



D A I L Y U P S C E D I T I O N

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I N S I D E T H I S E D I T I O N

1	BRICS Anti-Drug Agencies' Meeting 2026	GS 2
2	Stealth Frigate <i>Mahendragiri</i> · Project 17A	GS 3
3	Questions Surrounding the Quad's Future	GS 2
4	Right to Walk as a Fundamental Right	GS 2
5	AI Governance & a Voice for the Global South	GS 2,3
6	Voting: Statutory Right vs Fundamental Right	GS 2
7	Falling Behind — Mumbai's Urban Flooding	GS 1
8	Bad for Both — Russia-Ukraine War	GS 2
9	Prelims Practice — 10 MCQs with Answer Key	TEST
10	Mains (8 & 12 Marks) + Essay Corner	TEST

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01 BRICS Nations Call for Stronger Ties to Curb Drug Trafficking

The Hindu · Page 14

GS 2

BRICS nations call for stronger ties to curb drug trafficking

The Hindu Bureau
GUWAHATI

Representatives of member countries, who converged in Guwahati for the two-day BRICS Heads of Anti-Drug Agencies' Meeting, 2026, on Monday emphasised the need for stronger international cooperation to combat drug trafficking.

An intergovernmental organisation of major emerging markets and developing countries, BRICS initially comprised Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa. It expanded to include Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Indonesia.

These countries represent almost half the global population, and more than 40% of the world's Gross Domestic Product.

Lucas Barbosa of Brazil's Ministry of Foreign Affairs lauded India for hosting the event. "The BRICS anti-drug working group has a long history of cooperation, and we intend to strengthen collaboration in law enforcement and intelligence sharing further. Drug trafficking is a transnational threat that requires coordinated action by all member countries,"



National flags of the BRICS countries. AP

he told journalists.

Anurag Garg, Director-General of the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB), said the impact of drug abuse was a factor behind India hosting the heads of anti-drug agencies from the BRICS nations for the first time.

International scourge

"Drugs have become an international scourge. Our youth is getting involved in drugs, and it is a problem that different nations have to fight together," he said, adding that the delegates would focus on emerging challenges in narcotics enforcement, including darknet marketplaces, cryptocurrencies for illicit transactions, and maritime routes for drug trafficking.

WHY IN NEWS

Representatives of member countries converged in **Guwahati** for the two-day **BRICS Heads of Anti-Drug Agencies' Meeting, 2026**, emphasising stronger international cooperation to combat drug trafficking.

- BRICS initially comprised **Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa**; expanded to include **Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Indonesia**.
- Members represent almost **half the global population** and more than **40% of world GDP**.
- Brazil's Lucas Barbosa: drug trafficking is a **transnational threat** requiring coordinated action; law-enforcement and intelligence-sharing collaboration to deepen.
- NCB D-G **Anurag Garg**: India hosted BRICS anti-drug agency heads for the **first time**; delegates to focus on **darknet marketplaces, cryptocurrencies** for illicit transactions, and **maritime trafficking routes**.

★ BRICS — STATIC POINTERS

- ★ **RIC formalised** at the first BRIC FMs' meeting on UNGA sidelines, New York, **2006**; first BRIC Summit at **Yekaterinburg, 2009**.
- ★ South Africa joined (BRIC→BRICS) in **2010**; attended the 3rd Summit at **Sanya, 2011**.
- ★ Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, UAE — full members from **Jan 2024; Indonesia from Jan 2025**.
- ★ **10 Partner Countries** joined in 2025 (Belarus, Bolivia, Kazakhstan, Cuba, Malaysia, Nigeria, Thailand, Uganda, Uzbekistan, Vietnam).
- ★ 2026 Summit theme (India's chairship): **"Building for Resilience, Innovation, Cooperation and Sustainability"**.

The Hindu, Pg 14 — BRICS anti-drug meeting, Guwahati

02 Stealth Frigate *Mahendragiri* Set to Join Indian Navy

The Hindu · Page 14

GS 3

Stealth frigate *Mahendragiri* set to join Indian Navy

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Indian Navy will commission its sixth indigenous Project 17A stealth frigate, *Mahendragiri* (F38), at Visakhapatnam on July 11, marking another major milestone in India's indigenous warship-building programme.

The stealth frigate was designed by the Navy's Warship Design Bureau and built by Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Limited, Mumbai. The advanced multi-role frigate will significantly enhance operational capabilities across the Indo-Pacific while reinforcing the country's *Atmanirbhar Bharat* initiative, the Navy said.

Mahendragiri is equipped with advanced stealth features, reduced radar signature, and a high degree of automation, it further said.

The Hindu, Pg 14 — Mahendragiri (F38)

WHY IN NEWS

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- Designed by the Navy's **Warship Design Bureau**; built by **Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Ltd, Mumbai**.
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- Equipped with advanced **stealth features, reduced radar signature** and a high degree of **automation**.

★ PROJECT 17A (NILGIRI-CLASS) — STATIC POINTERS

- ✦ **Seven** stealth guided-missile frigates; follow-on to the **Shivalik-class (Project 17)**.
- ✦ **4 by MDL** (Nilgiri, Udaygiri, Taragiri, Mahendragiri); **3 by GRSE** (Himgiri, Dunagiri, Vindhyagiri).
- ✦ Designed for **blue-water operations** — power projection and protection of maritime trade routes.
- ✦ **75% indigenous content** — showcases India's warship-manufacturing capability.
- ✦ Stealth: low **radar cross-section (RCS)**, radar-absorbing coatings, flush-mounted weapons, specialised exhausts for **infrared signature reduction**.

03 Questions Surrounding the Quad's Future

The Hindu · Page 9

GS 2

WHY IN NEWS

With the U.S. reversing the **Indo-Pacific Command back to the Pacific Command** (June 16), criticisms have been levelled against the relevance of the Quad. The reversal suggests the region no longer enjoys the priority it once did in Washington.

Questions surrounding the Quad's future

With the U.S. reversing the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command back to the U.S. Pacific Command, criticisms have been levelled against the relevance of the Quad

DATA POINT

ANALYSIS

At work: Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi is in New Delhi for the 16th India-Japan Annual Summit, her first visit to India since assuming office. The two sides reaffirmed their commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific. The reaffirmation, however, comes at a moment when the idea of the Indo-Pacific appears to be losing its principal champion. On June 16, the Pentagon resumed the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command back to the U.S. Pacific Command, reversing a change it had made in 2018. The meaning of the Command in 2018, though, was nuanced: the region's growing significance and acknowledged India's centrality to the U.S.'s regional strategy. The reversal suggests that the region no longer enjoys the priority it once did in Washington. In fact, the National Security Strategy released by the U.S. in November 2022 prioritises the Western Hemisphere over the Indo-Pacific and mentions the Quad only in passing. It also suggests Beijing, which has long resented the formation, Washington's approach to managing its relations with Beijing is undergoing a change under the current administration.

All of this has put the future of the Quad under the scanner. If Washington retreats from the idea, the platform built around it inevitably invites questions about its relevance. These questions only add to a set of older concerns. How relevant or successful is the Quad? Is it doing enough? And the criticism aren't without substance. The first criticism entails the hesitation to name China. If the objective is indeed to shape the balance of power in the region, then silence over Beijing's military and economic aggression is half-hearted. However, this is largely a reactive criticism. One can argue that

the Quad's reluctance to name Beijing is strategic, because positioning itself as an anti-China platform could dissuade smaller countries from associating with it. Critics highlight the Quad's hesitation to project itself as a security-centric grouping as another of its shortcomings. Given that Beijing poses hard security challenges to the region, any balancing effort has to be primarily security-centric. The extent of the grouping's hesitation is evident in the moment here: active effort to make an implicit distinction between Quad and the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QSD). There is a reluctance to use them interchangeably, even as the members acknowledge the grouping's origin to be rooted in the first QSD in 2004.

The Quad's reluctance to advance the partnership to a 2+2 level — a bilateral ministerial dialogue, comprising Foreign and Defence Ministers — is another pain point. Even as each of the four countries has furnished 2+2 meetings bilaterally with one another, the Quad continues to have meetings only at the leaders' and Foreign Ministers' level.

Domains of cooperation The alleged overbearing focus on non-security or soft issues is a related criticism. However, a review of the Quad's agenda with a different story. Even though the Quad assumed its current form in 2017, there was a call for the first four years. It only picked up steam after the COVID-19 pandemic, when the four countries held their first virtual leaders' summit and announced a first set of initiatives. Within six months, the Quad held its first in-person leaders' summit and expanded its areas of cooperation. The list today has grown to 37, of which 23 fall under security-related domains (Chart 1). Technology, energy, maritime capabilities and secure communication will be key in countering China in the years ahead.

Choosing the right area of cooperation doesn't necessarily reveal much, though. The type of cooperation and capital flow are two dimensions to evaluating the relevance of the grouping. But a review of the type of cooperation that Quad has a heavy focus on interoperability, data sharing, monitoring, and relief (Chart 2). While this is necessary and critically important for any security-based grouping, Quad's integration efforts are limited to civilian or non-military trade capabilities. Nonetheless, these integration exercises have dual-use capabilities and can be leveraged for even military-grade purposes.

The Quad's focus on building capacity and resilience, supply chains and agriculture, especially as these relate to critical and emerging technologies, medicine, and communications — the domains where the bulk of competition with China is expected.

The Quad's security focus is not matched by its funding pattern. Based on what is available in the public domain, health and climate have been the primary beneficiaries (Chart 3). One can argue that since most security-related initiatives focus on integration and standard setting, they do not require the same scale of dedicated funding. The holding resilient supply chains would require substantial capital commitment, and that is where the gap is most visible.

The Quad's recent commitment towards the SD without towards the Critical Minerals Initiative and First Responder could change this picture. But it remains only a stated target at the moment, with no funding committed or allocated. If security is seen as a core to the mission of Quad initiatives, the funding allocation must follow suit.

The question surrounding the Quad's future will not be settled by manoeuvring in Washington. They will be settled by whether the grouping backs its security-heavy agenda with capital.

Uncertain course

Area Analysis is a Staff Research Analyst with the International Program of the Vedanta Coaching Academy. The data for the charts were sourced by the author from the Quad Secretariat website.



CHART 1 This chart shows the number of initiatives under different domains of cooperation. Some initiatives span multiple domains, and thus may get counted more than once.

CHART 2 This chart shows the type of initiatives in the Quad Secretariat website. Some initiatives span multiple domains, and thus may get counted more than once.

CHART 3 This chart shows the funding for various initiatives of the Quad by different countries and the Quad Collective. Absence of values indicates no funding.

The Hindu, Pg 9 — Data Point: Uncertain course (Quad initiatives, funding charts)

- Japanese PM **Sanae Takaichi** visited New Delhi for the **16th India-Japan Annual Summit**; both sides reaffirmed a free and open Indo-Pacific.
- Criticisms — hesitation to **name China** (strategic silence, so smaller countries aren't dissuaded) and reluctance to be a **security-centric** grouping; members distinguish Quad from the **QSD (2004)**, with no **2+2** elevation.
- Of **37 initiatives**, **23 fall under security-related domains** — but focused on interoperability, data sharing, monitoring and relief; funding skews to **health (\$9.1 bn aid)**, not security (\$0.22 bn).
- The **\$20 bn Critical Minerals Initiative** commitment could change the picture, but no funding is yet committed or allocated.

★ QUAD — GENESIS & EVOLUTION

- ★ **2004:** ad-hoc maritime HADR coalition after the Indian Ocean Tsunami; **2007:** dialogue institutionalised by PM Shinzo Abe (ARF, Manila), then a decade-long hiatus.
- ★ **2017:** revived at senior-official level (East Asia Summit, Manila); **2021:** first virtual Leaders' Summit (March 12).
- ★ Members: **India, U.S., Australia, Japan** — a non-military plurilateral coalition for an open, rules-based order.

04 How the Right to Walk is Integral to Modernity

The Hindu · Page 8

GS 2

How the right to walk is integral to modernity

That we would need a court of law to remind us that the Right to Walk should be a fundamental right at this moment in history when activists are trying to stop government corporations from restricting the natural flow of rivers cannot be just a coincidence. The Right to Walk on footpaths, to be specific. There is a restriction on the freedom of nearly all parts of the human body imposed by the state – the hands cannot touch whatever they want to, one can't spit or defecate wherever one might want to, one cannot rest one's back against every available wall, and our legs are prevented from taking us to anywhere the mind wants to.

Hence the unnoticed privilege of having a mind – “*Kothao aamar hariye jawar nei mana money money*” (I can get lost anywhere, in my mind), is a Rabindranath song sung as much with hope as with the intuitive acknowledgement that only the mind has that kind of unrestricted freedom. At the other end of the head are our legs, and one would imagine that they would also like a similar degree of freedom as the mind has in the Tagore song. It must be in acknowledgement of this need that the Supreme Court has asked for the Right to Walk on footpaths to be included as a fundamental right.

Walking within literature
It seems almost tautological – the need for such a right. However, under a Facebook post from a decade ago, which detailed the experience of being a pedestrian in India, among the many disrespectful and inhuman responses was one by a young engineer. The pedestrian does not pay road tax and therefore cannot make a claim on the road, he said. The abrasive character of new capitalist energy soon became visible; he insisted that like the poor, the pedestrian was a burden on the Indian economy. What would he then make of the recent Supreme Court ruling that



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declared the Right to Walk safely on footpaths a fundamental right under Article 19(1)(d) (freedom of movement) and Article 21 (right to life), a ruling that gives pedestrians a claim on public pathways over automobiles?

Five kilometres away from the Supreme Court, where this ruling was given, Gandhi was walking, his walk frozen into a statue along with others in the piece of sculpture called “Gyarah Murti”, built by Devi Prasad Roy Chowdhury. Could that have played a role in the ruling? Or, since they knew the Indian Constitution so well, could they have been unconsciously thinking of Nandalal Bose, whose art frames the words that guarantee our relationship with this country, and whose linocut from 1930, “Bapuji”, which showcases Gandhi standing with the most well-known walking stick in the world, has conditioned the way we imagine Gandhi? Or could they have been thinking of Rabindranath's song “*Aekla chalo re*” (Walk alone), which sings of the conviction necessary to walk alone?

The judges who had delivered this judgment, Justices P.S. Narasimha and A.S. Chandurkar, must have been raised by a literary consciousness that would have influenced such an outlook. To give an example, a poem such as Jibanananda Das's *Bonolata Sen*, that begins, “For a thousand years I've been walking earth's paths, from Sinhal's seas to the waters of Malaya in night's darkness”. A poem like that was in the air, and influenced the way a community spoke and loved and laughed. There were bound to be equivalents of this trust placed in walking in all literary and artistic cultures of India.

Walking has been integral to the creation of a political instinct in India – from Subhash Chandra Bose's “*Delhi chalo*” to Gandhi's Dandi March, various protest marches have marked resistance before and after 1947. These had been sharpened by a spiritual

history that had been a harvest of walking – by figures such as Siddhartha, Nanak, Chaitanya, and other mendicant-seekers. Even the gods had a history of walking: the goddess Lakshmi's footprints, drawn as part of folk rituals of worship, are evidence of that. As had ways of storing information or writing a poem or telling a story, for, “*pada*” (foot), is a metric stanza and also a foundational group in Indic knowledge categories.

A symbol of modernity
At university, the author of this article had once told her teacher that modernity came to exist because Baudelaire – who coined the term in his 1863 essay “*The Painter of Modern Life*” – walked the streets of Paris. One wasn't thinking specifically of the flâneur, but of walking without purpose, and what it does to our mind and its circulation of thoughts. We've all benefitted from walking

unnoticing the clots in our self-accusatory consciousness. “The long poem of walking manipulates spatial organisations, no matter how panoptic they may be: it is neither foreign to them (it can take place only within them) nor in conformity with them (it does not receive its identity from them). It creates shadows and ambiguities within them. It inserts its multitudinous references and citations into them (social models, cultural mores, personal factors). Within them it is itself the effect of successive encounters and occasions that constantly alter it and make it the other's blazon: in other words, it is like a peddler carrying something surprising, transverse or attractive compared with the usual choice. These diverse aspects provide the basis of a rhetoric. They can even be said to define it,” Michel de Certeau writes in *The Practice of Everyday Life*. The Supreme Court's judgment, in rehabilitating the sense of life as a long poem, to “wander lonely as a cloud”, restores to Indians their quiet modernity.

WHY IN NEWS

The **Supreme Court** has declared the **Right to Walk safely on footpaths a fundamental right** — under **Article 19(1)(d)** (freedom of movement) and **Article 21** (right to life) — giving pedestrians a claim on public pathways over automobiles.

- The ruling restores dignity to pedestrians — the “unnoticed privilege” of mobility that the state and car-centric urbanism had restricted.
- Walking has been integral to India's political instinct — from **Subhash Chandra Bose's ‘Delhi Chalo’** to **Gandhi's Dandi March**; protest marches marked resistance before and after 1947.
- A spiritual harvest of walking too — Siddhartha, Nanak, Chaitanya and other mendicant-seekers; goddess Lakshmi's footprints in folk worship.
- Baudelaire's *flâneur* (1863) tied walking to modernity itself — the judgment “restores to Indians their quiet modernity”.

★ EXAM CONNECT

- ♦ **Art. 19(1)(d):** right to move freely throughout the territory of India.
- ♦ **Art. 21:** expansive reading — right to life includes safe public infrastructure.
- ♦ Links: pedestrian safety, urban commons, universal accessibility, road-safety governance.

The Hindu, Pg 8 — Opinion: the Right to Walk

05 AI Governance and a Voice for the Global South

The Hindu · Page 8

GS 2

GS 3

WHY IN NEWS

In **February 2026**, India hosted the **India AI Impact Summit 2026**, putting the needs of the **Global South** and **real-world harms** at the centre of AI discourse — a departure from Bletchley Park (2023), Seoul (2024) and Paris (2025), which prioritised catastrophic and existential risks.

AI governance and a voice for the Global South

In February 2026, India hosted the India AI Impact Summit 2026, that sought to put the needs and challenges of the Global South at the centre of the Artificial Intelligence (AI) discourse. The summit's theme framed by India were rooted in the contextual realities of the Global South with a focus on real-world harms. This was a departure from the previous summits (at Bletchley Park, 2023; U.S., Seoul 2024, and Paris 2025) that prioritised both catastrophic and existential risks over questions of present harms, equity and inclusion.

At the summit embodied, the political and policy momentum shifted toward raising capital for AI development in India and accelerating adoption through domestic use cases. In this process, India increasingly began to position itself within the newly framed "middle power" discourse, at the cost of Global South solidarity which underpinned the summit's original vision. India clarified this stance by joining Pax Silica, signalling strategic alignment with the United States-dominated semiconductor supply chain. As part of the agreement, India agreed to adopt a pro-innovation regulatory approach, thereby compromising its pursuit of strategic autonomy.



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partner in the AI adventure in India. The U.S. has declared its disinterest in AI governance, especially global multilateral or multistakeholder governance. This raises fundamental questions for India and the Global South on concentration of infrastructure, and economic power in the U.S. Will it be a repeat of the social media story — when U.S. foreign policy pushed back against regulating for user harms to safeguard the interests of social media platforms concentrated in the U.S.? Furthermore, economic value primarily accrues to American industry despite significant business and users outside its borders, while disproportionate externalisation and harms also persist to domestic markets.

Pertinent Issues
In the AI story, numerous questions arise. Will India mainly be a consumer of U.S. tech with Indian users bearing disproportionate harms? Will India be a site for extraction of data, labour for data labelling, minerals for manufacturing, and land, water, electricity and resources for data centres, primarily enabling the growth of American Big Tech?

Since the summit in February, India has sanctioned land for data centres displacing communities, triggering protests. There are no meaningful guardrails to protect local communities as American companies scrape public content to build language and indigenous knowledge datasets. The non-profit ecosystem is signing memoranda of understanding to diffuse AI and adopt use cases. However, fundamental AI innovation has been slow — India remains unable to compete with global foundational models. Its semiconductor development is focused on low-value assembly and there is a question of adequate capital to invest and grow the national AI ecosystem.

But perhaps all is not lost for India. The first of a two-part UN Global Dialogue on AI is underway in Geneva (July 6-7, 2026). Stakeholders will

convene to discuss how the multilateral and multistakeholder ecosystem can come together to collectively define the rules for the governance of AI.

A window for leadership
India can use the opportunity to stitch together a fractured AI policy agenda that currently lacks a leader. It remains one of the few countries with the political will, the technical capacity, and a diverse market to play this role. Rather than positioning itself merely as a destination for investment or a market for AI, India could reassert a vision of technological development rooted in public purpose, user safety, strategic autonomy, and international cooperation.

India should reiterate the need for international norms that empower Global South countries to focus on building local AI ecosystems and fostering innovation, safeguarding users, enhancing regulatory capacity, enabling skill-building and developing domestic infrastructure. It should also advance critical debates on competition and consumer protection and ensure economic value accrues within national markets.

Concurrently, India must create pathways for international cooperation on AI within the Global South. The Geneva dialogue is a critical moment for Global South countries to come together to enable enhanced agency and strategic autonomy.

This requires developing innovative approaches to pool capacity and resources including cooperation on data, compute, interoperable standards and shared protocols and governance, and strengthening institutional capacity both regulatory and technical across the Global South.

As heterogeneous as the Global South is, it can be a counterweight to the hegemony of Big Tech. India can lead this march to ensure that shared governance norms are created and benefits are shared with the people in the Global South, appropriately protecting them from harms.

The Hindu, Pg 8 — AI governance and the Global South

- Momentum shifted toward raising capital and domestic adoption; India repositioned within a **"middle power"** discourse at the cost of Global South solidarity.
- India joined **Pax Silica** — strategic alignment with the U.S.-dominated semiconductor supply chain — and agreed to a **pro-innovation regulatory approach**, compromising strategic autonomy.
- The U.S. has declared **disinterest in AI governance**, raising questions of concentration of infrastructure and economic power; will India be mainly a **consumer of U.S. tech**, a site for data extraction, labelling labour, minerals, land, water and electricity for data centres?
- Since February, land sanctioned for **data centres has displaced communities**, triggering protests; no meaningful guardrails as companies scrape public content for language and indigenous-knowledge datasets.
- First of a two-part **UN Global Dialogue on AI** underway in **Geneva (July 6-7, 2026)** — a critical moment for Global South agency.

★ A WINDOW FOR LEADERSHIP — WAY FORWARD

- ✦ India has the **political heft, technical capacity and diverse market** to lead a fractured AI policy agenda; reassert a vision rooted in **public purpose, user safety and strategic autonomy**.
- ✦ Champion norms that let Global South countries build **local AI ecosystems**; pool capacity — data, compute, interoperable standards, shared protocols.
- ✦ The Global South, heterogeneous as it is, can be a **counterweight to Big Tech hegemony**.

06 In India, Voting Cannot Remain Merely a Statutory Right

The Hindu · Page 8

GS 2

WHY IN NEWS

A Congress leader has revived the constitutional debate demanding that **voting be recognised as a fundamental right**. For over seven decades the Supreme Court has held it to be **merely a statutory right** — yet its jurisprudence has steadily constitutionalised the voter (S.Y. Quraishi).

In India, voting cannot remain merely a statutory right

Recently, a Congress leader revived an old constitutional debate by demanding that voting should be recognised as a fundamental right. At first sight, the demand appears unexceptionable. In a democracy, what could be more fundamental than a citizen's right to choose those who govern? Yet, for more than seven decades, the Supreme Court of India has consistently held that the right to vote is not a fundamental right but merely a statutory right.

This judicial position, though well established, has become increasingly difficult to reconcile with the Court's own evolving jurisprudence. In a series of landmark decisions, the Court has gradually transformed the voter from a passive statutory creature into an active constitutional actor.

The result is a curious paradox: while the act of voting itself continues to be described as statutory, many of its essential facts have already acquired constitutional protection.

The traditional position dates back to *K.P. Guruswami vs Returning Officer* (1952), where the Court held that the right to vote and the right to contest elections are not common law rights but rights created by statute. The principle was reaffirmed in *Justi Basu & Others vs Botha Ghosal & Others* (1982), where Justice O. Chinnappa Reddy observed that the right to elect, "fundamental though it is to democracy", is neither a fundamental right nor a common law right, but "purely a statutory right". A Constitution Bench reiterated this position in *Kuldeep Nayar vs Union of India* (2006), holding that while democracy forms part of the basic structure of the Constitution, the individual right to vote flows from legislation, principally the Representation of the People Acts.

The logic behind this approach is understandable. The Constitution does not expressly enumerate the right to vote among the fundamental rights contained in Part III. Parliament, therefore, enjoys considerable latitude in prescribing qualifications, disqualifications and procedures governing elections.

However, the story does not end there.

Constitutionalising the poll process Beginning in the early years of this century, the Court embarked upon a process of constitutionalising the electoral process. In *Union of India vs Association for Democratic Reform* (2002), the Court held that voters have a right to know the criminal antecedents, educational qualifications and financial assets of candidates. This right was located squarely in Article 19(1)(a), the fundamental right to freedom of speech and expression. The Court reasoned that meaningful participation in democracy is impossible unless voters are adequately informed.



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of the Great
Indian Election*

A year later, in *People's Union of Civil Liberties vs Union of India* (2003), the Court drew an important distinction. While reiterating that the right to vote is statutory, it held that the freedom of voting — that is, the freedom to make an informed choice — is a fundamental right protected by Article 19(1)(a).

The most intriguing development came in the 2013 *Wafa* judgment. Recognising the option of "None of the Above", the Court held that a voter's decision to reject all candidates is a form of political expression protected by Article 19(1)(a). The Court further held that secrecy of the ballot must extend even to those who choose not to vote for any candidate.

This produces an extraordinary constitutional anomaly. The Court has effectively held that the right to know is fundamental, the freedom to make an informed choice is fundamental, the secrecy of the ballot is fundamental, and even the right to reject all candidates is constitutionally protected. Yet, the act of voting itself continues to be treated as a mere statutory entitlement.

One is tempted to ask: if the Constitution protects the right to reject all candidates, why does it not protect the right to choose one?

Recent constitutional jurisprudence also points in this direction. In *Anoop Baranwal vs Union of India* (2023), Justice Ajay Rastogi, in his separate opinion, expressly favoured recognising voting as a fundamental right. Although this view did not command a majority, the Constitution Bench repeatedly referred to voting as a constitutional right rather than merely a statutory one. This marks an important shift in judicial understanding. The Court may not yet have elevated voting to the status of a fundamental right, but it has undoubtedly moved beyond the narrow statutory conception that dominated earlier decisions.

The anomaly becomes even more striking when viewed through the prism of the basic structure doctrine. Since *Kesavananda Bharati vs State of Kerala* (1973), the Court has repeatedly held that democracy forms part of the Constitution's basic structure. In *Indira Nehru Gandhi vs Raj Narain* (1975), the Court underscored that free and fair elections are an essential feature of democracy. Subsequent decisions have consistently reinforced this principle.

Democracy begins with voters If democracy does not exist in the abstract, it operates through elections, and elections derive their legitimacy from the participation of citizens through the ballot. The vote is the very instrument through which popular sovereignty is exercised. It is through the vote that "We, the People" periodically renew the legitimacy of the state and hold governments accountable.

If democracy is a part of the Constitution's

basic structure, and if free and fair elections are indispensable to democracy, it is difficult to explain why the citizen's right to vote should remain outside the constitutional core. To say that democracy is basic to the Constitution while the citizen's vote is merely a statutory right appears incongruous. A democracy without voters is inconceivable.

This does not necessarily mean that every aspect of voting should be elevated into an absolute fundamental right immune from regulation. Parliament must continue to prescribe qualifications, disqualifications and procedures necessary for the conduct of elections. Age requirements, electoral rolls, residency conditions, disqualifications for corrupt practices and other regulatory provisions are indispensable for orderly elections.

What requires constitutional recognition is not every procedural detail but the core right of every eligible citizen to participate in the democratic process. This becomes particularly evident when one examines Article 326 of the Constitution. The Article mandates that elections to the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies shall be based on universal adult suffrage. Every citizen above the age of 18 is constitutionally entitled to be registered as an elector, subject only to narrowly defined disqualifications. The source of this entitlement is not legislation but the Constitution itself. The Representation of the People Acts merely operationalise what the Constitution commands.

Thus, while the mechanics of voting may be statutory, the citizen's entitlement to be a voter flows directly from the Constitution. Exclusion from the electoral roll, except in accordance with constitutionally permissible limitations, therefore, strikes at a constitutional guarantee.

A matter for the Court to revisit The distinction between statutory and constitutional rights may have served a useful purpose in the early years of the Republic, when electoral jurisprudence was still in its infancy. But the Court's own decisions have steadily blurred that distinction by progressively constitutionalising various facets of voting.

Perhaps the time has come for the Court to revisit an old doctrine. In a Constitution where democracy and free and fair elections constitute the basic structure, the citizen's vote cannot remain a constitutional orphan. The ballot is not merely a statutory privilege conferred by Parliament. It is the instrument through which popular sovereignty is expressed and the Republic periodically renews its democratic legitimacy.

After all, if the Constitution protects the right to reject every candidate, it can scarcely deny protection to the right to choose one.

- **N.P. Ponnuswami (1952):** right to vote/contest are **statutory creations**; reaffirmed in **Jyoti Basu (1982)** — "purely a statutory right".
- **Kuldip Nayar (2006):** democracy is basic structure, but the vote flows from the **Representation of the People Acts**.
- **ADR (2002):** right to know candidates' antecedents — **Art. 19(1)(a)**; **PUCL (2003):** the **freedom of voting** (informed choice) is fundamental even if the vote is statutory.
- **NOTA (2013):** rejecting all candidates is protected **political expression**; ballot secrecy extends to non-voters.
- **Anoop Baranwal (2023):** Justice Rastogi favoured fundamental-right status; the Bench repeatedly called voting a **constitutional right**.

The Hindu, Pg 8 — S.Y. Quraishi on the right to vote

★ THE CONSTITUTIONAL ANOMALY

- ◆ **Art. 326** mandates universal adult suffrage — the entitlement to be a voter flows from the **Constitution itself**; RP Acts merely operationalise it.
- ◆ Free and fair elections are **basic structure (Kesavananda 1973; Indira Nehru Gandhi 1975)**; if the Constitution protects the right to **reject** every candidate, it can scarcely deny the right to **choose** one.

07 Falling Behind — Urbanisation vs Infrastructure in Mumbai

The Hindu · Page 8 · Editorial

GS 1

Falling behind

Urbanisation in Mumbai is evolving faster than its infrastructure upgrades

The southwest monsoon has been highly active over western India, with south-westerly winds loaded with moisture sweeping over the Western Ghats and delivering intense rains along the Konkan coast, while other weather systems offshore are routing more moisture over Mumbai and the surrounding areas. In urban areas in general, rainfall intensity matters more than volume. Mumbai itself can generally absorb moderate rainfall over several hours; however, its drainage — like in many Indian cities — cannot handle several hundred millimetres in short bursts. Heavy rainfall also overwhelmed river catchments in parts of Maharashtra, including around Nashik, while high tides reduced the efficiency of Mumbai's stormwater drainage, worsening flooding in the city. Mumbai-Pune rail services were suspended after landslides in the Bor Ghat and flights were affected. The closures of the Mumbai-Pune expressway and the Mumbai-Goa highway and significant flooding on the Mumbai-Ahmedabad expressway were disruptive, speaking to the increasing erraticity of monsoon rainfall, the vulnerabilities associated with linear infrastructure projects, and the ease with which the effects of natural disasters are compounded by cascading failures. A chawl collapse in Mankhurd took the lives of five children.

Mumbai lies on a peninsula built mostly on reclaimed land, former marshes, tidal flats, and low-lying coastal areas, creating the characteristic risk of higher flooding when rainfall coincides with high tide. It is compounded by decades of haphazard urbanisation that has encouraged water to run-off rather than be absorbed by the ground, forcing drains to handle more water than their design limits. After the July 2005 floods, when it received 944 mm in 24 hours, Mumbai launched the BRIMSTOWAD project and widened drains, installed pumping stations, and undertook premonsoon de-silting. Many of these works remain incomplete while some completed upgrades are based on assumptions about the monsoon that climate change has since undermined. Officials have also argued that pre-monsoon desilting helped reduce flooding in parts of Mumbai, but water on the Mumbai-Ahmedabad expressway, the chawl collapse, deadly tree falls in Kurla and Aarey, lack of redundancies in public transport, and the BMC's belated advisory to builders to halt hazardous construction all suggest a governance lapse. Mumbai's accountability also remains split across the BMC for local drainage and roads, the IMD for forecasting, the NDRF, two Railway zones, the State government, and highway authorities. Overall, the city has improved at shutting down to save lives and minimising the death toll — but as climate change and urbanisation evolve faster than infrastructure upgrades, simply waiting for system capacity to catch up to demand will be a failing strategy.

The Hindu, Pg 8 — Editorial: Falling behind

- In urban areas **rainfall intensity matters more than volume** — drainage cannot handle several hundred millimetres in short bursts.
- Mumbai sits on **reclaimed land, former marshes and tidal flats** — flooding risk spikes when rain coincides with **high tide**.
- Decades of **haphazard urbanisation** encourage run-off over absorption, pushing drains beyond design limits.
- After **July 2005 (944 mm in 24 hrs)**, Mumbai launched **BRIMSTOWAD** — widened drains, pumping stations, pre-monsoon de-silting; many works incomplete, some based on monsoon assumptions **undermined by climate change**.
- Accountability is split — **BMC** (drainage/roads), **IMD** (forecasting), **NDRF**, two Railway zones, State govt, highway authorities — a governance lapse.
- The city has improved at shutting down to save lives, but **waiting for capacity to catch up with demand is a failing strategy**.

WHY IN NEWS

The southwest monsoon has been highly active over western India; Mumbai's flooding, rail suspensions (Bhor Ghat landslides), expressway closures and a **fatal chawl collapse in Mankhurd** show urbanisation evolving **faster than infrastructure upgrades**.

08

Bad for Both — Russia and Ukraine Must End the War

The Hindu · Page 8 · Editorial

GS 2

Bad for both**Russia and Ukraine must end the war and concede mutual concessions**

More than four years into Russia's invasion, Ukraine has found ways to raise the cost of the war for the Kremlin — striking its energy infrastructure with drones and imposing a drone blockade on Crimea. When the war began in February 2022, Ukraine's immediate response was to resist Russia's battlefield advances, while mobilising international support. As the war dragged on, Ukraine received advanced defensive and offensive weapons from its western partners, while Russia was subjected to sweeping sanctions. But this approach did not slow Russia, which reinforced its front lines and captured more Ukrainian territory. Both sides have suffered tens of thousands of casualties. Ukraine's economy has become heavily dependent on western aid. Kyiv has also transformed the way the war is fought by launching hundreds of drones each day at Russian troops and critical infrastructure. For President Vladimir Putin, who initially sought to shield the Russian public from the consequences of the war, these attacks are a stark reminder that the war has come home. Strikes on Russian oil facilities, described by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy as "long-range sanctions", have knocked out parts of Russia's refining capacity. Ukraine has also targeted the electricity infrastructure and fuel logistics of Crimea, the Black Sea peninsula Russia annexed in 2014, forcing a state of emergency.

Mr. Zelenskyy wants to use this offensive pressure to force Mr. Putin to the negotiating table and secure a ceasefire. But drone warfare has only slowed Russian advances. Last week, Russia's Defence Ministry announced the capture of the eastern city of Kostiantynivka and a closing in on Lyman. Russia now controls over 20% of Ukraine since 2014. Russia has repeatedly accused NATO countries of enabling Ukraine to strike deep inside its territory. Mr. Putin is already under pressure over his inability to secure a decisive victory, and nationalist voices have urged him to widen the conflict to increase pressure on NATO. The situation remains highly volatile with no political settlement in sight. Ukraine can hurt Russia economically, but it continues to lose ground on the battlefield. Russia can inflict military losses on Ukraine, but it is also facing attacks on a scale unseen since the Second World War. Neither side has a viable military path to achieving its objectives. Mr. Putin and Mr. Zelenskyy should adopt a more accommodative position with mutual concessions. They should agree to a ceasefire and be ready to begin substantive negotiations on the outstanding issues, including the security concerns of both countries and the future of NATO.

The Hindu, Pg 8 — Editorial: Bad for both

- Ukraine's early response (Feb 2022): resist battlefield advances, mobilise international support; later, advanced Western weapons + sweeping **sanctions** on Russia.
- Kyiv launches **hundreds of drones daily**; strikes on refineries — "long-range sanctions" (Zelenskyy) — hit refining capacity, Crimea's power and fuel logistics (state of emergency).
- Russia announced capture of **Kostiantynivka** and closing in on **Lyman**; now controls **over 20% of Ukraine** (since 2014).
- Putin under pressure over no decisive victory; nationalist voices urge widening the conflict against **NATO**; situation volatile with no political settlement in sight.
- Ukraine can hurt Russia **economically** but loses ground militarily; Russia faces attacks on a scale unseen since WWII.
- **Way out:** mutual concessions — a ceasefire, then substantive negotiations covering both countries' security concerns and the **future of NATO**.

WHY IN NEWS

More than **four years** into Russia's invasion, Ukraine is striking Russian energy infrastructure with drones and imposing a **drone blockade on Crimea** — yet Russia keeps gaining ground. Neither side has a viable military path to its objectives.

PRELIMS PRACTICE — 10 MCQs

BASED ON TODAY'S EDITION · ANSWERS WITH EXPLANATIONS

1 Which city hosted the two-day BRICS Heads of Anti-Drug Agencies' Meeting in 2026?

- A. New Delhi
B. Guwahati
C. Mumbai
D. Yekaterinburg

ANSWER: B · Representatives of member countries converged in **Guwahati** for the two-day BRICS Heads of Anti-Drug Agencies' Meeting in 2026.**2** Which of the following countries became a full member of BRICS in January 2025?

- A. Egypt
B. Iran
C. Indonesia
D. Saudi Arabia

ANSWER: C · Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the UAE became full members from **January 2024**, while **Indonesia** joined as a full member in **January 2025**.**3** Which entity built the Indian Navy's sixth indigenous Project 17A stealth frigate, *Mahendragiri*?

- A. Garden Reach Shipbuilders & Engineers Ltd
B. Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Limited
C. Cochin Shipyard Limited
D. Goa Shipyard Limited

ANSWER: B · *Mahendragiri* was designed by the Navy's Warship Design Bureau and built by **Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Limited**, Mumbai.**4** What is the percentage of indigenous content in the Project 17A frigate *Mahendragiri*?

- A. 50%
B. 65%
C. 75%
D. 90%

ANSWER: C · The Project 17A frigate features **75% indigenous content**, highlighting India's growing capability in indigenous warship manufacturing.

5

The Quad has expanded its areas of cooperation to 37 initiatives. How many of these fall under security-related domains?

- A. 12
C. 23
- B. 15
D. 30

ANSWER: C · Out of the Quad's 37 current areas of cooperation, **23** fall explicitly under security-related domains.

6

The Supreme Court recently declared the Right to Walk safely on footpaths a fundamental right under which Articles of the Constitution?

- A. Article 14 and Article 21
C. Article 19(1)(a) and Article 21
- B. Article 19(1)(d) and Article 21
D. Article 15 and Article 19(1)(d)

ANSWER: B · The ruling declared the Right to Walk safely on footpaths a fundamental right under **Article 19(1)(d)** (freedom of movement) and **Article 21** (right to life).

7

The India AI Impact Summit 2026 sought to focus the AI discourse primarily on what?

- A. Existential and catastrophic risks
C. Accelerating American Big Tech integration
- B. Real-world harms and the needs of the Global South
D. Dominating the global semiconductor supply chain

ANSWER: B · The Summit aimed to put the needs and challenges of the **Global South** at the centre of AI discourse, focusing on **real-world harms** rather than catastrophic or existential risks.

8

In which 1952 case did the Supreme Court first hold that the right to vote is merely a statutory right?

- A. Jyoti Basu vs Debi Ghosal
C. N.P. Ponnuswami vs Returning Officer
- B. Kuldip Nayar vs Union of India
D. Kesavananda Bharati vs State of Kerala

ANSWER: C · The traditional position dates back to **N.P. Ponnuswami vs Returning Officer (1952)**, where the Court held the rights to vote and contest are created by statute, not common law.

9

Which Article of the Constitution mandates that elections to the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies shall be based on universal adult suffrage?

- A. Article 324
C. Article 326

- B. Article 325
D. Article 329

ANSWER: C · Article 326 mandates that elections to the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies shall be based on universal adult suffrage.

10

Following the catastrophic floods of July 2005, Mumbai launched which project to widen drains and install pumping stations?

- A. Mithi River Rejuvenation Project
C. Mumbai Stormwater Initiative

- B. BRIMSTOWAD project
D. Konkan Coastal Defense Project

ANSWER: B · After the July 2005 floods (944 mm in 24 hours), Mumbai launched the **BRIMSTOWAD project** to widen drains, install pumping stations and undertake pre-monsoon de-silting.

CONSOLIDATED ANSWER KEY

Q1 · B

Q2 · C

Q3 · B

Q4 · C

Q5 · C

Q6 · B

Q7 · B

Q8 · C

Q9 · C

Q10 · B

MAINS PRACTICE

ONE 8-MARK (150 WORDS) · ONE 12-MARK (250 WORDS) · WITH ANSWER POINTERS

Q1 · GS 2 8 MARKS · 150 WORDS

“Voting in India is treated merely as a statutory right despite possessing several characteristics of a fundamental right.” Analyze this paradox in light of recent Supreme Court judgments.

“कई मौलिक अधिकार-समान विशेषताओं के बावजूद भारत में मतदान को केवल एक विधिक (सांविधिक) अधिकार माना जाता है।” हाल के सर्वोच्च न्यायालय के निर्णयों के आलोक में इस विरोधाभास का विश्लेषण कीजिए।

KEY POINTERS FOR EVALUATION

- ▶ **Traditional stance:** for over seven decades voting held to be a statutory right created by legislation (Representation of the People Acts) — *N.P. Ponnuswami (1952)*, *Kuldip Nayar (2006)*.
- ▶ **Constitutional evolution:** the Court has increasingly constitutionalised the electoral process — fundamental right to know candidates’ backgrounds under Art. 19(1)(a) (*ADR, 2002*).
- ▶ **The paradox:** freedom of voting and the option to reject candidates (*NOTA, 2013*) are protected political expression; informed choice, ballot secrecy and rejection are fundamental — yet the core act of voting stays purely statutory.
- ▶ **Constitutional roots:** Art. 326 guarantees universal adult suffrage — the entitlement flows directly from the Constitution, making the purely statutory classification increasingly incongruous with the basic-structure status of democracy.

Q2 · GS 2/3 12 MARKS · 250 WORDS

Discuss the strategic dilemma faced by India in positioning itself within the global AI governance architecture. How can India leverage its position in the Global South to shape an equitable AI policy?

वैश्विक AI अभिशासन संरचना में स्वयं को स्थापित करने में भारत के समक्ष रणनीतिक दुविधा की चर्चा कीजिए। समान AI नीति को आकार देने हेतु भारत वैश्विक दक्षिण (Global South) में अपनी स्थिति का लाभ कैसे उठा सकता है?

KEY POINTERS FOR EVALUATION

- ▶ **The dilemma (middle power vs Global South):** India hosted the India AI Impact Summit 2026 centring Global South realities and real-world harms, yet joined **Pax Silica** — aligning with the U.S.-dominated semiconductor supply chain — compromising strategic autonomy.
- ▶ **Economic & social risks:** India risks becoming merely a site for data extraction, labour and resources for American Big Tech, with disproportionate harms on Indian users; data-centre land sanctions have already triggered protests.
- ▶ **Leveraging the Global South:** India is one of the few nations with the technical capacity, political heft and diverse market to lead a fractured global AI agenda.
- ▶ **Policy prescriptions:** reassert a vision rooted in public purpose, user safety and international cooperation; advocate norms empowering Global South nations to build local ecosystems rather than remain mere markets; use platforms like the UN Global Dialogue (Geneva) to pool data, compute and shared protocols as a counterweight to Big Tech hegemony.

ESSAY CORNER

ONE TOPIC · WITH STRATEGIC POINTERS FOR DEVELOPMENT

ESSAY TOPIC OF THE DAY

Urbanization and Climate Change: A Cascading Crisis for Indian Cities

शहरीकरण और जलवायु परिवर्तन: भारतीय शहरों के लिए एक शृंखलाबद्ध संकट

STRATEGIC POINTERS FOR DEVELOPMENT

- ▶ **Introduction:** introduce the compounding effects of climate change and rapid urbanization in India, using Mumbai as a prime case study of how extreme weather overwhelms urban infrastructure.
- ▶ **Geographical & infrastructure vulnerabilities:** cities built on reclaimed lands, marshes and tidal flats face heightened risk when high tides coincide with intense short bursts of rainfall; haphazard urbanization prevents absorption, overwhelming outdated drainage.
- ▶ **The failure of remedial measures:** critique the lag in upgrades — e.g. BRIMSTOWAD (launched after the 944 mm rainfall of 2005) — incomplete works and climate shifts undermining localized fixes.
- ▶ **Governance & cascading failures:** split accountability across civic bodies (BMC), forecasting (IMD), disaster response (NDRF), Railway zones, State government and highway authorities creates severe governance lapses; relate to cascading failures in linear infrastructure (rail, highways, expressways).
- ▶ **Conclusion:** waiting for infrastructure capacity to organically catch up with climate realities is a failing strategy — advocate proactive climate-resilient urban planning and unified governance to save lives and sustain economic activity.

+ THOUGHT OF THE DAY +

"A city that plans only for yesterday's rain will drown in tomorrow's."

जो शहर केवल बीते कल की बारिश के लिए योजना बनाता है, वह आने वाले कल की बारिश में डूब जाएगा।