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1.1. POLITY & GOVERNANCE

1.1.1. THE CONSTITUTIONAL DILEMMA OF THE NATIONAL SECURITY ACT (NSA)

Context

The **Allahabad High Court** quashed the **National Security Act (NSA)** detention of a student activist, terming the executive action "despotic" and passed "without application of mind." Ordering ₹5 lakh compensation deducted from the salaries of erring officials, the court warned that unchecked bureaucratic overreach risks creating an "Orwellian dystopia."



Introduction

Enacted to neutralize grave threats to state security, the **National Security Act (NSA), 1980**, permits preventive detention without formal trial. However, recurring executive misuse against democratic dissent undermines **fundamental rights**, bypassing procedural natural justice and testing the constitutional balance between sovereign defense and individual liberty.

About National Security Act (NSA), 1980

- **Core Mandate:** Enacted on September 23, 1980, empowering Central and State governments to detain individuals preventively without formal charges or trial to maintain **state security and public order**.
- **Colonial Lineage:** Traces roots to colonial regulations like **Bengal Regulation III (1818)** and the **Rowlatt Act (1919)**, subsequently evolving through post-independence statutes including the **Preventive Detention Act (1950)** and **MISA (1971)**.
- **Statutory Detention Limits:** Authorizes preventive detention for up to **12 months** (extendable upon fresh evidence), permitting authorities to withhold grounds of arrest for up to **10 days**.

Constitutional Framework & Safeguards

- **Article 22(3)(b):** Creates a constitutional carve-out suspending standard safeguards, exempting the state from producing detainees before a magistrate within 24 hours or providing immediate legal counsel.
- **Article 22(4):** Restricts preventive detention to a maximum of **three months** unless an independent **Advisory Board** confirms sufficient cause for continued detention.
- **Advisory Board Review:** Comprises three individuals qualified to be High Court judges; however, detainees are statutorily barred from having **legal representation** before the panel.

Legal Provisions

- **Grounds for Invocation:** Invoked against acts prejudicial to the **defense of India**, foreign relations, state security, or the maintenance of **public order** and essential community supplies.
- **Executive Immunity:** Grants overarching protection under Section 16 for any action taken or intended in "**good faith**", shielding officials from legal prosecution.

- **Denial of Natural Justice:** Deprives detainees of normal bail provisions and the right to cross-examine evidence presented against them during detention proceedings.

Significance of the National Security Act

1. Pre-emptive Threat Mitigation

- Empowers the state to proactively neutralize acute threats to national security and internal peace before actionable harm occurs.
- Prevents organized subversion, espionage, and cross-border terrorism that threaten **territorial sovereignty**.

2. Effective Deterrence

- Imposes a severe psychological deterrent against anti-social syndicates, habitual offenders, and disruptive actors targeting critical infrastructure.
- Disfavors intentional attempts to incite widespread civil unrest or communal disharmony.

3. Operational Agility in Sensitive Zones

- Equips authorities with rapid, decisive intervention powers in volatile conflict environments, border corridors, and communally fragile districts.
- Enables swift administrative action when ordinary law enforcement mechanisms are inadequate to maintain peace.

4. Safeguarding Essential Supplies

- Deters calculated sabotage, hoarding, and illicit disruptions affecting the supply of **essential commodities and civic services**.
- Ensures uninterrupted community lifelines and public utility operations during socio-economic crises.

5. Sovereign Safety Valve

- Acts as an emergency statutory backstop to preserve state security when standard criminal prosecution machinery is incapacitated or slow.
- Guarantees public order when gathering courtroom-admissible evidence is compromised by imminent peril.

Associated Challenges

1. Threat of Executive Arbitrariness

- Broad executive discretion allows authorities to invoke the law for routine law-and-order disputes to bypass standard bail processes.
- Reflected in systemic judicial quashing rates, such as the Allahabad High Court invalidating **94 out of 120 detention orders** in 2021.

2. Infringement of Natural Justice

- Statutory prohibition of legal representation before the **Advisory Board** violates the bedrock principle of *audi alteram partem* (right to be heard).
- Detainees remain vulnerable to fabricated executive claims without access to specialized legal assistance.

3. Absence of Transparency & Data Vacuum

- Because NSA detentions bypass standard **First Information Reports (FIRs)**, the **National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB)** excludes them from national crime statistics.
- This omission prevents empirical legislative assessment and conceals the actual scale of preventive incarcerations.

4. Prolonged Unreviewed Detention

- Allows individuals to be incarcerated for up to **three months** before mandatory review by the Advisory Board.
- Leaves citizens vulnerable to custodial excesses and mental trauma during extended confinement without formal charge.

5. Suppression of Democratic Dissent

- Subjective statutory phrasing enables the state to weaponize preventive detention against labor demonstrators, student activists, and political opposition.
- Chills constitutionally protected freedoms of speech, peaceful assembly, and collective bargaining under **Article 19**.

Way Forward

1. Strengthen Judicial Oversight

- Institutionalize immediate, independent judicial scrutiny at the stage of the District Magistrate's order to eliminate arbitrary detentions.
- Ensure timely judicial intervention rather than relying exclusively on post-facto habeas corpus petitions.

2. Grant Statutory Legal Representation

- Amend Section 11 of the NSA to permit detainees legal counsel before the **Advisory Board**.
- Align administrative review processes with constitutional fair-trial standards and international human rights norms.

3. Enforce Personal Accountability & Restitution

- Implement judicial precedents mandating that compensation for illegal detention be deducted directly from the **salaries of erring officials**.
- Dismantle blanket bureaucratic immunity by investigating and penalizing malicious invocations of preventive detention.

4. Delineate "Public Order" Thresholds

- Statutorily clarify the distinction between localized "law and order" problems and genuine disruptions affecting "**public order**" at large.
- Prevent executive authorities from invoking national security mechanisms for petty or routine penal offenses.

5. Incorporate Sunset Clauses & Mandatory Re-evaluation

- Introduce periodic legislative reauthorization mechanisms (**sunset clauses**) to prevent the normalization of emergency-era powers.
- Mandate monthly internal reviews of detention orders instead of permitting automatic prolonged incarceration.

6. Mandate Comprehensive Data Tracking

- Require state governments to furnish detailed, disaggregated data on preventive detentions for mandatory inclusion in **NCRB reports**.
- Enhance public transparency and parliamentary accountability regarding detention rationale and demographics.

Conclusion

Preventive detention is an exceptional constitutional compromise, not an administrative shortcut for ordinary penal procedures. Safeguarding the republic requires strictly circumscribing executive discretion with judicial accountability, ensuring that sovereign security never compromises the fundamental soul of constitutional liberty.

Q. Analyse the constitutional safeguards under the National Security Act (NSA), 1980, and discuss the challenges arising from its arbitrary invocation. 15 Marks

1.2. INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1.2.1. INDIA'S MODEL BIT RESET: BALANCING INVESTMENT PROTECTION WITH REGULATORY SOVEREIGNTY

Context

India is reportedly revisiting its **2015 Model Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT)** to make its investment regime more attractive while preserving the State's **right to regulate**. The debate also raises concerns about **transparency, parliamentary oversight and participatory democracy** in treaty-making.



Introduction

As India seeks to attract greater **foreign investment amid global competition for capital**, strengthening investor confidence while safeguarding **policy autonomy, regulatory certainty and national interests** has become increasingly important.

What is a Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT)?

- A **BIT is an agreement between two countries that establishes reciprocal rules for the promotion and protection of investments made by investors of one country in the territory of the other**.
- BITs generally provide foreign investors protection against risks such as **expropriation, discrimination, arbitrary State action and unfair treatment**, while prescribing mechanisms for resolving investment disputes.
- A key feature of modern BITs is **Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS)**, under which a foreign investor may, subject to treaty conditions, bring a claim against the host State before an international arbitral tribunal.

Why is India Revising the 2015 Model BIT?

1. Experience with investor-State disputes

- India began reconsidering its investment treaty framework after several foreign investors initiated claims against India alleging violations of BIT obligations.
- These disputes exposed the tension between **protecting foreign investment and preserving governmental policy space**, particularly in taxation, regulation and public policy.

2. Limitations of the 2015 Model BIT

- The **2015 Model BIT** was formulated after India undertook a broader reassessment of its investment treaty policy.
- India subsequently moved towards **terminating several older BITs** and using the 2015 Model BIT as the basis for negotiating new treaties.
- However, India has concluded only a limited number of BITs based on the 2015 model, indicating difficulties in making the framework acceptable to major capital-exporting countries.

3. Need to restore investor confidence

- Foreign investors are concerned not only about treaty provisions but also about **regulatory uncertainty, governance risks and delays in judicial proceedings**.
- Therefore, the proposed revision can be viewed as an attempt to move from an excessively sovereignty-oriented framework towards a **more balanced investment regime**.

Concerns Associated with India's Revised BIT Framework

1. **Investor protection vs regulatory autonomy:** India must balance **investor protection** with the State's right to regulate public health, environment, taxation and national security.
2. **Risk of regulatory chill:** Fear of investment claims may discourage the government from undertaking necessary **public-interest regulations and welfare measures**.
3. **Investor confidence:** Excessive emphasis on sovereignty may weaken **legal certainty and predictability**, increasing perceived investment risks.
4. **Limited treaty adoption:** The limited number of BITs concluded under the 2015 Model indicates that its restrictive approach may have reduced its **acceptability to capital-exporting countries**.
5. **Arbitration uncertainty:** Ambiguous treaty provisions may give arbitral tribunals excessive interpretative discretion, leading to **inconsistent rulings and prolonged disputes**.
6. **Effective dispute settlement:** India must ensure **accessible international arbitration** while preventing frivolous or speculative investor claims through appropriate safeguards.
7. **FDI competitiveness:** A predictable BIT regime is essential to attract **long-term FDI, integrate into global value chains and remain competitive for global capital**.

Way Forward

1. Strike a calibrated balance

India should adopt the principle of “**protect investment, but preserve the right to regulate**”, rather than moving from one extreme to another.

2. Introduce precise treaty language

Ambiguous provisions should be replaced with clearly defined standards to reduce **interpretational uncertainty and litigation**.

3. Reform ISDS without eliminating it

India can provide meaningful access to international arbitration while incorporating safeguards against **frivolous claims, forum shopping and excessive damages**.

4. Strengthen domestic dispute resolution

Faster and more predictable domestic courts and specialised commercial dispute-resolution mechanisms can reduce investor uncertainty.

5. Institutionalise stakeholder consultation

Consultation with **academics, economists, investors, lawyers, arbitrators, industry and civil society** should become a regular part of BIT formulation.

Conclusion

India's revised Model BIT should move the pendulum towards the centre—**providing credible investment protection without compromising regulatory sovereignty**. Equally, transparent consultation and parliamentary scrutiny can ensure that India's investment diplomacy remains both **economically competitive and democratically legitimate**.

Q. India's proposed revision of the Model Bilateral Investment Treaty provides an opportunity to balance investor protection with the State's right to regulate. Discuss the associated challenges and suggest a way forward. 10 Marks

1.2.2. INDIA-BELGIUM: FROM DIAMOND TRADE TO DEFENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

Context:

Belgian PM Bart De Wever's India visit, the first by a Belgian PM in nearly two decades, has revitalised bilateral ties. India and Belgium agreed to deepen cooperation in defence, intelligence, trade, fintech, semiconductors, renewable energy and maritime security, signalling a shift from trade-centric ties to a broader strategic and technology partnership.



Introduction

For over a century, **Antwerp's diamonds connected Belgium with Mumbai-Surat**. Today, the relationship is moving beyond diamonds towards **defence, semiconductors, fintech, maritime security and renewable energy**, making Belgium an important partner in India's wider **Europe strategy and pursuit of strategic autonomy**.

Historical Foundations & Shared Legacy

- **WWI Legacy:** India remembers the sacrifice of **9,000+ Indian soldiers in Flanders Fields**; institutional links connect the Flanders Fields Museum with India's CAFHR.
- **Early Diplomatic Ties:** Belgium was among the **earliest European countries to establish diplomatic relations with India in 1947**.
- **People-to-People Connect:** Historical ties have evolved into enduring **cultural, academic and diaspora linkages**.
- **Institutional Continuity:** Historical cooperation provides a foundation for expanding today's **economic, defence and strategic partnership**.

From Economic Partnership to Strategic & Technology Cooperation

1. Economic & Trade Partnership

Partnership So Far

- **Strong trade ties:** Bilateral trade reached around **US\$13.01 billion in 2025–26**, with Belgium being an important European economic partner for India.
- **Diamond value chain:** Belgium's **Antwerp** and India's **Mumbai–Surat** form a complementary global diamond-trading, cutting and polishing ecosystem.

Current Agreement / New Direction

- **Trade diversification:** Both sides aim to **double bilateral trade over the next five years**, moving beyond dependence on diamonds.
- **New sectors:** Focus is expanding towards **fintech, semiconductors, manufacturing, renewable energy and advanced technology**.

2. Defence & Defence-Industrial Cooperation

Partnership So Far

- Belgium possesses specialised capabilities in **ammunition, drones, radar, electro-optical systems, naval technologies and mine-countermeasure systems**.
- Indian and Belgian defence industries have already explored cooperation in **ammunition, rockets, counter-drone systems, sensors and autonomous maritime systems**.

Current Agreement / New Direction

- **Letter of Intent:** Both sides agreed to establish structured cooperation covering **military exchanges, training, R&D, joint exercises and defence-industrial cooperation**.
- **Co-development:** Around **15 Belgian defence companies** engaged with Indian industry, signalling greater emphasis on **joint production, technology transfer and manufacturing**.

3. Maritime Security

Partnership So Far

- Cooperation is emerging around **naval technologies, autonomous systems and mine-countermeasure capabilities**.
- Belgian expertise complements India's requirement for advanced **underwater systems, sensors and maritime technologies**.

Current Agreement / New Direction

- Greater focus on **mine countermeasures, underwater robotics and autonomous maritime systems**.
- Cooperation can help protect **ports, subsea cables, pipelines and maritime trade routes**, strengthening supply-chain resilience.

4. Intelligence & Internal Security

Partnership So Far

- Growing security engagement reflects the increasing importance of **European cooperation in combating transnational threats**.
- Belgium's location within Europe provides opportunities for cooperation against **cross-border criminal networks**.

Current Agreement / New Direction

- Both sides agreed to strengthen **intelligence-sharing and cooperation between security agencies**.
- Focus includes combating **transnational crime, organised crime, terror financing and emerging security threats**.

5. Semiconductors & Strategic Technology

Partnership So Far

- India and Belgium possess **complementary technological and industrial strengths**, creating scope for deeper technology cooperation.
- Semiconductors are increasingly important for **electronics, automobiles, AI, defence and digital infrastructure**.

Current Agreement / New Direction

- Both sides agreed to deepen cooperation in **semiconductors and related technology ecosystems**.
- This can support India's efforts to build **resilient domestic semiconductor supply chains** and reduce excessive dependence on concentrated global sources.

6. Fintech & Digital Economy

Partnership So Far

- India's strength lies in its **Digital Public Infrastructure, digital payments and large fintech ecosystem**.
- Belgium and the wider European ecosystem provide opportunities for **financial expertise, innovation and regulatory cooperation**.

Current Agreement / New Direction

- Cooperation is being expanded among **financial institutions, fintech companies and regulators**.
- Potential areas include **digital payments, financial inclusion, RegTech and cross-border financial services**.

7. Renewable Energy & Green Transition

Partnership So Far

- Energy transition has emerged as a promising area for India–Belgium economic and technological cooperation.
- Belgium’s technological capabilities can complement India’s growing **renewable-energy market and manufacturing capacity**.

Current Agreement / New Direction

- Both sides are working towards a **renewable-energy partnership/pact**.
- Cooperation can cover **clean-energy technologies, renewable energy and green industrial solutions**.

8. Institutional & EU-Level Cooperation

Partnership So Far

- The **India–Belgium–Luxembourg Economic Union Joint Commission**, established in **1997**, provides an institutional mechanism for economic cooperation.
- Belgium’s position as an **EU member and major European economic hub** gives the bilateral relationship wider strategic relevance.

Current Agreement / New Direction

- Belgium can serve as an important **gateway for strengthening India–EU economic, technological and strategic cooperation**.
- The expanding bilateral agenda creates opportunities to connect **India’s interests with broader European supply chains, technology and security frameworks**.

Geopolitical & Strategic Significance of India–Belgium Relations

1. Gateway to the European Union

- As an important **EU member**, Belgium can facilitate India’s wider engagement with the **EU on trade, FTA, technology and resilient supply chains**.
- It strengthens India’s access to the broader **European strategic and economic ecosystem**.

2. Strategic Autonomy & Diversification

- Cooperation reflects India’s approach of **diversifying economic, technological and strategic partnerships** amid geopolitical fragmentation and supply-chain vulnerabilities.
- It supports India’s goal of **strategic autonomy without alignment with any single bloc**.

3. Issue-Based Strategic Convergence

- Despite differences over issues such as the **Russia–Ukraine conflict**, India and Belgium continue to deepen cooperation.
- This demonstrates that **strategic partnerships do not require complete geopolitical convergence**, reflecting India’s preference for **issue-based alignment over alliance-based foreign policy**.

Challenges in India–Belgium Relations

1. Limited Scale of Trade

- Bilateral trade remains relatively modest compared with India’s major European and global trading partners.

- Greater diversification into **technology, manufacturing and services** is needed to unlock the full economic potential.

2. Diamond Concentration

- India–Belgium trade has traditionally been heavily linked to the **diamond industry**, creating sectoral concentration.
- Expanding cooperation into **fintech, semiconductors, technology and green energy** is essential for a more resilient partnership.

3. EU Regulatory Barriers

- Differences in **standards, regulations and market-access norms** can increase compliance costs for Indian exporters.
- Greater regulatory coordination is needed to facilitate **trade and deeper India–EU economic integration**.

4. Technology Transfer

- Defence cooperation will be meaningful only if it results in **technology transfer and domestic capability building**.
- India needs greater emphasis on **co-development, joint production and strengthening indigenous defence manufacturing**.

5. Geopolitical Differences

- India and Belgium/Europe may differ on issues such as **Russia, China and wider strategic priorities**.
- Managing these differences through **issue-based cooperation and strategic dialogue** is essential.

6. Implementation Gap

- MoUs and Letters of Intent can have limited impact if they do not translate into **actual investments and joint projects**.
- Effective implementation requires **clear timelines, private-sector participation and institutional monitoring**.

Way Forward for India–Belgium Relations

1. Diversify Economic Relations

- Move beyond the traditional **diamond-centric trade model** towards semiconductors, fintech, renewable energy and advanced manufacturing.
- Promote greater **investment, services trade and technology partnerships** to build a balanced economic relationship.

2. Promote Defence Co-development

- Shift from defence procurement towards **joint R&D, technology transfer and joint production**.
- Increase **Indian value addition and private-sector participation** to strengthen domestic defence capabilities.

3. Leverage the India–EU FTA

- Use the FTA to improve **market access and reduce trade barriers** for Indian businesses.

- Integrate Indian firms into **European value chains**, particularly in manufacturing and technology.

4. Build Resilient Supply Chains

- Develop partnerships in **semiconductors, critical technologies, clean energy and defence**.
- Reduce excessive dependence on concentrated global supply chains through **diversification and trusted partnerships**.

5. Strengthen Maritime Cooperation

- Expand cooperation in **underwater robotics, autonomous systems, mine countermeasures and maritime-domain awareness**.
- Jointly protect critical infrastructure such as **ports, subsea cables and pipelines** to enhance maritime resilience.

6. Deepen Technology & Green Cooperation

- Expand collaboration in **semiconductors, fintech, renewable energy and other emerging technologies**.
- Combine **Belgian/European technological expertise with India's market, talent and manufacturing capabilities**.

7. Preserve Strategic Autonomy

- India should maintain **multi-alignment**, engaging with Europe, Russia, the US, Japan and other partners based on national interests.
- Differences on geopolitical issues should be managed through **issue-based cooperation rather than rigid bloc politics**.

Conclusion

India–Belgium relations are evolving from a **transactional partnership to a more strategic and future-oriented engagement**. The growing convergence reflects India's effort to **diversify partnerships, strengthen resilience and deepen its presence in Europe**.

Q. India–Belgium relations are evolving beyond traditional trade and investment towards a broader strategic and technology partnership. Discuss the significance of this transformation for India's strategic autonomy and engagement with Europe. 15 marks

1.2.3. BRICS POWER: INDIA'S PRESIDENCY AND THE EMERGING GLOBAL ORDER

Context

Ahead of the **18th BRICS Summit in New Delhi on September 12–13, 2026**, BRICS is being projected as a platform for **Global South cooperation**, centred on **POWER—Principle, Openness, Win-Win, Engine and Responsibility**, while India seeks to balance **strategic autonomy, multipolarity, economic cooperation and complex China ties**



Introduction

The **18th BRICS Summit** in New Delhi comes amid **multipolarity, geopolitical fragmentation and growing mistrust in global institutions**. As BRICS expands its Global South footprint, India's presidency offers an opportunity to turn its growing economic and political weight into **effective, inclusive and development-oriented multilateralism** through the framework of **POWER—Principle, Openness, Win-Win, Engine and Responsibility**.

BRICS: From Economic Grouping to Global South Platform

1. Evolution of BRICS

- BRIC was coined by Jim O'Neill in 2001.
- Formal cooperation began in 2006, with the first summit in 2009.
- South Africa joined in 2010, making it BRICS.
- Subsequent expansion has widened its Global South representation.

2. Expanding Global South Footprint

- New members include Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, UAE and Indonesia.
- The partner-country framework further broadens engagement with developing economies.
- This enhances BRICS' representativeness and bargaining power.

3. Institutionalising Cooperation

- NDB: Provides financing for infrastructure and sustainable development.
- CRA: Acts as a financial safety net against external liquidity pressures.
- Cooperation has also expanded into food security, science & technology and digital cooperation.

4. From Economic Bloc to Global South Platform

- BRICS has moved beyond economic cooperation to address global governance and development concerns.
- It seeks to strengthen the voice, bargaining power and strategic autonomy of the Global South.
- Thus, BRICS is increasingly becoming a platform for multipolar and inclusive global governance.

India's BRICS Strategy: The POWER Framework

1. P – Principle: Defending a Rules-Based Order

BRICS seeks to uphold international law and sovereign equality while promoting peaceful dispute resolution. For India, this aligns with Article 51 and the vision of a rules-based international order.

- UN Charter principles: Sovereign equality, non-interference, peaceful settlement of disputes and respect for international law.
- Indian approach: Given internal geopolitical divergences, India should pursue issue-based convergence rather than ideological uniformity.

2. O – Openness: Resisting Protectionism

Amid rising protectionism, tariffs and supply-chain disruptions, BRICS can promote an open and resilient global economy. India can combine global integration with protection of strategic interests.

- Economic cooperation: Strengthen trade, infrastructure, energy, critical minerals and resilient supply chains.
- India's approach: Promote strategic and calibrated openness while supporting a reformed, WTO-centred trading system.

3. **W – Win-Win: Development at the Centre**

BRICS' strongest common ground is development cooperation rather than military alignment. It can provide developing countries greater access to finance, technology and resilient economic systems.

- Development agenda: Focus on SDGs, food and energy security, climate finance, health and technology sharing.
- India's contribution: Leverage DPI, digital payments, healthcare and agriculture to strengthen South-South cooperation.

4. **E – Engine: Driving Global Growth**

BRICS' large population, markets, resources and manufacturing base give it the potential to become a major engine of global growth. Emerging technologies can provide the next phase of cooperation.

- Growth sectors: AI, digital economy, smart manufacturing, green technology and new industrialisation.
- India's opportunity: Position itself as a bridge between technology, development and the Global South.

5. **R – Responsibility: From Representation to Leadership**

BRICS must move beyond demanding greater representation and demonstrate its capacity to deliver global public goods. India's presidency provides an opportunity to advance responsible Global South leadership.

- Global responsibilities: Address peace, food-energy security, sustainable development and global crises.
- India's vision: Promote reformed multilateralism, rather than turning BRICS into another competing geopolitical bloc.

BRICS and India: Strategic Autonomy & the China Factor

1. **BRICS as an Instrument of Strategic Autonomy:** India uses BRICS to pursue multi-alignment, engaging simultaneously with BRICS, QUAD, SCO, G20 and Indo-Pacific platforms without permanently aligning with any power bloc.
2. **Diversifying Strategic Partnerships:** BRICS enables India to engage China and Russia, strengthen Global South leadership, diversify economic partnerships and access alternative development financing.
3. **BRICS ≠ Anti-Western Alignment:** India's BRICS participation is not a rejection of the West. Rather, it reflects India's effort to retain strategic flexibility and bargaining power across competing global power centres.
4. **China: Partner as well as Competitor:** India and China converge on Global South cooperation, multilateralism and global governance reform, but remain divided over borders, trade imbalance, the Indo-Pacific and China's regional influence.

5. **India's Approach: Engage, but Safeguard Interests:** China's support for India's BRICS presidency offers a diplomatic opening. India should pursue structured engagement with China through BRICS while firmly protecting its sovereignty, security and economic interests.

Major Challenges Before BRICS

1. **Geopolitical Divergence:** Members have competing strategic interests and foreign-policy priorities, making consensus and coordinated action difficult.
2. **Economic Asymmetry:** China's dominant economic weight can create concerns over unequal influence and power imbalance within the grouping.
3. **Expansion-Cohesion Dilemma:** Expansion enhances Global South representation, but greater diversity of interests can make consensus-building and decision-making slower.
4. **Institutional & Implementation Weakness:** Institutions such as the NDB and CRA remain limited compared with the IMF and World Bank. Frequent changes in presidency can also create a gap between summit declarations and actual implementation.
5. **De-dollarisation & Strategic Positioning:** Local-currency settlements and payment interoperability can strengthen financial autonomy, but a common BRICS currency is difficult due to divergent economies and monetary systems. BRICS should therefore prioritise practical financial cooperation over premature currency ambitions, while avoiding becoming an anti-Western bloc.

Way Forward: From Summitry to Delivery

1. **Strengthen Institutional Architecture:** Create a lean, technocratic permanent BRICS Secretariat to ensure continuity, coordinate priorities and monitor implementation beyond annual summits.
2. **Deepen Financial Cooperation:** Expand NDB financing, local-currency lending and cross-border payments. Interoperable systems such as BRICS Pay can gradually enhance financial autonomy.
3. **Build Resilient Supply Chains:** Cooperation in critical minerals, pharmaceuticals, food, energy, semiconductors and logistics can reduce vulnerability to geopolitical disruptions.
4. **Ensure Food & Energy Security:** Initiatives such as a BRICS Grain Exchange can strengthen food-market resilience, while greater energy cooperation can address supply shocks.
5. **Democratise Technology & Strengthen Global South Voice;** Develop partnerships in AI, DPI, biotechnology, healthcare and green technology, while working with the AU, ASEAN and other Global South platforms to build a coordinated voice.
6. **Institutionalise Crisis Diplomacy:** Create mechanisms for dialogue, mediation and conflict management, enabling BRICS to contribute to resolving crises rather than merely issuing summit declarations.

Conclusion

BRICS must convert **collective weight into collective action** through Principle, Openness, Win-Win, Engine and Responsibility. For India, it is a platform to combine **strategic autonomy, multilateralism and Global South leadership**. The goal is a **more inclusive, representative and effective global order—not an anti-Western bloc**.

Q. "BRICS is evolving from an economic grouping into an important platform for Global South leadership and a more multipolar world order." In this context, examine the opportunities and challenges before BRICS, and discuss how India can leverage its presidency to advance strategic autonomy and reformed multilateralism. 15 Marks

1.3. HEALTH

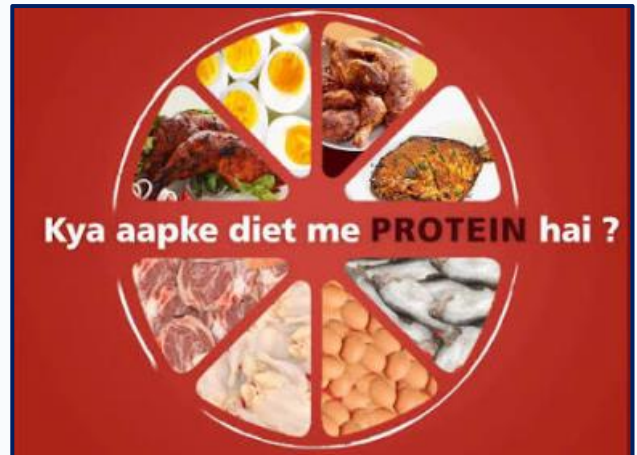
1.3.1. PROTEIN IN INDIA: FROM NUTRITIONAL NEED TO SOCIAL-MEDIA FAD

Context

Protein is increasingly promoted on social media through **shakes, high-protein foods and "proffee" (protein + coffee)**, shifting the focus from **overall diet quality to protein quantity**. The concern is not protein itself, but its **reduction to a marketing number and social-media trend**.

Introduction

In the age of fitness influencers, protein shakes and "high-protein" labels, protein has moved from the kitchen table to the centre of India's nutrition discourse. Yet, the growing obsession with counting grams risks overlooking a more fundamental question, whether people are consuming a diverse, affordable and wholesome diet.



Why is Protein Important?

- **Growth and development:** Supports growth and development of body tissues, especially during childhood.
It is crucial during adolescence when the body undergoes rapid physical development.
- **Muscle maintenance and repair:** Helps build, maintain and repair muscles after physical activity. Its importance increases with regular exercise and ageing.
- **Immunity:** Provides building blocks for antibodies and other immune-related proteins. Adequate protein intake therefore supports an effective immune response.
- **Healing and recovery:** Supports tissue formation and repair after injury, illness or surgery. It also aids faster recovery by providing essential amino acids.
- **Enzymes and hormones:** Proteins form enzymes and certain hormones that regulate body functions.
They are essential for metabolism, growth and other physiological processes.
- **Satiety:** Protein promotes greater and longer-lasting feelings of fullness. This can help regulate appetite and support healthy dietary patterns.

India's Protein Requirement

- **Recommended intake:** ICMR–NIN (Indian Council of Medical Research - National Institute of Nutrition) recommends around **0.83 g protein/kg body weight/day** for a healthy Indian adult. This provides the baseline protein requirement for maintaining normal body functions.
- **For a 60-kg adult:** A 60-kg healthy adult requires roughly **50 g of protein per day**. Actual needs may vary depending on age, activity level and health status.
- **Children and adolescents:** Require relatively higher protein intake to support rapid growth and development. Their needs vary with age, body weight and stage of development.
- **Pregnant and lactating women:** Have increased protein needs to support foetal growth and milk production. Adequate intake is important for maternal and child health.

- **Sportspersons:** May require higher protein intake due to increased muscle activity and tissue repair. Requirements depend on the type, intensity and duration of training.
- **Older adults:** May need greater attention to protein intake to reduce age-related muscle loss. Adequate protein supports muscle maintenance and physical function.
- **Illness and recovery:** Protein needs may increase during recovery from illness, injury or surgery. It supports tissue repair, healing and restoration of body functions.

Protein requirements are individualized not one-size-fits-all.

Protein: Beyond the Hype

- **Protein deficiency:** The concern in India is often **low dietary diversity and protein adequacy**, rather than complete absence of protein.
- **Protein anxiety:** Social media promotes the misconception that **more protein is always better** and supplements are essential for everyone.
- **Protein quality:** Plant proteins can meet amino-acid needs when consumed through a **varied and balanced diet**; specific combinations at every meal are not essential.
- **Social-media influence:** Influencer-driven content can **oversimplify nutrition and promote commercial products**, replacing evidence-based dietary advice with protein-centric trends.
- **Supplements with caution:** Whole foods should remain the foundation, while supplements may be useful for **specific needs such as athletes, illness or GLP-1 users**.

What Constitute Wholesome Nutrition

- **Wholesome meal:** A balanced plate should combine **carbohydrates, protein, fibre, healthy fats and micronutrients** rather than prioritising one nutrient.
- **Indian dietary approach:** Traditional meals like **rice-dal, roti-chana and idli-sambar** can be strengthened through greater dietary diversity and balance.
- **Adequacy:** Nutrition should provide **sufficient nutrients to meet the body's physiological requirements**.
- **Individualisation:** Dietary needs should be tailored to **age, activity, health status, medical history and lifestyle**.
- **Avoidance of excess:** Excess intake of one nutrient **cannot compensate for deficiencies in others** and may create nutritional imbalance.
- **ABCDE approach:** Effective nutrition assessment considers **anthropometric, biochemical, clinical, dietary and exercise-related factors** before designing a diet.

Way Forward: Towards Holistic and Evidence-Based Nutrition

1. **Shift from nutrient-centric to diet-centric nutrition:** Promote **balanced, diverse and wholesome diets** rather than focusing excessively on individual nutrients.
2. **Promote affordable and diverse protein sources:** Encourage **pulses, millets, eggs, dairy, soy, nuts, seeds and locally available foods** to improve protein adequacy.
3. **Strengthen nutrition literacy:** Equip citizens to understand **protein requirements, food labels, serving sizes and the difference between evidence and marketing claims**.
4. **Ensure targeted nutritional guidance:** Develop **age, activity and disease-specific** dietary advice, particularly for children, elderly, pregnant women and people with chronic conditions.

5. **Regulate nutrition misinformation and marketing:** Strengthen **evidence-based communication, responsible health advertising and food-labelling standards** to counter misleading claims.
6. **Integrate nutrition with healthy lifestyles:** Promote **adequate nutrition, regular physical activity and resistance exercise** as a combined strategy for long-term health.
7. **Revitalise India's traditional food systems:** Modernise and diversify **traditional Indian meals** to improve nutritional quality without replacing them with ultra-processed or highly marketed products.

Conclusion

The protein debate reflects a larger transformation in India's food culture—from **traditional dietary wisdom to quantified, market-driven nutrition**. Protein is indispensable, but **health cannot be measured in grams of protein alone**. The goal should not be a “high-protein diet”, but a high-quality, diverse and affordable diet in which protein is one essential component of a wholesome meal.

Q. “Protein is increasingly being promoted as a nutritional solution in India, yet the real challenge lies not merely in protein deficiency but in the quality and diversity of diets.” Discuss. 15 Marks

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2.1. ENVIRONMENT

2.1.1. FOREST RIGHTS VS. INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT

Context

The Committee on Public Undertakings has proposed reducing the mandatory Gram Sabha consent requirement from absolute unanimity (100%) to a 70–75% majority. This move aims to expedite clearances for major infrastructure and energy initiatives, such as the long-stalled Teesta-IV project.



Introduction

Enacted to address historical injustices, the Forest Rights Act (FRA) empowers forest-dwelling communities through Gram Sabha consent in forest-land diversion. Easing these norms for macroeconomic goals risks weakening tribal autonomy, bypassing affected communities, and undermining decentralized governance.

About Forest Rights Act (FRA)

- **Core Objective:** Enacted in 2006 to legally recognize and vest forest rights in Forest Dwelling Scheduled Tribes (FDSTs) and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (OTFDs).
- **Rights Recognized:** It grants Individual Forest Rights (IFR) for habitation and self-cultivation, alongside Community Forest Rights (CFR) for grazing, fishing, and minor forest produce collection.
- **Historical Correction:** It effectively dismantles the colonial-era legacy of centralized state control over natural resources by acknowledging customary tribal ownership.

Key Regulatory Authorities

- **Ministry of Tribal Affairs (MoTA):** The official nodal agency for implementing the FRA. Its recent reluctance to assert jurisdiction over consent rules has created a dangerous regulatory vacuum.
- **Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC):** The body that oversees the procedural rules for the diversion of forested land for non-forest use, frequently prioritizing rapid infrastructure expansion.
- **Gram Sabha:** The decentralized, constitutionally protected democratic institution representing the inhabitants at the village level.

What is Gram Sabha Consent?

- It is a statutory veto power granted to the village assembly (Gram Sabha) under the FRA, 2006.
- It mandates absolute, unanimous approval before any forest land can be legally diverted for non-forest purposes, transferring decision-making from central bureaucracies directly to local communities.

The Proposed 70-75% Rule and its Impact

- **Fractional Consent Bypass:** Moving from absolute consensus to a majoritarian threshold (70–75%) allows developers to legally override the veto of deeply affected core communities.

- **The "Reservoir" Loophole:** Developers could secure No-Objection Certificates (NOCs) from minimally affected peripheral villages to manufacture a majority, completely bypassing the consent of a village facing total destruction (e.g., reservoir submergence).
- **Demographic Engineering:** Political attempts to arbitrarily alter the classification of tribal communities make it easier for the State to split village assemblies and artificially engineer the required fractional consent.
- **Regulatory Vulnerability:** Deferring to MoEFCC rules rather than MoTA's nodal authority leaves forest-dependent communities exposed to unilateral executive shifts.

Significance of Absolute Consent

1. Constitutional Safeguard

- Operationalizes participatory democracy at the grassroots level.
- Ensures assemblies function as decentralized constitutional protectors rather than procedural rubber stamps.

2. Shields Customary Rights

- Acts as the strongest legal barrier against arbitrary forced displacement.
- Protects the land-based livelihoods, ancestral heritage, and cultural identity of indigenous groups.

3. Prevents Engineered Approvals

- Stops project developers from exploiting demographic divisions.
- Prevents pitting less-affected villages against severely impacted ones to manufacture fraudulent majorities.

4. Acknowledges Ecological Stewardship

- Formally recognizes the vital environmental services provided by forest dwellers.
- Empowers communities that are crucial for meeting India's global climate commitments.

5. Upholds Statutory Intent

- Fulfills the core legislative mandate of democratizing forest governance.
- Ensures that decision-making power remains directly with the community rather than reverting to state bureaucracies.

Associated Challenges

1. Threat of Demographic Manipulation

- Political attempts to arbitrarily alter the classification of tribal communities can distort local populations.
- This makes it easier for the State to intentionally fracture village assemblies and engineer the required fractional consent.

2. Executive Overreach

- Altering substantive consent requirements through opaque bureaucratic guidelines undermines the legislative process.
- It effectively bypasses transparent parliamentary scrutiny.

3. Growth vs. Rights Asymmetry

- There is an aggressive prioritization of national energy and macroeconomic targets.
- Statutory tribal rights are increasingly viewed as administrative hurdles rather than non-negotiable protections.

4. Erosion of Core Village Autonomy

- The proposed fractional rule legally sanctions the destruction of the most highly impacted settlements.
- It completely nullifies the self-determination of a core village if a broader regional majority acquiesces.

5. Inter-Ministerial Apathy

- The reluctance of the nodal agency (MoTA) to actively defend its mandate leaves forest-dependent communities exposed.
- It allows for unilateral, infrastructure-focused environmental clearances by the MoEFCC.

Way Forward

1. Codify Unanimous Consent

- Legally mandate that No-Objection Certificates (NOCs) must be secured from all directly affected villages.
- Eliminate fractional majoritarian loopholes to prevent arbitrary and destructive project approvals.

2. Proactive MoTA Intervention

- The Ministry of Tribal Affairs must actively assert its jurisdiction as the statutory nodal agency.
- It must proactively prevent the dilution of the Act by other ministries or state governments.

3. Ensure Legislative Scrutiny

- Any modification to forest diversion rules must be debated openly in Parliament.
- Changes should never be enacted via executive fiat or inter-ministerial technicalities.

4. Harmonize Allied Legislations

- Strengthen and synchronize the protections conferred by the LARR Act, 2013 (Land Acquisition) and the PESA Act, 1996.
- This will ensure a watertight, comprehensive legal framework for tribal land rights.

5. Protect Demographics

- Institutionalize strict, independent safeguards against the political reclassification of tribal communities.
- Prevent administrative maneuvering designed solely to split village assemblies.

6. Empower Tribal Climate Action

- Elevate tribal communities from passive project victims to central stakeholders.
- Integrate indigenous knowledge into executing India's sustainable development and ecological goals.

Conclusion

The dilution of community consent threatens to unravel the democratic decentralization envisaged by the Constitution. Upholding absolute community approval is not an impediment to growth, but a strict prerequisite for inclusive governance and long-term environmental security.

Q. *The proposed dilution of the Gram Sabha's absolute consent under the Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006, reflects a growing tension between infrastructure expansion and tribal autonomy. Discuss its significance and associated challenges. 15 Marks*

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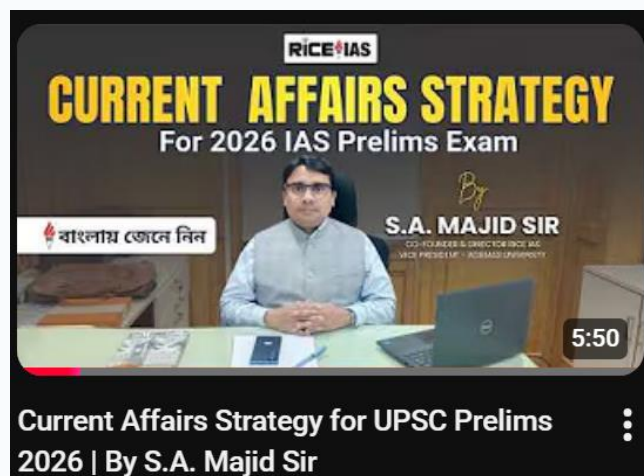
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