteriorating air quality. A 2023 UNEP report shows how current patterns of consumption and production are driving climate change, which in turn drives the air pollution crisis. Thus, the World Health Organization (WHO) accurately recognises that air quality significantly affects life expectancy, public health, economic productivity, and environmental justice. These sordid AQI figures are the result of poorly thought-out development. The consequences are visible not only in north India. Experts warn of worsening air in Mumbai and other cities on the southeast coast.

What next?

A more nuanced model of governance with strong political will to curb the sources of the crisis; a caring human development model addressing the needs of the working class and farmers; and a more regionally informed model are some of the imperatives needed to find sustainable solutions.

A recent study by IIT Bhubaneswar highlighted the importance of a broader regional airshed scale management strategy to tackle air pollution, rather than merely addressing the issue in piecemeal.

Only with stronger policies that involve varied stakeholders from across borders and states, can one evolve a meteorological mindset to uproot the sources of air pollution.

Dev Nath Pathak is associate dean, faculty of social sciences at South Asian University. Vibha Bharadwaj is a research scholar at Christ University, Bangalore.

THE GIST

▼ In November 2024, eastern and northern Pakistan and north India faced a severe pollution event that came to be known as the '2024 India-Pakistan Smog'.

▼ The Greenpeace 2023 World Air Quality Report underlined that poor air quality in South Asia is due to anthropogenic sources such as industrial and vehicular emissions, and burning of solid fuel and wastages.

▼ *The Lancet* Health Journal highlighted that in 2019 India's GDP reduced by 1.36% due to premature morbidity and mortality as a result of air pollution.

Key Analysis

1. What was the 2024 India–Pakistan Smog?

- In November 2024, eastern and northern Pakistan and North India experienced an intense smog episode.

Daily News Analysis

- Lahore and Delhi frequently topped global AQI charts, registering hazardous air quality levels.
- Satellite images showed "brown clouds" spread over the Indo-Gangetic plains.
- Changing winter wind patterns carried pollutants across borders, worsening Delhi's air while smoke from Indian regions drifted into Pakistan.
- By 2025, both Delhi and Lahore once again appear among the world's worst polluted cities.

2. How has air pollution become rampant across South Asia?

Natural + Anthropogenic causes converge

- Shared Indo-Gangetic topography traps air due to low ventilation.
- Anthropogenic emissions:
 - industrial and vehicular pollution
 - solid fuel burning
 - agricultural residue burning
 - municipal waste burning

Regional connectivity of air

- Fixed geography creates a common airshed, where pollutants travel freely across Nepal, India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh.
- Weak or inconsistent political action and short-term measures (e.g., seasonal restrictions) worsen the crisis.

Regional pattern

- Bangladesh: Dhaka's winter AQI regularly hits unhealthy to very unhealthy.
- Nepal: Kathmandu records dangerous AQI every winter.
- India–Pakistan: Delhi and Lahore occupy top spots among the world's worst cities.

Only Sri Lanka, Maldives, Bhutan remain relatively unaffected.

3. What does the Greenpeace 2023 World Air Quality Report state?

- South Asia accounts for the worst air quality globally.
- Nine out of the 10 most polluted cities in the world are in South Asia.
- Primary sources:

- vehicles
 - industries
 - construction dust
 - solid fuel combustion
 - open waste burning
- Winter inversion + geography + man-made emissions → regional haze that travels across borders.

4. How do deteriorating AQI levels affect India economically?

Air pollution is not just an environmental issue; it is a developmental and economic issue.

Economic impacts

- World Bank (2023): 3% of India's GDP is spent on health costs + lost labour productivity due to high AQI.
- Lancet (2019): India's GDP shrank by 1.36% due to premature mortality and morbidity linked to pollution.
- Loss of human capital: respiratory illness, cardiovascular diseases, lower life expectancy.
- Urban productivity loss: absenteeism, reduced cognitive performance.
- Sectoral impacts:
 - tourism decline
 - higher insurance/health costs
 - effect on foreign investment in polluted cities
- Rising vehicle ownership, weak public transport, and rapid but poorly planned urbanisation increase long-term costs.

5. What should be the way ahead? (For Mains answers)

A. Governance reforms

- Strong political will beyond seasonal emergency responses.
- Implement airshed-level management (as suggested by IIT Bhubaneswar) rather than city-wise or state-wise fragmentation.
- Integrated regional monitoring network for India, Pakistan, Nepal, and Bangladesh.

B. Cross-border environmental cooperation

Daily News Analysis

- Establish a South Asian Clean Air Agreement similar to the UNECE Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution.
- Joint early-warning systems, emission inventories, and coordinated crop-residue management.

C. Domestic reforms

- Decarbonisation of industries.
- Strong emission standards for vehicles.
- Expansion of public transport and non-motorised mobility.
- Urban planning reforms: green spaces, dust control, construction regulation.

D. Agricultural & rural reforms

- Incentives for farmers:
 - in-situ residue management
 - biomass-based power plants
 - alternative cropping patterns

E. Climate and consumption alignment

- Aligning consumption/production patterns with climate goals (UNEP 2023).
- Promote renewable energy and reduce dependence on solid fuels.

Conclusion

Air pollution in South Asia has transcended national boundaries to become a regional humanitarian, developmental, and ecological crisis. The 2024 India-Pakistan Smog demonstrates how local actions in one country can trigger hazardous conditions in another. With the Indo-Gangetic Plain functioning as a shared airshed, isolated national strategies cannot succeed. A coordinated regional approach, backed by strong political commitment, structural reforms in transport, agriculture, industry, and cross-border cooperation, is essential to secure clean air, human health, and sustainable development across South Asia.

Daily News Analysis

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Ques: Consider the following statements regarding air pollution in South Asia:

1. The 2024 India-Pakistan Smog was caused primarily due to a combination of local pollution and cross-border movement of pollutants due to wind patterns.
2. According to the Greenpeace 2023 report, natural factors such as South Asian topography also play a role in restricting the ventilation of pollutants.
3. The World Bank's 2023 report stated that South Asia contains nine out of the world's ten most polluted cities.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

Ans : d)

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques: Deteriorating AQI levels in India impose heavy economic costs. Analyse the economic implications of air pollution and suggest a roadmap to build a sustainable and regionally coordinated air-quality governance system. **(150 Words)**



Classes
Quality education

India's fisheries and aquaculture, its promising course

Fisheries and aquaculture are among India's fastest-growing food-producing sectors, playing a vital role in livelihoods, nutrition, and trade. Over the decades, India has witnessed remarkable growth in aquatic food production that is driven by technological innovation, institutional support and proactive policy measures. Yet, the sector faces critical challenges. Overfishing, habitat degradation, water pollution and climate change are straining aquatic ecosystems. Small-scale fishers and farmers often lack access to finance, technology and markets, while poor traceability and inadequate post-harvest measures limit tapping of the best export and domestic market potential and compromise food security.

On World Fisheries Day 2025 (November 21), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) calls for a renewed commitment to India's Blue Revolution and supports the Government of India's theme this year, which is "India's Blue Transformation: Strengthening Value Addition in Seafood Exports".

India's growth in fisheries and aquaculture
 According to the FAO State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture (SOFIA) 2024, global capture fisheries produced 92.3 million tonnes in 2022, while aquaculture reached a record 130.9 million tonnes, valued at \$313 billion. India contributed 10.23 million tonnes of aquatic animals, making it the world's second-largest aquaculture producer.

India's aquatic food production, encompassing capture fisheries and aquaculture, has risen from 2.44 million tonnes in the 1980s to 17.54 million tonnes in 2022-23. Aquaculture has emerged as one of the key driver of this growth, reflecting sectoral modernisation through advanced technologies, infrastructure and institutional support.

Agencies such as the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) fisheries institutes, Marine Products Export Development Authority, and National Fisheries Development Board have promoted innovation and best practices, while the Coastal Aquaculture Authority has regulated coastal aquaculture activities to ensure



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The FAO is committed to guiding India's Blue Revolution toward a resilient and inclusive future

environmental compliance. The private sector has expanded investments from hatcheries to exports, reinforcing value chain efficiency.

The past decade has ushered in a new phase of transformation, beginning with India's Blue Revolution initiative and advancing under the Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY). These programmes have driven production growth, particularly in inland and brackish water aquaculture, while improving safety, regulation, and resilience in fisheries.

Key reforms include vessel transponders for fisher safety, digital and credit inclusion through the Kisan Credit Card, and the establishment of Matsya Seva Kendras for integrated support. The Climate-Resilient Coastal Fishermen Villages Programme and the draft National Fisheries Policy 2020 are positive developments.

The FAO's support across India

The FAO has been a long-standing partner in India's fisheries and aquaculture journey, supporting the country's transition toward sustainability and resilience. The FAO's decades of collaboration with India have shaped policy, strengthened institutions, and advanced innovation in the sector.

The FAO's collaboration with India began with the Bay of Bengal Programme (BOBP), one of FAO's earliest regional small-scale fisheries initiatives. The FAO, through BOBP, has supported the Government of India in improving small-scale fishing technologies, strengthening sea safety, and enhancing post-harvest management.

The FAO's Bay of Bengal Large Marine Ecosystem (BOBLME) project strengthened India's efforts to balance fisheries and conservation, supporting the Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management (EAFM), and National Plans of Action to combat Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing, a major threat to marine ecosystems and sustainable fisheries, conserve endangered species and sustain small-scale fisheries.

To support India's rapid strides in the field of aquaculture, the FAO is supporting a Global Environment Facility (GEF)-funded project in

Andhra Pradesh on 'Transforming Aquaculture to a Sustainable, Reduced Footprint and Climate-Resilient Food System', guided by Guidelines for Sustainable Aquaculture (GSA) and Ecosystem Approach to Aquaculture (EAA) principles. The project aims to support the Department of Fisheries, Government of Andhra Pradesh, in promoting climate-resilient, sustainable aquaculture, benefiting the State and serving as a model for India to take forward the government's Blue Revolution.

As part of the aquatic value chain, strengthening of fishing ports and fishing harbours is also one of the main thrust areas of the Government of India. A Technical Cooperation Programme (TCP) of the FAO intends to assist the Government of India to strengthen the technical capacities of fishing ports to address main environmental, social and economic challenges that affect the aquatic value chain. Two pilot fishing ports, specifically Vanakbara (Union Territory of Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Diu without legislation) and Jakhau in Gujarat, will benefit from this TCP that will provide them with specific strategic and operational tools to identify and formulate investments projects, whose implementation would address main challenges.

Focus on sustainability

India's fisheries and aquaculture sectors are on a promising trajectory. Yet, sustainability must remain central. Managing fishing efforts through science-based stock assessments, promoting co-managed Monitoring Control and Surveillance (MCS) to curb IUU fishing, following Guidelines for Sustainable Aquaculture and embedding ecosystem-based approaches are key priorities. Strengthening certification, traceability, and digital tools – while ensuring inclusivity for smallholders – will enhance competitiveness in domestic and global markets.

The FAO remains committed to supporting India's journey toward sustainable aquatic food systems, ensuring food and nutritional security, and reducing environmental and climate footprints, guiding India's Blue Revolution toward a resilient and inclusive future.

GS. Paper 3 Indian Economy

UPSC Mains Practice Question : Despite being one of the fastest-growing food-producing sectors, India's fisheries and aquaculture system faces serious sustainability and governance challenges. Critically examine the opportunities and constraints in India's 'Blue Transformation' pathway. (250 words)

Context :

India's fisheries and aquaculture sector has emerged as one of the fastest-growing components of the food economy, contributing significantly to livelihoods, export earnings, nutrition, and rural development. On World Fisheries Day 2025, the FAO emphasises India's "Blue Transformation," noting that while the country has made remarkable progress, the sector still faces sustainability, livelihood, and environmental challenges that demand urgent policy attention.

Key Analysis

1. India's Strong Growth Trajectory

- India is the world's second-largest aquaculture producer, contributing 10.23 million tonnes of aquatic animals.
- Total aquatic food production rose from 2.44 million tonnes (1980s) to 17.54 million tonnes (2022–23).
- Growth is driven by:
 - Modern technologies (seed production, feed, disease management)
 - Infrastructure expansion (hatcheries, cold chain)
 - Institutional support (ICAR fisheries institutes, MPEDA, NFDB)
 - Private-sector investment across the value chain

2. Policy Push: Blue Revolution to PMMSY

The last decade saw reforms that modernised fisheries governance:

- Blue Revolution and Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY) strengthened inland and brackish-water aquaculture.
- **Key reforms:**
 - Vessel transponders for safety
 - Kisan Credit Card for fishers
 - Matsya Seva Kendras for integrated services
 - Climate-Resilient Coastal Fishermen Villages Programme
 - Draft National Fisheries Policy 2020

These initiatives aim to improve safety, regulation, productivity, and sustainability.

3. Challenges: Sustainability & Inclusivity Gaps

Despite growth, the sector faces major bottlenecks:

- Environmental stress: overfishing, habitat loss, water pollution, coastal degradation.
- Climate change impacts: warming seas, cyclones, changing fish stock patterns.
- Livelihood vulnerabilities: small-scale fishers lack finance, technology, cold storage, and market linkages.
- Low traceability and poor post-harvest systems limit exports and food safety.
- IUU fishing (Illegal, Unreported, Unregulated) remains a major governance challenge.

Without addressing these structural issues, India risks undermining long-term sustainability.

4. FAO's Long-standing Support to India

The FAO has supported India through key initiatives:

- Bay of Bengal Programme (BOBP): small-scale fisheries, safety, post-harvest practices.
- BOBLME Project:
 - Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management (EAFM)
 - National Plan of Action against IUU fishing
 - Conservation of endangered species
- GEF-supported aquaculture project in Andhra Pradesh: climate-resilient, reduced-footprint aquaculture based on FAO sustainability guidelines.
- Technical Cooperation Programme (TCP) for improving fishing port management in:
 - Vanakbara (Dadra & Nagar Haveli and Diu)
 - Jakhau (Gujarat)

These aim to enhance environmental, social, and economic sustainability across the fisheries value chain.

5. Way Forward: A Sustainability-Driven Blue Transformation

FAO outlines several priority areas for India:

- Science-based stock assessment for regulating fishing effort.
- Strengthening Monitoring, Control and Surveillance (MCS) to curb IUU fishing.
- Ecosystem-based aquaculture following FAO's Global Sustainability Guidelines.
- Improved traceability and certification to meet global market standards.
- Digital tools for value-chain efficiency.
- Ensuring smallholder and small-scale fisher inclusion in modernisation efforts.

Sustainable fisheries are central to India's food security, export competitiveness, and climate resilience.

Conclusion

India's fisheries and aquaculture sector stands at a transformative moment. Significant expansion in production and policy support has positioned India as a major global player. However, environmental pressures, livelihood vulnerabilities, and governance gaps must be addressed to sustain this momentum. With FAO's continued partnership, science-driven management, and a strong emphasis on traceability and resilience, India's "Blue Transformation" can become a model of sustainable and inclusive growth for the developing world.