

The Hindu Important News Articles & Editorial For UPSC CSE

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The President of India has made a rare Presidential Reference to the Supreme Court under Article 143, seeking clarity on whether the judiciary can impose time limits and prescribe procedures for Governors and the President in giving assent to State Bills under Articles 200 and 201 of the Constitution. This follows a recent judgment related to Tamil Nadu where the Governor delayed assent to 10 State Bills, triggering a legal and political tussle.

Constitutional Background:

- Article 200: Empowers the Governor to assent, withhold assent, or reserve a Bill for the President's consideration.
- Article 201: Pertains to the President's options when a Bill is reserved by the Governor.
- Article 143: Allows the President to seek the Supreme Court's opinion on questions of law or fact of public importance.
- Article 142: Grants the Supreme Court the power to pass any order necessary to do complete justice.
- Article 361: Provides immunity to the President and Governors from court proceedings during their term in office.
- Article 145(3): Requires that substantial questions of law be decided by a Constitution Bench of at least five judges.

Key Issues Raised in the Presidential Reference:

- Can judiciary impose time limits on the President/Governors under Articles 200/201 when the Constitution itself does not specify any?
- Can Article 142 be used to override constitutional provisions or impose such timelines?

T.N. CM slams Presidential Reference to top court on timeline to act on State Bills

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI/CHENNAI

Strongly condemning a Presidential Reference to the Supreme Court under Article 143 of the Constitution on the timeline imposed for Governors and the President to act on Bills, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin on Thursday said it was a desperate attempt to weaken democratically elected State governments by placing them under the control of Governors serving as agents of the Centre.

President Droupadi Murmu, in a rare move, had sought the opinion of the Supreme Court through a Presidential Reference on Tuesday, on whether the court can "impose" timelines and prescribe the manner of conduct of Governors and the President while dealing with State Bills sent to them for assent or reserved for consideration. Broadly, the Reference asked if judicial orders can dictate by what time and how the President and Governors should function under Articles 200 and 201 of the Constitution.

Mr. Stalin dubbed the move as "an attempt to subvert the Constitutional position" settled by the top court in the Tamil Nadu case against the Governor and other precedents.

The President's move to seek clarity arose from an April 8 judgment of a Bench of Justices J.B. Pardiwala and R. Mahadevan in a petition filed by the Tamil Nadu government challenging the Governor's delay in clearing 10 re-passed Bills and his subsequent action to reserve them for

Question of clarity

President Droupadi Murmu has sought clarity from the Supreme Court on the 'scope and contours' of Article 142

Presidential Reference: Article 143 of the Constitution empowers the President to seek advice from the Supreme Court on questions of law or fact, present or future, of public importance

The President has raised 14 questions, which include:
■ Can SC impose timelines and dictate the manner of exercise of powers by Governors and the President under Article 200, 201, respectively?

■ Can deemed consent to Bills be given through a judicial order?
■ What are constitutional options before a Governor when a Bill is sent for his assent. Is he bound by the aid and advice of the Council of Ministers?



consideration by the President.

The Reference asked whether, in the absence of any constitutionally prescribed time limit for Governors and President, time limits could be imposed and manner of exercise of powers be prescribed through judicial orders. "Can the Constitutional powers of the President/Governors be substituted by a judicial order exercising Article 142? Is Article 142 limited to matters of procedural law or does it extend to issuing directions contrary to or inconsistent with existing substantive or procedural provisions of the Constitution?" it asked.

Indirectly questioning the validity of the "deemed" assent, the Reference has queried if a law made by a State Legislature could even "be considered a law in force without the assent of the Governor". "Are decisions of the Governor and the President under Articles 200 and 201, respectively, justiciable at a stage prior to even the Bill in question becoming a law?" it asked.

It said the "concept of deemed assent" of the President and the Governor, introduced in the judgment, was alien to the constitutional scheme.

The Reference has also raised questions about a two-judge Bench of the court pronouncing judgments on "substantial questions of law... without referring it to a minimum five-judge Bench as prescribed under Article 145 (3) of the Constitution.

The Reference further asked the court to clarify the constitutional options before a Governor when a Bill is presented to him under Article 200. It raised doubts as to whether the "constitutional discretion" of Governors and the President under Articles 200 and 201, respectively, was even justiciable. "Is Article 361 of the Constitution [immunity given to President and Governors from legal action while in office] an absolute bar to judicial review in relation to the actions of a Governor under Article 200?" the Presidential Reference sought.

Daily News Analysis

- Is the concept of "deemed assent" (i.e., treating assent as granted after a time lapse) constitutionally valid?
- Are the actions of Governors/President justiciable before a Bill becomes law?
- Is Article 361 an absolute bar to judicial review of decisions taken under Article 200?
- Should a larger Bench decide such critical constitutional questions rather than a two-judge Bench?

Political and Legal Significance:

- Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin has criticised the Presidential Reference, calling it a politically motivated move to curtail State autonomy and empower Governors acting as agents of the Centre.
- The case originates from delays by the Tamil Nadu Governor, which led the State to file a petition and the Supreme Court to question indefinite inaction.
- The April 8 judgment was seen as attempting to ensure constitutional accountability of constitutional authorities, but is now being reviewed for overreach.

Critical Analysis:

- The Presidential Reference indicates a serious institutional conflict between the judiciary and executive over interpretation of constitutional boundaries.
- It raises questions about judicial creativity in introducing doctrines like deemed assent, which are not explicitly mentioned in the Constitution.
- At the same time, it exposes the vacuum in constitutional procedures—there is no time limit for assent, potentially allowing indefinite delays.
- The issue also reveals how Governors can be used to stifle legislative intent in States governed by opposition parties.

Conclusion:

- This development is a test of constitutional balance between judicial oversight, executive discretion, and federal principles. The Supreme Court's opinion on this Reference could shape future Centre-State relations, the role of Governors, and the extent of judicial intervention in legislative processes.

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Ques : Consider the following Articles of the Indian Constitution:

1. Article 142
2. Article 143
3. Article 200
4. Article 361

Which of the above relate to the powers and functions of the President and the Governor regarding State legislation?

- a) 1 and 2 only
- b) 2, 3 and 4 only
- c) 1, 2 and 3 only
- d) 1, 3 and 4 only

Ans : b)

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques : Examine the scope and limitations of judicial review over the discretionary powers of the Governor under Articles 200 and 201 of the Constitution. In your view, should there be time-bound mandates for Governors to act on Bills? Justify. **(250 words)**

India's overall trade deficit (goods + services) widened to \$8.65 billion in April 2025, up from \$5.77 billion in April 2024. While merchandise exports grew by 9%, imports increased at a much higher rate of 19.1%, widening the merchandise trade deficit to \$26.4 billion. The services sector, however, continued to perform strongly, with a trade surplus of \$17.77 billion due to robust services exports.

Trade deficit grows to \$8.65 billion in April as merchandise imports rise

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

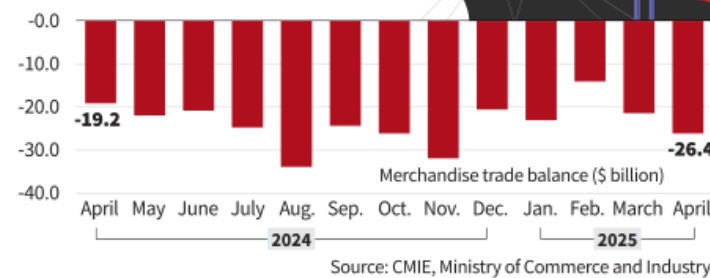
India's total trade deficit, counting both merchandise and services, widened to \$8.65 billion in April, compared with \$5.77 billion in April last year, according to the data from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry released on Thursday.

While briefing the media, Commerce Secretary Sunil Barthwal also mentioned that India's total exports, including merchandise and services, stood at \$824.9 billion in 2024-25, the highest-ever, up 6% from 2023-24.

Merchandise exports

Widening gap

The government said merchandise exports stood at **\$38.49 billion** in April, while imports were at **\$64.91 billion**



grew 9% to \$38.49 billion in April 2025, while the imports of goods grew at a significantly faster 19.1% to \$64.91 billion, as compared to the same month of last year. The merchandise trade deficit, there-

fore, widened to \$26.4 billion in April this year, as compared to \$19.19 billion last year. Exports of tobacco (66.43%), coffee (47.85%), electronic goods (39.51%), mica, coal other ores and minerals

(34.43%), fruits and vegetables (30.72%), and marine products (17.81%) marked a growth in April 2025.

The services sector, however, witnessed the opposite trend, with exports widening their lead over imports. Services exports for April, an estimation because the final data from the Reserve Bank of India arrives with a month's lag, grew 17% in April 2025 to \$35.31 billion. Services imports, on the other hand, grew just 4.6% to \$17.54 billion in April, taking the services trade surplus to \$17.77 billion.

RELIEF IN SERVICE
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Key Terms Explained:

- Trade Deficit: Occurs when a country's imports exceed its exports.
- Merchandise Trade: Physical goods such as electronics, textiles, food, etc.

- Services Trade: Includes IT, finance, consultancy, education, tourism, etc.
- Trade Surplus: When exports exceed imports in a particular sector, e.g., services.

Data Highlights:

- Total Trade Deficit (April 2025): \$8.65 billion (widened from \$5.77 billion in April 2024)
- Merchandise Exports: \$38.49 billion (↑ 9%)
- Merchandise Imports: \$64.91 billion (↑ 19.1%)
- Merchandise Trade Deficit: \$26.4 billion
- Services Exports (est.): \$35.31 billion (↑ 17%)
- Services Imports (est.): \$17.54 billion (↑ 4.6%)
- Services Trade Surplus: \$17.77 billion
- Total Exports in FY 2024–25 (Goods + Services): \$824.9 billion (Record high, ↑ 6% YoY)

Prelims Relevance:

- Basic understanding of trade deficit, current account, balance of payments.
- Awareness of export-import trends, especially merchandise vs. services.
- Key sectors with growth in exports: tobacco, coffee, electronic goods, marine products, fruits & vegetables.

Mains Relevance:

- Implications of a Widening Trade Deficit:
- Negative for Current Account Balance: A rising trade deficit puts pressure on the current account, increasing the risk of currency depreciation and foreign exchange depletion.
- Import Dependency: The sharp rise in imports indicates high dependency on foreign goods, especially energy, electronics, and capital goods.
- Inflation Risks: Increased imports could reflect rising domestic demand, but may also result in higher imported inflation, especially if the rupee weakens.
- Contrast in Services Sector: The strong performance of services exports helps in partially offsetting the merchandise trade deficit and supports the current account balance.

Structural Economic Takeaways:

- Diversified Export Base: Growth in agricultural (coffee, fruits), mineral, and electronic goods exports signals sectoral diversification.

Daily News Analysis

- India's Digital & IT Strength: Consistent services surplus showcases India's continued strength in IT, fintech, consulting, and other services.
- Policy Implications: A need to boost domestic manufacturing (Make in India) to reduce import dependence, especially in electronics and capital goods.

Conclusion:

- While India has achieved a record in total exports, the disproportionate rise in merchandise imports has widened the trade deficit. The resilience of the services sector continues to be a buffer, but long-term policy efforts are needed to reduce vulnerabilities by strengthening domestic production and export competitiveness, especially in high-import sectors.

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Ques : Consider the following statements about India's trade performance in April 2025:

1. India's merchandise exports grew faster than merchandise imports.
2. The services sector recorded a trade surplus during the same period.
3. The overall trade deficit of India reduced as compared to April 2024.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 and 2 only
- b) 2 only
- c) 1 and 3 only
- d) 1, 2 and 3

Ans: b)

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques: Despite record export performance, India's widening trade deficit in April 2025 highlights underlying structural challenges. Discuss the reasons for the rise in trade deficit and its implications for India's macroeconomic stability. **(250 words)**

The Supreme Court of India has issued a strong warning to the Telangana government over the illegal deforestation of the Kancha Gachibowli forest in Hyderabad, where trees were felled for an IT infrastructure project. The court has given the State two options: either restore the forest or face imprisonment of senior officials, including the Chief Secretary.

Restore Kancha Gachibowli forest or risk jail for officials: SC to Telangana

Supreme Court raps State authorities over illegal deforestation; IT infrastructure and ecology could go hand in hand, argues State's counsel; Chief Justice Gavai asks why felling of trees was initiated during a long weekend when courts were closed

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Thursday gave the State of Telangana a choice between restoring the ruined acres of Kancha Gachibowli forest where trees were felled for an IT infrastructure project during an extended weekend or face the prospect of its Chief Secretary and "half a dozen officials" being sent to a "temporary prison".

"It is for the State to make a choice between restoring the forest or having the Chief Secretary and

officials in prison," Chief Justice B.R. Gavai stated firmly on Thursday.

Senior advocate A.M. Singhvi, appearing for Telangana, said the State deserved its day in court to persuade that IT and ecology could go together.

"We have always been advocates of sustainable development. But the question here is the felling of thousands of trees" the Chief Justice reacted.

Forest Survey report

Mr. Singhvi maintained that "thousands" of trees were not cut. "We have seen the photographs,"



Nature's loss: An excavator seen on the 400-acre land in Kancha Gachibowli, in Hyderabad last month. SIDDHANT THAKUR

Chief Justice Gavai responded.

Amicus curiae, senior advocate K. Parameshwar, drew the attention of the court to a finding in a For-

est Survey of India report that out of the 104 acres cut in two nights, over 60% had been moderately and heavily dense forest.

The State had previous-

ly denied the land was a forest. The claim had sprung up only after developmental activities commenced following the allotment of the land to the Telangana Industrial Infrastructure Corporation. Mr. Singhvi said the intention of the State was bona fide.

"If your intention was bona fide, why did you start the felling of the trees at the beginning of a long weekend when courts were closed?" Chief Justice Gavai responded.

The court scheduled the case for further hearing on July 23.

Key Developments:

- Tree felling took place on a long weekend when courts were shut, raising questions of intent and timing.
- The State initially denied the land was forest, but a Forest Survey of India (FSI) report confirmed that over 60% of the land cleared was moderately to heavily forested.
- The land was allotted to the Telangana Industrial Infrastructure Corporation for development.
- The State's counsel argued for sustainable development, stating IT and ecology can coexist.

- However, the Supreme Court was unconvinced, especially due to the secretive timing and photographic evidence of mass tree-cutting.

Prelims Analysis:

- Environment Governance: Role of the Forest Survey of India, forest classification.
- Constitutional Provisions: Judicial intervention in environmental protection under Article 21 (Right to Life).
- Judicial Accountability Tools: Threat of contempt and imprisonment to ensure compliance.

Mains Analysis:

- **Environmental Governance & Accountability:**
 - Reflects judiciary's proactive role in protecting ecological assets from unregulated development.
 - Raises concerns on state transparency and misuse of long weekends to evade legal scrutiny.
 - Highlights conflict between economic development and environmental sustainability.
 - Brings focus on urban forest loss, a growing issue amid infrastructure expansion in cities.
- **Sustainable Development Debate:**
 - Shows lack of proper environmental clearance, public consultation, or environmental impact assessment (EIA).
 - Emphasizes that "green infrastructure" is not just a policy slogan, but a legal responsibility.

Conclusion:

- The case showcases how the judiciary is enforcing environmental accountability even on powerful state actors. It is a reminder that development cannot bypass ecological norms, and sustainable development must be more than rhetoric.

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques: *Judicial activism has become a vital tool in environmental governance in India. Discuss this statement in the context of recent Supreme Court intervention in the Kancha Gachibowli forest case. (250 words)*

A roundtable organized by Janpahal NGO and the Gig Workers Association in Delhi addressed the challenges faced by gig and platform workers in India. The meeting called for minimum wages, social security, and legal protections for these workers, along with the establishment of tripartite welfare boards at both State and Central levels.

Gig workers' meeting demands minimum wages, social security

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

A roundtable held here on Thursday on platform work in the country recommended minimum wages, social security and legal protections for gig and platform workers. The meeting demanded a tripartite welfare Board for gig workers in all States and at the Central level comprising representatives from employees, employers and governments.

The meeting, titled "Current developments, challenges and way forward", organised by a non-governmental organisation, Janpahal, and the Gig Workers Association decided to foster dialogue between stakeholders to identify the way forward in ensuring gig workers' rights within the context of existing policy develop-



Voicing concerns: At the roundtable held in Delhi on Thursday, gig workers highlighted the 'harsh realities' they face in the sector. PTI

ments. Janpahal secretary Dharmendra Kumar said the outcome of the meeting would be sent to the policymakers so that a more equitable gig economy could be created in the country.

Representatives from the Union and State governments and international organisations addressed the meeting.

The testimonies shared by workers in the meeting pointed towards "harsh realities of work" in the sector. "The dictatorial and insensitive attitude of the companies is a regular feature in their life. There are no avenues of redress. Their IDs are blocked, and they are thrown out of work for the smallest mistakes or no mistakes. So-

ciety also looks at them with disrespect. Most of these workers are not yet organised, and there are only a few initiatives to organise them. Companies are thwarting any attempts by the workers to organise and unionise themselves. Any initiative for organising, protesting and raising demands is met with termination of work," a statement issued after the meeting said.

The meeting demanded a minimum wage/income for the workers based on their logged-in hours. "The continuous reduction in the rate cards for workers should be stopped," it demanded adding that surcharge collected from consumers should be properly shared with the workers.

It also urged the Centre to declare a social security policy for online platform workers.

Background on Gig and Platform Economy:

- Gig workers are independent contractors or freelancers hired on a temporary or task-based basis.
- Platform workers perform work through digital platforms (e.g., food delivery, ride-hailing apps).
- The gig economy is expanding rapidly in India, but labour protections have not kept pace.

Key Issues Highlighted:

- No minimum income guarantee: Workers are paid based on unpredictable algorithms and incentives.
- Lack of grievance redressal: Workers face arbitrary blocking of IDs and job termination without explanation.
- Denial of unionization: Attempts to organize are discouraged or penalized by companies.
- Social stigma and lack of recognition: Society often treats them as informal or 'non-serious' workers.
- Exploitation through rate cuts: Frequent reduction in per-task payment rates by platforms.
- No share in surcharges collected from consumers by companies.

Demands Raised:

- Minimum Wage/Income based on logged-in hours, not just task completion.
- Social Security Policy for gig workers at the national level.
- Tripartite Welfare Board with representation from workers, employers, and the government.
- Legal protection against unfair dismissals and discrimination.
- Transparency in rate cards and fair sharing of surcharges.

Mains Analysis :**1. Governance and Labour Rights:**

- Highlights the gap between digital innovation and labour policy.
- Shows the urgency for legal recognition of gig workers under labour laws (e.g., Code on Social Security, 2020).
- Reflects the State's responsibility under Directive Principles (Article 43) to secure just and humane conditions of work.

2. Social Justice and Equity:

- Points to rising informalisation in the digital economy with lack of worker protections.
- Affects livelihood security of millions, especially youth and migrants.
- Raises the need for inclusive policies in new-age workspaces.

3. Economic and Social Policy:

- Challenges in balancing platform innovation with worker welfare.
- Risk of deepening inequality in the digital economy.
- Gig workers are essential for urban services, yet remain economically and legally vulnerable.

Conclusion:

- The meeting is a step forward in voicing the concerns of a rapidly growing but highly under-protected labour segment. For India's gig economy to be truly inclusive, policymakers must institutionalize protections—minimum wage guarantees, social security, and legal recognition—to ensure fair treatment and dignity of work in the digital age..

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques : *The rapid growth of the gig and platform economy in India has not been matched by adequate labour protections. Critically examine the challenges faced by gig workers and suggest policy measures to ensure their welfare. (250 words)*

India is witnessing a disturbing rise in childhood hypertension, with surveys such as NFHS-5 and CNNS showing that a significant percentage of adolescents (up to 12%) already have elevated blood pressure levels. This trend highlights the need to intervene early—specifically through school-based nutrition programs, most notably the PM POSHAN (Mid-Day Meal) scheme.

Raising healthy hearts: reimagining school nutrition to tackle childhood hypertension

Anuja Agarwala

It is easy to think of high blood pressure as something that happens later in life. But in India, that assumption is starting to look dangerously outdated. More and more children are being diagnosed with elevated blood pressure, and many of them do not even know it. It is not until adolescence or adulthood that the signs become too loud to ignore.

The numbers tell a worrying story. The Comprehensive National Nutrition Survey (CNNS) from 2016-18 found that 7.3% of Indian adolescents had hypertensive blood pressure levels. That number climbs to 9.1% in urban areas. Then there is the National Family Health Survey-5 (NFHS-5), which shows that 12% of teens aged 15-19 already have elevated blood pressure. These are not isolated cases. This is a trend. And it points to one very clear takeaway: if we want to tackle hypertension, we have to start early. Really early.

There are a few things feeding into this trend – rising childhood obesity, less physical activity, and a lifestyle that has shifted indoors and online. But if we had to name the biggest culprit, it would



Structured food education and balanced menus can transform lunch into a launchpad for lifelong health. FILE PHOTO

probably be the food our children are eating.

Walk into any grocery store or school canteen, and the reality hits you. Processed snacks that promise flavour and convenience in seconds. And they are taking a toll. On average, Indian adolescents are consuming more than 8 grams of salt a day. That is almost double the World Health Organization's recommended limit for adults. Most of it comes from packaged snacks, fast foods, and street-side treats that are heavy on salt and low on nutrition.

Over time, children develop a

preference for these hyper-palatable foods, while their tolerance for healthier options drops. They create habits, and those habits are forming early.

India's mid-day meal scheme (PM POSHAN) can become a pathway to break these habits early. As of 2025, the scheme now feeds approximately 120 million children across over 1.27 million schools, making it the largest school meal programme globally.

As the programme scales, there's an opportunity to evolve beyond basic nutrition. Can these meals also be a gateway to healthier food habits and greater food literacy? For many children, these meals are not just their main source of nourishment but also their first exposure to structured eating.

What if the next phase of PM POSHAN combined nutritional targets with efforts to cultivate a more joyful, educational relationship with food? Could we introduce regionally-inspired menus, fresh produce, or even involve students in food preparation and learning?

For inspiration, we can look to Japan, where the concept of *Shokuiku*, food education, is woven into school life. Children

help plan meals, learn where their food comes from, and serve lunch to their classmates. They study nutrition and food origins. It is a simple yet powerful approach, which helps children understand how to make better choices. And the results speak for themselves: lower rates of childhood obesity and a healthier relationship with eating. If Japan seems too far removed from India's realities, consider Vietnam. Their Ministry of Education teamed up with Ajinomoto to improve school lunches by adapting the *Shokuiku* model in 2012.

We need to bring that same ambition into our schools. We can do this by elevating PM POSHAN scheme into a food-literacy engine, and reshaping habits, palates, and minds.

(Dr. Anuja Agarwala is a senior genetic metabolic nutrition consultant and national vice-president, Indian Dietetic Association anujaiims@gmail.com)

For feedback and suggestions

for 'Science', please write to science@thehindu.co.in with the subject 'Daily page'

Key Issues:

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- **Rising Childhood Hypertension:**

- 7.3% of adolescents have high BP (CNNS 2016–18); rises to 9.1% in urban areas.
- NFHS-5 shows 12% of teens aged 15–19 already affected.
- Often remains undiagnosed until adulthood, creating long-term health risks.

- **Causes:**

- Poor diet (high-sodium processed food, street snacks).
- Low physical activity and a sedentary lifestyle (screen time, indoor play).
- Early formation of unhealthy eating habits and taste preferences.

The Role of School Nutrition:

- **PM POSHAN (Mid-Day Meal Scheme):**

- Feeds over 120 million children across 1.27 million schools.
- Can become a platform for early intervention in dietary habits.
- Currently addresses hunger and basic nutrition but lacks focus on food literacy or behavior change.

- **Opportunity for Reform:**

- Introduce balanced, regionally relevant menus with fresh produce.
- Encourage student involvement in meal planning and preparation.
- Embed structured food education to build lasting habits and awareness.

Global Models for Inspiration:

- **Japan's ShoKuiku Program:**

- Integrates food education into the school day.
- Children plan meals, learn origins of food, and serve classmates.
- Result: Lower childhood obesity rates, better understanding of nutrition.

- **Vietnam's Adaptation:**

- Ministry of Education collaborated with Ajinomoto (2012) to apply ShoKuiku principles to school meals.
- Demonstrates that such models are adaptable even in developing countries.

Mains Analysis:

Daily News Analysis

- Evaluate the effectiveness and potential of PM POSHAN as not just a welfare program but a public health intervention.
- Role of state and central governments in addressing non-communicable diseases (NCDs) early through education and welfare.
- Rising childhood hypertension is a public health crisis in the making.
- Integration of nutrition, education, and health for sustainable outcomes.
- Importance of preventive health strategies over curative approaches.

Conclusion:

- To address the silent epidemic of childhood hypertension, India must go beyond calorie counts in school meals and focus on building food awareness, literacy, and healthy habits from a young age. PM POSHAN holds the potential to become not just a nutrition scheme, but a foundation for lifelong health and well-being—if reimagined with bold and educational intent.

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques: The PM POSHAN scheme has the potential to become more than just a food security initiative - it can be a foundation for preventive public health. Discuss in the context of rising childhood hypertension in India. **(250 words)**

The paradox of the approach to the Manipur issue

As the stalemated conflict in Manipur completes two years, the veritable wait for the Godot of political settlement continues to remain elusive. Despite unleashing a trail of devastation, the loss of over 250 lives and an unfolding human tragedy which compelled thousands of internally displaced persons to live in sub-human makeshift relief centres for over two years, Manipur's violence has not secured a high-order-of-national-priority. This is gallingly evident as Prime Minister Narendra Modi maintains his stoic refusal to visit the State and offer a definitive road map to break the impasse. This compares starkly with the topmost-priority accorded by him to the Pahalgam terror strike on April 22, which led to the curtailment of his official visit to Saudi Arabia and the announcement of policy measures.

The very short military stand-off between India and Pakistan and the swift response made eminent sense given the overwhelming and dominant mood of the nation that something decisive had to be done not only to decimate terrorist infrastructure across the Line of Control, but also penalise Pakistan for its alleged sponsorship of cross-border terrorism. As the stand-off and the terms of the understanding/ceasefire likely to be agreed upon by the two nuclear powers continue to take centre-stage, it is highly unlikely that Manipur's continuing human tragedy and political impasse will get the serious attention it deserves.

The approach to the northeast

What explains this paradox? And in what way does this follow a broader pattern of New Delhi's engagement with Manipur, and, by extension, Northeast India?

A clue lies in making a long-term assessment of New Delhi's approach to the Northeast, and for that matter Manipur, which is underscored by its obsession with national security and regime consolidation. Unlike Kashmir, which is the focus in a series of triangular conflicts with Pakistan and China, Manipur's case does not present an imminent threat to India's national security despite concerted efforts over the past two years to make this as such. Although both of India's adversaries were involved in the training of armed independentist groups such as the Naga National Council and its progeny, the NSCN-IM, the Mizo National Front, the United Liberation Front of Assam, and the United National Liberation Front, in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, their support to these groups remains remote and diminished.

However, because the policy mandarins in Delhi best understand the language of national security, concerted attempts had been made by certain quarters of valley-based civil society groups and self-professed national security experts to squarely blame Manipur's violence on 'lungi-clad' Kuki armed militants across the India-Myanmar border. A case in point is the failed attempt to amplify this threat by the then



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The stance on what is also a national security issue is problematic

Chief Minister's office in mid-September 2024 by invoking credible 'intelligent inputs' which forewarned imminent crossover and attack by over '900 Kuki militants' based in Myanmar with the capabilities to launch rocket launchers against Meitei villages. On hindsight, this security bluster was a half-clever ploy to whip up a majoritarian sense of insecurity and used that as a pretext to prepare the grounds for a series of offensive strikes against Kuki-Zomi-Hmar villages beyond the 'buffer zone' on the pretext of combing operations.

Interestingly, the protagonists of national security remain conspicuously muted on the more serious threat posed by the large-scale mobilisation of valley-based insurgent groups, or VBIGs and their foot soldiers in the wake of this violence since May 3, 2023. One immediate consequence of this is the outsourcing of law and order to these groups on the pretext that the State fails to protect villages which remained exposed to transgressions and offensive attacks across the buffer zone. This zone, ideated and enforced by the Indian paramilitary forces after Home Minister Amit Shah visited the State towards the end of May 2023, lies in the foothills and marks the point of territorial and demographic separation between the Meiteis and Kuki-Zomi-Hmars.

Such a problematic stance on a national security issue has also effectively neutralised the security gains obtained by India since it successfully flushed out VBIGs from their safe havens in the valley areas in Operation All-Clear (2004). Instead of prioritising substantive security issues such as an upscaling of intelligence-gathering capabilities, counterinsurgency skills, modernisation and professionalisation of the Indian Army and police, the Indian security policy continues to be stuck in a time-war of political optics.

The case of fencing as an obsolete outlook

The unusual zeal with which New Delhi pushes the agenda of revoking the free movement regime and spending over ₹31,000 crore for fencing the 1,643 kilometre India-Myanmar border, including the 398 kilometre-long Manipur-Myanmar border, is clearly an instance of an obsolete security overdrive. While this may simultaneously cater to the perceived sense of insecurity whipped up by majoritarian groups based in the valley and eminently suit the pork-barrel brand of politics with promissory collateral benefits to contractors and brokers, the lines of divide are clearly apparent as the Naga, and Mizo, among others, have registered their staunch opposition. Unless such a policy framework is tailored to win the hearts and the minds of transborder people – which seems to be the case here – it is neither likely to augment India's national security nor promote India's neighbourhood first policy via the Act East policy across the India-Myanmar border and beyond.

Unfortunately, a longitudinal assessment of

India's national security policy framework across political regimes demonstrates that it is driven more by political optics in ways which help consolidate political regimes, rather than being hard-wired in upskilling security infrastructure. This explains why beyond the public spectacle of holding piecemeal arms surrender events, no sincere effort is made to recover sophisticated arms (numbering over 6,000) and ammunition (numbering over 5,00,000) given away to armed groups since the outbreak of violence. Notwithstanding this, barely around 4,000 of the 6,020 arms snatched away from the State armouries have so far been deposited in response to the State government's call. Interestingly, 894 of these were deposited in response to two deadlines – announced by Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla, on February 28, which was extended to March 6, 2025.

The self-congratulatory and nonchalant way in which voluntary arms surrender was pressed for political optics became evident on February 27, a day before the first deadline, when a cavalcade of the Arambai Tenggol, an armed militia accused of perpetrating atrocities against several Kuki-Zomi-Hmar villages, marched across the streets and surrendered 246 weapons at a police station in Imphal. Even though many of these so-called surrendered arms are country-made guns, there is neither a persistent follow-up action after the second deadline passed on March 6, nor any serious attempt to nab and prosecute defaulting individuals under the Arms Act.

An incremental approach such as this may be the key to gradually stabilising law and order. However, the easy and abundant availability of arms and ammunition in the hands of armed groups in the State is likely to perpetuate the ethnic security dilemma even as there is no sustained and credible security guarantee from the State. The reluctant imposition of President's Rule on February 13, 2025 as a convenient escape route to an imminent and inglorious fall of the Bharatiya Janata Party government, after an open revolt within its ranks, and the change of political guard in the State seems to have signalled a subtle, yet stern, message to armed groups across the divide that violence is not going to be tolerated.

Looking ahead

A halting, yet incremental return to normalcy may, however, impel serious political engagements with rival stakeholders in ways that simultaneously accommodate legitimate demands and promote trust and legitimacy to state institutions. As rival parties respectively commemorated May 3 as 'separation day' and a 'day of remembrance and reflection' to push their divergent political agendas, breaking the political impasse and stabilising law and order require substantive policy reorientations that transcend political optics and regime consolidation.

The views expressed are personal

Paper 03: Internal security

UPSC Mains Practice Question: India's border security policy towards the Northeast suffers from an outdated lens that prioritises fencing and control over engagement and trust-building. Discuss this in the context of the India-Myanmar border and its implications for regional security and diplomacy. (250 words)

Context :

The Manipur ethnic conflict, ongoing since May 2023, continues to cause large-scale human suffering, displacements, and violence. Despite over 250 lives lost and thousands displaced, the central government's muted response, including the Prime Minister's refusal to visit the State, reveals a lack of national priority accorded to the crisis. The article critiques the centralised, optics-driven, and security-obsessed approach of the Union government to Manipur and, broadly, to the Northeast.

Key Issues Highlighted:

- **1. Political Neglect and Inconsistent Priorities:**
 - The government's urgent response to terrorism-related incidents (like the Pahalgam attack) stands in contrast to the neglect of internal ethnic conflict in Manipur.
 - **Manipur's crisis is treated as peripheral compared to national security hotspots like Kashmir.**
- **2. Security-Centric Approach to the Northeast:**
 - Delhi's engagement with the Northeast is historically driven by national security and regime consolidation, rather than inclusive governance.
 - Attempts have been made to overstate cross-border threats (e.g., alleged 900 Kuki militants) to justify aggressive military action, often targeting specific ethnic communities.
- **3. Majoritarian Insecurity and State Complicity:**
 - The valley-based civil society and militia groups have weaponized "national security" rhetoric to justify attacks against Kuki-Zomi-Hmar villages.
 - Law and order has been informally outsourced to insurgent groups like valley-based insurgent groups (VBIGs).
- **4. Obsolete and Misguided Security Policies:**
 - The ₹31,000 crore border fencing plan with Myanmar is viewed as outdated and misaligned with the cultural and economic realities of trans-border ethnic groups (e.g., Naga, Mizo).

- Revoking the Free Movement Regime (FMR) undermines India's Act East Policy and alienates border communities.

Failures in Disarmament and Law Enforcement:

- Despite over 6,000 weapons being looted, only around 4,000 have been recovered, often symbolic or outdated weapons.
- The voluntary arms surrender events (e.g., by Arambai Tenggol) have been stage-managed for political optics rather than ensuring meaningful demilitarisation.
- Lack of prosecution under the Arms Act further erodes state credibility.

President's Rule and Political Fallout:

- The imposition of President's Rule in February 2025 was more a reaction to the political collapse of the BJP government than a proactive step to resolve the conflict.
- The central government's approach reflects regime survival tactics over genuine peacebuilding.

Looking Forward: A Path to Resolution

- A gradual return to normalcy could enable serious political dialogue with all stakeholders.
- The need is for substantive policy reorientation that:
 - Moves beyond military optics
 - Encourages decentralised federal engagement
 - Promotes trust-building, inclusive governance, and genuine power-sharing
 - Recognises the historical grievances and aspirations of all communities involved

Mains Analysis:

- Centre-State relations in internal conflict zones
- Security vs. Human rights in conflict resolution
- Role of President's Rule and political accountability
- Failure of peacebuilding mechanisms in Northeast India
- Impact of obsolete security infrastructure (e.g., fencing, outdated counterinsurgency strategy)
- The role of armed militia groups and failure to demobilise
- Ethnic security dilemma and its implications for internal security
- The dilemma of national security vs. regional autonomy

Conclusion:

- The Manipur crisis exposes deep governance deficits, a broken federal compact, and the failure to build trust among warring communities. Unless New Delhi abandons its optics-driven and security-first approach, the path to peace in Manipur will remain blocked. A holistic political settlement, inclusive dialogue, and administrative accountability are crucial for any lasting solution.



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