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Page 01: GS 2 :Indian Polity & Constitution / Prelims

The election of C.P. Radhakrishnan as the 17th Vice-President of India marks a significant political development, not just in terms of parliamentary arithmetic but also in the broader ideological contest between the ruling NDA and the opposition alliance.

C.P. Radhakrishnan elected Vice-President

- The NDA nominee got 452 first preferential votes against Opposition candidate who got 300 votes
- While 14 MPs abstained, 15 votes were found to be invalid; full electoral college comprises 788 electors
- Voting pattern shows that the nationalistic ideology has emerged victorious, says Radhakrishnan

Sobhana K. Nair
NEW DELHI

Maharashtra Governor C.P. Radhakrishnan was elected the 17th Vice-President of India on Tuesday by a margin of 152 votes. The Opposition fell short of its own expected tally, even as 98.2% of the total electorate, comprising members of both Houses of Parliament, cast their ballot.

Mr. Radhakrishnan – the ruling National Democratic Alliance's nominee – got 452 first preferential votes against the joint Opposition candidate Justice B. Sudershan Reddy, who got 300 votes. Fifteen votes were found to be invalid and 14 MPs abstained.

Including the strength of both Houses, the full electoral college comprises 788 electors. With six vacancies in the Rajya Sabha and one in the Lok Sabha, this tally was reduced to 781 for the election.

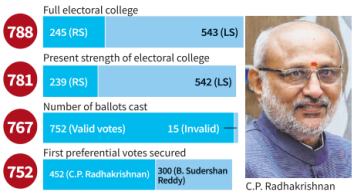
Out of this, 767 electors cast their vote before the polling closed at 5 p.m. Rajya Sabha Secretary-General P.C. Mody, the Returning Officer for the election, announced the results.

Cross-voting

Though the Opposition declared the final count a "moral victory", it still fell short of its own estimated strength of 324, despite having managed to get nearly all of its members to vote. On the other hand, the NDA and others aligned with the government, which had an presumed strength of 439, seem to have managed an additional 13 votes, indicating cross-voting from the Opposition's ranks.

Comfortable victory

Radhakrishnan won by a margin of 152 votes, as 98.2% of the total electorate, comprising both Houses of Parliament, cast their ballot



C.P. Radhakrishnan

"Congratulations to Thiru CP Radhakrishnan Ji on winning the 2025 Vice Presidential election. His life has always been devoted to serving society and empowering the poor and marginalised. I am confident that he will be an outstanding VP, who will strengthen our Constitutional values and enhance Parliamentary discourse," Prime Minister Narendra Modi posted on X.

Other senior Ministers and BJP leaders also congratulated Mr. Radhakrishnan.

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge extended his wishes to Mr. Radhakrishnan, while also thanking Justice Reddy for putting up a "spirited and principled fight" on behalf of the Opposition. Calling it an ideological battle, he said, "We hope the new Vice President-elect will uphold the highest ethos of Parliamentary traditions, ensuring equal space and dignity for the Opposition, and not succumb to pressures of the ruling dispensation."

In a concession statement, Justice Reddy said that he humbly accepted the outcome. "Our democracy is strengthened not by victory alone, but by the spirit of dialogue, dissent and participation. I remain committed, as a citizen, to upholding the ideals of equality, fraternity, and liberty that bind us together. May our Constitution continue to be the guiding light of our national life," he said.

In his first public remarks after the win, Mr. Radhakrishnan said, "The other side camp (opposition alliance) said that this (election) is an ideological fight, but from the voting pattern, we understand that the nationalistic ideology has emerged victorious." He said, "It is a victory for every Indian; we all have to work together. If we have to develop Viksit Bharat by 2047, which means we should not do politics in everything, now we will have to concentrate on development."

BJP leaders were quick to claim that at least 15 Opposition MPs had voted in favour of Mr. Radhakrishnan. BJP MP Sanjay Jaiswal claimed that "nearly 40 Opposition MPs" had listened to the voice of their conscience and voted in "some manner" in support of the NDA candidate, showing a wider acceptance for him. His assertion of support from 40 Opposition MPs appeared to include several invalid votes.

Countering this claim, Congress communications chief Jairam Ramesh insisted that the Opposition stood united. "Its performance has undeniably been most respectable. Its joint candidate Justice (retd) B. Sudershan Reddy secured 40% of the vote. In 2022, the Opposition had received 26% of the vote in the Vice Presidential Elections. The BJP's arithmetical victory is really both a moral and political defeat.," he said on X.

RELATED REPORTS
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Current Affairs Context

1. **Election Results (2025):**
   - NDA nominee C.P. Radhakrishnan secured 452 first-preference votes.
   - Opposition candidate Justice (retd.) B. Sudershan Reddy received 300 votes.
   - 15 invalid votes and 14 abstentions were recorded.
   - Margin of victory: 152 votes.
2. **Electoral College:**
   - Comprised 788 electors (both Houses of Parliament).
   - With 7 vacancies, effective tally: 781.
   - Turnout: 767 MPs (98.2%) cast their votes.
3. **Cross-Voting & Political Impact:**
   - NDA managed ~13 votes beyond its presumed strength, hinting at opposition cross-voting.
   - Opposition performance (40% votes) considered a "moral victory" compared to its 26% in the 2022 VP election.
4. **Statements & Reactions:**

- PM Modi hailed the victory as a step towards "strengthening constitutional values and Viksit Bharat 2047".
- Opposition leaders highlighted concerns about maintaining parliamentary traditions and giving space to dissent.

Static Background

- Vice-President of India (Articles 63–71, Indian Constitution):
  - Second-highest constitutional office after the President.
  - Ex-officio Chairperson of the Rajya Sabha (Article 64).
  - Elected indirectly by an electoral college consisting of MPs from both Houses (Article 66).
  - Tenure: 5 years; can be re-elected.
- **Election Method:**
  - Conducted through proportional representation by means of a single transferable vote (STV), via secret ballot.
  - No state legislature involvement, unlike Presidential elections.
- Recent Vice-Presidents:
  - JagdeepDhankhar (2022–2025), M. Venkaiah Naidu (2017–2022).

Analysis for Prelims & Mains

1. Prelims Pointers:

- Articles: 63–71 (VP of India), Article 64 (Rajya Sabha Chairperson), Article 66 (Election).
- Election system: Indirect, STV, proportional representation, secret ballot.
- Difference from President's election (state legislatures do not vote in VP election).
- Current officeholder: C.P. Radhakrishnan (17th VP, 2025).

2. Mains Analysis (GS-II: Polity & Governance):

- Strengthening Parliamentary Democracy:
  - VP plays a crucial role as Rajya Sabha Chairperson, ensuring decorum and balance between government and opposition.
  - The ideological contest shows VP elections as not just procedural but also politically symbolic.
- **Cross-Voting & Political Signals:**
  - Cross-voting suggests weakening opposition unity despite higher vote share compared to 2022.

- Reflects internal party dynamics and conscience voting.

- **Role in "Viksit Bharat 2047" Narrative:**
  - NDA framing the result as endorsement of nationalistic ideology and development-first politics.
  - VP as facilitator of legislative discourse aligned with government's vision.
- **Opposition's Moral Standpoint:**
  - Though electorally defeated, opposition projects 40% share as progress in its political consolidation.
  - Raises concerns about upholding parliamentary traditions, equal space, and dissent under majority politics.
- **Democratic & Constitutional Significance:**
  - Reinforces the functioning of indirect democracy in India.
  - Emphasizes the importance of free conscience voting, even within party lines.

Conclusion

C.P. Radhakrishnan's election as Vice-President of India is more than a routine constitutional event; it symbolizes the ongoing ideological battle between ruling and opposition forces within Indian democracy. While the NDA sees it as a victory for its developmental and nationalistic agenda, the opposition stresses the importance of pluralism, dissent, and parliamentary balance.

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Ques: Consider the following differences between the election of the President and Vice-President of India:

1. In the election of the President, members of State Legislatures participate, whereas in the election of the Vice-President, they do not.
2. Both elections are held by proportional representation by means of a single transferable vote.
3. The Vice-President is elected by secret ballot, while the President is elected by open ballot.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

(a) 1 and 2 only (b) 2 and 3 only (c) 1 and 3 only (d) 1, 2 and 3 **Ans: (a)**

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques: "Strong constitutional offices are essential for strengthening India's vision of Viksit Bharat by 2047." In this context, examine the importance of the Vice-President's role in ensuring effective parliamentary discourse. **(250 Words)**

Page 02 : GS 1 & 2 : Social Issues &Social Justice/ Prelims

Women's safety remains a pressing challenge in India's urban centres. Despite policy measures post-2012 Nirbhaya case, Delhi continues to fare poorly, as highlighted by the National Annual Report & Index on Women's Safety (NARI) 2025, which placed the national capital among the bottom four cities. This raises critical questions about the effectiveness of infrastructure, policing, and social attitudes towards gender safety.

Poor NARI ranking exposes women safety gaps in Delhi

Ashna Butani
NEW DELHI

Thirteen years after the 2012 bus gang rape and murder shocked the nation, women in Delhi continue to face glaring safety gaps in everyday public life.

From poorly lit streets and unsafe transport to the lack of secure public spaces and limited emergency services, the concerns remain stark, according to the National Annual Report & Index on Women's Safety (NARI) 2025.

The survey, launched by the National Commission for Women (NCW) last month, covered 12,770 women across 31 cities.

Delhi ranked 28th on the women's safety index, placing it among the worst-performing cities, ahead only of Kolkata, Srinagar, and Ranchi.

Over 30% of women in Delhi said women-friendly infrastructure was either minimal or non-existent. FILE PHOTO

According to the report, 31% of women in Delhi said women-friendly infrastructure was either "minimal" or "non-existent".

'Serious concern'

Nationally, the figure stood at 23%. "This ranking is a serious cause for concern, particularly because Delhi, as the national capital, should ideally set the benchmark for women's safety across Bharat," the report said.

In Delhi, 41% of women said deserted spaces made them feel unsafe, while unlit areas, high crime rates, and public behaviour were also cited as reasons for fear.

The contrast between daytime and nighttime safety was sharp: while 8% felt unsafe during the day, the number jumped to 35% after dark.

The report noted that there is a "concerning disparity" between Delhi and the national average regarding experiences of harassment in public spaces.

The national capital recorded a higher incidence of harassment in public spaces compared with the national average. While 7% of women across the country reported experiencing harassment, in Delhi, the figure was 12%.

Repeated harassment

Alarmingly, 61% of Delhi women who reported harassment said they had faced it more than twice, pointing to systemic lapses in deterring repeat offenders. Neighbourhood areas were most frequently cited as sites of harassment (34%), indicating that proximity to home does not guarantee safety. This was followed by transport facilities (32%).

When asked for solutions, 51% of women demanded more policing, while 17% specifically called for timely and proper police action, underscoring frustration with law enforcement.

Cities that ranked higher than the national average included Kohima, Visakhapatnam, Aizawl, Bhubaneswar, Gangtok, Itanagar, and Mumbai. Faridabad ranked 27th, just above Delhi. The NARI report, ideated and funded by Pvalue Analytics, was released on August 28 and marks the first such national safety index.

Current Affairs Context

1. **NARI 2025 Survey (National Commission for Women &Pvalue Analytics):**
   - Sample size: 12,770 women across 31 cities.
   - Delhi ranked 28th, above only Kolkata, Srinagar, and Ranchi.

2. **Survey Findings on Delhi:**
    - 31% women: women-friendly infrastructure is "minimal or non-existent" (national average: 23%).
    - Harassment in public spaces: 12% (vs national average 7%).
    - Repeated harassment: 61% of victims faced it more than twice.
    - Unsafe zones:neighbourhood areas (34%), transport facilities (32%).
    - Day–night gap: 8% unsafe during the day, 35% after dark.
    - Solutions sought: 51% demand more policing; 17% demand timely and proper police action.
3. Top-performing cities: Kohima, Visakhapatnam, Aizawl, Bhubaneswar, Gangtok, Itanagar, and Mumbai.

Static Background

- Nirbhaya Case (2012): Led to Justice J.S. Verma Committee recommendations, amendments to Criminal Law (2013), creation of Nirbhaya Fund for women's safety.
- **Relevant Laws & Initiatives:**
    - Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013→ expanded definition of sexual assault, stricter punishments.
    - One Stop Centres under MWCD for women facing violence.
    - Safe City Project (MWCD + MHA) under Nirbhaya Fund for technology-driven safety.
    - Women Helpline (181), Delhi Police Himmat App, pink buses/special coaches in metro.
- **Constitutional Backing:**
    - Article 14 (Equality), Article 15 (No discrimination), Article 21 (Right to life with dignity).
- SDG-5 (Gender Equality): Calls for eliminating violence against women in public and private spheres.

Analysis for Prelims & Mains

1. Prelims Pointers:

- NARI 2025 → launched by NCW, ideated by Pvalue Analytics.
- Delhi's ranking: 28th out of 31 cities.
- Safe City initiatives funded by Nirbhaya Fund.

2. Mains Analysis (GS-I, GS-II, GS-IV):

- **Urban Infrastructure Gaps:**
  - Poorly lit streets, unsafe public transport, and lack of surveillance technology exacerbate risks.
  - Delhi's infrastructure lags behind even smaller cities like Kohima and Gangtok.
- **Policing & Law Enforcement Issues:**
  - High repeat harassment (61%) shows weak deterrence and inadequate police follow-up.
  - Public distrust reflected in women demanding not just more police but better police action.
- **Socio-Cultural Dimensions:**
  - Harassment in neighbourhoods suggests patriarchal mindsets and normalization of street harassment.
  - Safety is not just about infrastructure but also about behavioural change and civic awareness.
- **Policy & Governance Paradox:**
  - Despite being the national capital with maximum attention, Delhi lags behind smaller, resource-constrained cities.
  - Indicates mismatch between policy intent and ground-level implementation.
- **Implications for SDG-5 & National Policy:**
  - Women's safety directly linked to mobility, education, workforce participation→ crucial for India's demographic dividend.
  - Persistent safety gaps undermine India's progress toward gender equality and inclusive urbanization.

Conclusion

Delhi's poor performance in the NARI 2025 women's safety index underscores the gap between legal reforms, policy initiatives, and ground reality. More than a decade after Nirbhaya, the capital city continues to reflect systemic failures in infrastructure, policing, and societal attitudes. The lesson for India is clear: achieving true gender safety requires a multi-pronged approach — better urban planning, responsive policing, technological interventions, and deeper societal change. Without addressing these gaps, the vision of safe, inclusive cities under SDG-5 and National Urban Policy will remain unfulfilled.

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Ques: Which of the following initiatives are associated with improving women's safety in India?

1. Nirbhaya Fund
2. One Stop Centres
3. Safe City Project
4. BetiBachaoBetiPadhao

Select the correct answer:

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

Ans :a)

UPSC Mains Practice Question : Social Issues

Ques: Discuss how women's safety challenges in urban areas affect their participation in education, employment, and public life. How can addressing these challenges contribute to India's demographic dividend? (150 Words)

UPSC Mains Practice Question : Governance& Social Justice

Ques: Women's safety is not only a law-and-order problem but also a question of urban planning, social attitudes, and governance. Analyse this statement in the light of the findings of the NARI 2025 report. (150 Words)

UPSC Mains Practice Question : Ethics

Ques: Women's safety in public spaces is not only a governance challenge but also a test of societal ethics. In this context, discuss the role of citizens, communities, and institutions in ensuring a safe environment for women. (150 Words)

Page : 04 : GS 2 : International Relations/ Prelims

Nepal, India's immediate neighbour and close historical partner, is witnessing widespread violence following protests against corruption and restrictions on social media. The turmoil has led to the resignation of Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli and deployment of the Nepal Army to restore law and order. Prime Minister Narendra Modi termed the violence "heart-wrenching" and appealed directly to the people of Nepal to maintain peace. For India, this development holds significance under foreign policy, neighbourhood relations, and regional stability.

Violence in Nepal heart-wrenching, Modi says in appeal for normalcy

The MEA says that India is 'closely monitoring' the unfolding situation in Nepal; officials maintain that India's cautious approach is governed by the understanding that given the political situation, New Delhi should adopt a neutral stance

Kallol Bhattacherjee
NEW DELHI

The unfolding violence in Nepal is "heart-wrenching", Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Tuesday appealing directly to Nepal citizens and urging them to restore normalcy in their country, which has been rocked by protests over the past three days leading to the resignation by Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli.

"The violence that has happened in Nepal is heart-wrenching. My heart is extremely disturbed by the fact that many young people have lost their lives. Nepal's stability, peace and prosperity are of utmost importance. I humbly appeal to all my brothers and sisters in Nepal to maintain peace and order," said Mr. Modi as Nepal Army announced that it will take over the responsibility of law and order from 10 p.m. of Tuesday. Mr. Modi was on a tour of Himachal Pradesh for flood assessment during the day and chaired a meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Security Affairs upon returning to Delhi where a "detailed discussion" was held on Nepal. Mr. Modi posted his message on social media platforms in Nepali.

On fire: People look at a burnt police vehicle during protests against the social media ban and corruption in Kathmandu on Tuesday. AP

Earlier, the Ministry of External Affairs said that India is "closely monitoring" the unfolding situation in Nepal as Prime Minister Oli resigned a day after Nepal police shot dead at least 19 young people who were protesting against his government during what is being described as "Gen-Z" uprising. Officials here maintained that India's cautious approach is governed by the understanding that given the heated political situation in Nepal, New Delhi should not be seen as supportive of any side in this uprising.

"We are closely monitoring the developments in Nepal since yesterday and are deeply saddened by the loss of many young lives. Our thoughts and prayers are with families of deceased. We also wish speedy recovery for those who were injured," said the MEA. Officials here said the ground situation might become a bit clear in a couple of days when many of the stakeholders in the protest would come out with their plans. "As a close friend and neighbour, we hope that all concerned exercise restraint and address any issues through peaceful means and dialogue," the MEA said.

The MEA \advised Indians to defer travel to Nepal in view of the situation. They are advised to follow safety advisories from Nepal authorities and the Embassy of India, Kathmandu, on the following helpline numbers: +977-980-860-2881 and +977-981-032-6134 (WhatsApp call also in both). Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri had visited Nepal during August 17-18 and met Mr. Oli and he was expected to visit India later this month. Mr. Misri had also met Foreign Minister Arzu Rana Deuba.

Current Affairs Context

1. **Unrest in Nepal:**
   - Triggered by protests against corruption and a social media ban.
   - Protests labelled as a "Gen-Z uprising" led to heavy clashes.
   - At least 19 youth killed by police firing.
2. **Political Fallout:**
   - PM K.P. Sharma Oli resigned after three days of violence.
   - Nepal Army took charge of law and order from September 9, 10 p.m.
3. **India's Reaction:**
   - PM Modi's Statement: Appealed in Nepali language for peace, emphasized Nepal's "stability, peace and prosperity".
   - MEA Statement: India is "closely monitoring" developments, expressed condolences, and urged restraint and dialogue.
   - Travel Advisory: Indians asked to defer travel; helplines provided by Indian Embassy in Kathmandu.
4. **Diplomatic Context:**
   - Foreign Secretary VikramMisri recently visited Nepal (Aug 17–18, 2025), met PM Oli and Foreign Minister Arzu Rana Deuba.
   - India maintaining neutral stance, avoiding perception of supporting any faction.

Static Background

- **India–Nepal Relations:**
  - Bound by 1950 India–Nepal Treaty of Peace and Friendship.
  - Close economic ties → India is Nepal's largest trade partner and major development partner.
  - Open border → crucial for migration, trade, and people-to-people ties.
- **Geopolitical Context:**
  - Nepal strategically located between India and China.
  - India traditionally dominant influence, but China increasing presence through infrastructure and Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).
- **Past Political Instability in Nepal:**
  - Transition from monarchy to republic (2008).
  - Frequent government changes, coalition instability, constitutional debates.
  - Similar mass protests in 2015 during Constitution promulgation and Madhesi movement.

Analysis for Prelims & Mains

1. Prelims Pointers:

- Treaty of Peace & Friendship, 1950 → cornerstone of India–Nepal ties.
- Open border regime → unique feature of India–Nepal relationship.

2. Mains Analysis (GS-II: International Relations):

- **India's Balancing Act:**
  - Unlike past interventions, India adopting neutral, cautious approach→ avoids alienating any political camp.
  - Aim: prevent perception of external interference, respect Nepal's sovereignty.
- **Regional Stability Concerns:**
  - Protests show deep generational discontent in Nepal → long-term governance challenge.
  - Escalation may create refugee/migration pressure across open border with India.
  - Instability in Nepal could allow greater Chinese strategic entry.
- **India's Strategic Interests:**
  - Safety of Indian nationals in Nepal (large diaspora & pilgrims).
  - Infrastructure projects: cross-border rail, hydropower, trade corridors.
  - Security: countering cross-border crime, preventing misuse of open border.
- **Diplomatic Leverage:**
  - India emphasizing dialogue, restraint, and peace resonates with democratic values.
  - Appeal by PM Modi in Nepali language →soft power diplomacy and cultural affinity.

Conclusion

The unfolding violence in Nepal highlights the fragility of its political system and the generational demand for accountable governance. For India, the challenge lies in balancing its role as a close friend and neighbour while avoiding overt interference that could backfire diplomatically. A peaceful and stable Nepal is vital for India's security, trade, and neighbourhood policy. India's cautious approach — guided by neutrality, people-to-people ties, and strategic patience — reflects the evolving maturity of its Neighbourhood First Policy.

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Ques :With reference to India–Nepal relations, consider the following statements:

1. India and Nepal share an open border allowing free movement of people.

2. The 1950 Treaty of Peace and Friendship forms the basis of India–Nepal ties.

3. Nepal is a member of both SAARC and BIMSTEC.

4. Nepal is part of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

Which of the above statements are correct?

(a) 1, 2 and 3 only

(b) 2 and 4 only

(c) 1, 2, 3 and 4

(d) 1 and 3 only

Ans : c)

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques: "The unfolding violence in Nepal underscores the fragility of its political system and the challenges of India's neighbourhood policy." Discuss India's cautious response to the Nepal crisis in light of its Neighbourhood First Policy**. (150 Words)**

Page 06 : GS 3 : Environment & Ecology/ Prelims

The ₹81,000-crore Great Nicobar Island Project has triggered controversy over alleged violations of tribal and forest rights. The Union government has now sought a "factual report" from the Andaman and Nicobar Islands administration after the Tribal Council of Little and Great Nicobar complained that rights under the Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006 were not settled before the diversion of nearly 13,000 hectares of forest land. The case highlights the conflict between strategic development projects and indigenous rights protection.

Union govt. seeks 'factual report' on forest rights complaint concerning Nicobar project

Abhinay Lakshman
NEW DELHI

The Union government has sought a "factual report" from the Andaman and Nicobar Islands administration on points raised in a complaint by the Tribal Council of Little and Great Nicobar that forest rights had not been settled before diverting around 13,000 hectares for the ₹81,000-crore Great Nicobar Island project in August 2022.

In August, *The Hindu* reported about the complaint to Tribal Affairs Minister Jual Oram that the administration had made a "false" representation to the Centre in certifying that all rights under the Forest Rights Act (FRA) of 2006 had been identified and settled before diverting the required forest land for the project in the certificate issued on August 18, 2022.

The Andaman and Nicobar Island administration has maintained that it need not implement the Forest Rights Act of 2006. GETTY IMAGES

The council said its consent had been "obtained under pressure" and withdrawn formally soon after in a letter to the government. The certificate contradicted the administration's position in monthly FRA progress reports to the Ministry that it does not need to implement the Act.

In a letter to the Chief Secretary of the Union Territory on Monday, the Ministry asked for a "factual report addressing each of the points raised in the said news report and the letter of Tribal Council".

The Ministry said it had received the letter from the Tribal Council, "raising the issue that the Forest rights guaranteed to the Nicobarese in Great Nicobar Island have not been settled under the FRA, 2006, and Nicobarese have not consented to diversion of forest lands...".

Earlier this year, Mr. Oram said concerns over the project are being "examined". Weeks after sending the complaint to Mr. Oram in July, the Tribal Council said it had received no response.

The council then wrote to the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi, on August 26, flagging the authorities' "refusal" to engage in dialogue with them. This prompted Mr. Gandhi to write to Mr. Oram last week, urging his office to examine the concerns raised by the council.

On Monday, Congress Parliamentary Party Chairperson Sonia Gandhi, in an article in *The Hindu*, criticised the Centre over this project, calling it a "planned misadventure". After sending the complaint to Mr. Oram, a member of the Tribal Council told *The Hindu* that it had recently been made aware of the August 2022, certificate issued by the Deputy Commissioner of Nicobar, certifying, "The complete process for identification and settlement of rights under the FRA has been carried out..." But the Tribal Council said that the process of identification and settlement of rights under the FRA "has not even been initiated".

According to the progress reports, the administration has maintained that it does not need to implement the FRA, arguing that tribespeople's rights were already protected on the islands under the Protection of Aboriginal Tribes Act, 1956 which enables the administration to unilaterally divert forest land.

Current Affairs Context

1. **Complaint by Tribal Council (2022–2025):**
   - Alleged that consent for diversion of forest land was obtained "under pressure" and later withdrawn.
   - Administration falsely certified to the Centre (Aug 18, 2022) that FRA rights were settled.
   - Progress reports submitted to the Ministry claimed FRA need not be implemented in Nicobar.

2. **Union Government Response:**
   - Ministry of Tribal Affairs has asked for a "factual report" from UT administration.
   - FRA implementation questioned, as Nicobarese tribal rights allegedly ignored.
3. **Political Reactions:**
   - Tribal Council approached Tribal Affairs Minister JualOram (July 2025) but received no response.
   - Later wrote to Rahul Gandhi, who urged the Minister to intervene.
   - Sonia Gandhi called the project a "planned misadventure."
4. **Project Background:**
   - Project aims at international transshipment terminal, airport, power plant, and township.
   - Requires diversion of ~13,000 hectares of pristine forest, impacting shompen and Nicobarese **tribes.**

Static Background

- **Forest Rights Act (2006):**
  - Recognises individual and community rights of forest-dwelling Scheduled Tribes and OTFDs (Other Traditional Forest Dwellers).
  - Requires Gram Sabha consent before forest diversion.
- **Protection of Aboriginal Tribes Regulation (PATR), 1956:**
  - Governs tribal welfare in Andaman & Nicobar.
  - Administration argues PATR provides adequate protection, hence FRA need not apply.
- **Constitutional Backing:**
  - Article 244 & Fifth/Sixth Schedules: Special provisions for Scheduled Tribes.
  - Article 338A: National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST) oversight.
- **Supreme Court Precedent:**
  - Orissa Mining Corporation v. MoEF (2013, Niyamgiri case)→ tribal consent mandatory for diversion of forest land under FRA.

Analysis for Prelims & Mains

1. Prelims Pointers:

- FRA 2006 → consent of Gram Sabha mandatory.
- PATR 1956 → colonial-era law, specific to Andaman & Nicobar.
- Great Nicobar Project → ₹81,000 cr, ~13,000 ha forest diversion.

2. Mains Analysis (GS-II, GS-III, GS-V):

- **Legal-Administrative Conflict:**
  - FRA (2006) is a central law → applicable across India, but UT administration claims exemption under PATR 1956.
  - Raises question of federal consistency in tribal rights enforcement.
- **Development vs Indigenous Rights:**
  - Project justified as strategic (India's Act East policy, shipping hub).
  - But threatens ecological balance (rainforests, biodiversity) and survival of Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) like Shompens.
- **Consent Under Pressure:**
  - Allegations of "forced consent" undermine spirit of free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC).
  - Tribal withdrawal of consent indicates procedural irregularity.
- **Governance & Transparency Issues:**
  - Certificate issued (2022) claimed rights settled → but progress reports said FRA not applicable.
  - Reflects contradictions in administrative accountability and data reporting.
- **Political Sensitivity:**
  - Opposition raising issue → increasing pressure on government.
  - Could become a national-level debate on tribal rights and environmental governance.
- **Implications for India's International Image:**
  - India has commitments under UNDRIP (United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples).
  - Projects undermining indigenous rights may attract global scrutiny.

Conclusion

The Nicobar project embodies the classic development versus rights dilemma in India's governance. While strategically important for India's maritime ambitions, it raises serious concerns about the implementation of the Forest Rights Act, tribal consent, and ecological sustainability. The government's decision to seek a factual report is a step forward, but resolving this requires:

- Transparent settlement of tribal rights under FRA.
- Genuine community participation in decision-making.
- Balancing strategic infrastructure goals with constitutional and ecological responsibilities.

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Ques: With reference to the Forest Rights Act, 2006, consider the following statements:

1. Consent of Gram Sabha is mandatory before diversion of forest land for non-forest purposes.

2. The Act is applicable only to mainland India, not to Union Territories.

3. Both individual and community forest rights are recognized under the Act.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

(a) 1 and 2 only

(b) 2 and 3 only

(c) 1 and 3 only

(d) 1, 2 and 3

Ans :c)

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques: The Great Nicobar Project reflects the classic dilemma between strategic development and ecological-tribal rights. Analyse the challenges and suggest measures to resolve them. **(150 words)**

Page 11 : GS 1 : Social Issues / Prelims

Urbanisation in India is often characterised by unplanned growth, inadequate infrastructure, and weak local governance. Kerala, facing rapid "rurban" transformation and climate stress, set up the Kerala Urban Policy Commission (KUPC) in December 2023 — India's first State-level urban commission. Its 2025 report provides a 25-year roadmap integrating climate resilience, finance, governance, and community participation, offering valuable lessons for the rest of India.

EXPLAINER

Rejuvenating cities: A fisherman casting his net into the backwaters, in Kochi. H.VIBHU

Lessons for India: how Kerala is tackling rapid urbanisation

As the first State-level urban commission in the country, the Kerala Urban Policy Commission's report promises nothing less than a data revolution, governance recalibration, identity revival, and finance empowerment

Tikender Singh Panwar

The story so far:

Kerala is a tapestry of villages rippling into towns, of backwaters, and midlands and highlands woven together in a living continuum. Capital cities and hamlets bleed into each other, forming a unique "rurban" landscape. Yet beneath this tapestry lies a race against time – urbanisation accelerating faster than infrastructure and governance can keep up, while climate stress lurks in floods, landslides, coastal erosion, and unpredictable weather. In response, Kerala decided to tackle the problem head-on with the Kerala Urban Policy Commission.

What is the KUPC?

The Kerala Urban Policy Commission, (KUPC) set in motion in December 2023, was charged with designing a 25-year urban roadmap that sees cities not as concrete problems, but as organic, climate-aware ecosystems. When the KUPC handed its report to the State in March 2025, the result was not a mild adjustment – it was a structural reset. The blueprint promised nothing less than a data revolution, governance recalibration, identity revival, and finance empowerment – all tied together in one bold vision.

Why was it needed?

By late 2023, Kerala was urbanising at a pace well ahead of the national average. Estimates projected an urban population of over 80% by 2050 – a seismic shift in a region where villages and towns intermesh in a delicate mosaic. Meanwhile, climate threats were intensifying. Floods devastated Ernakulam; landslides shattered hillsides; and coastal zones reeled from sea-level pressures. The gap between crisis and planning was growing wide.

The cabinet's December 2023 resolution to form the KUPC was a calculated break from India's centralised, project-based urban model. It was a political acknowledgement that Kerala needed its own compass – tailored to its place, history, and climate context. No other State had taken such a leap. Therefore, the KUPC became India's first State-level urban commission, signalling a paradigm shift – from reactive fixes to systemic thinking.

What were the recommendations of the commission?

The commission conducted 33 deep-dive studies, covering everything from land-use patterns and water systems to finance flows and civic health. It held 53 district-level stakeholder dialogues, involving mayors, NGOs, unions, resident associations, gig workers, and panchayat members.

A 2,359-page final report, structured around 10 thematic pillars, ranging from climate readiness and finance to well-being and identity, was submitted to the State. The commission drew on Census numbers, satellite imagery, socio-economic realities, ecological hazards, and Kerala's lived "rurban" character to deliver actionable insights grounded in evidence and local narrative.

Some of the most important recommendations of the KUPC report submitted to the Chief Minister on March 30, 2025 include:

Climate and risk-aware zoning: Any kind of urban planning must reflect hazard mapping of landslides, coastal inundation, flood zones etc. Thus, planning becomes proactive, instead of being reactive.

A digital data observatory: At the Kerala Institute of Local Administration, a real-time data nerve centre could collate high-resolution Light Detection and Ranging, and ground penetrating radar, tide/water gauge, satellite and real-time weather data. Thus, every municipality gains a living intelligence feed.

Green fees and climate insurance: Projects in eco-sensitive zones could come with environmental levies (green fees) which would fund urban resilience. A parametric insurance model ensures pre-approved payouts for disaster-prone areas.

Municipal and pooled bonds: While Thiruvananthapuram, Kochi, and Kozhikode, being bigger cities, could issue municipal bonds, smaller towns would use pooled instruments. Bond subscriptions were even plugged into the 2024 interim Budget.

Governance overhaul: City cabinets, led by mayors, could replace bureaucratic inertia. Specialist cells (climate, waste, mobility, law) with dedicated municipal cadres should be formed. A "Jnanashree" program would recruit and deploy youth tech talent.

Place-based economic revival: Thrissur-Kochi is known as a FinTech hub; Thiruvananthapuram-Kollam a knowledge corridor; Kozhikode is known as the city of literature; and Palakkad and Kasaragod have been elevated to smart-industrial zones.

Commons, culture, and care: The report stressed the need to revive wetlands, reactivate waterways and preserve heritage zones. It also recommended city health councils to cater to migrants, students, gig workers.

Why is the report unique?

The KUPC highlighted a deeper innovation: the fusion of local narratives and data systems.

Commission members described how fishermens' ordeals with coastal recession, youth-crafted water conservation drives, or mobility woes voiced by bazaar vendors – all became structured into the urban data apparatus. LIDAR maps now register tidal health near fishing zones; municipal dashboards carry community-generated indicators; and city briefing templates reflect lived stories. Rather than imposing "top-down solutions," policies were co-produced with citizens, giving Kerala an urban intelligence engine – a living, breathing system where city systems absorb, interpret and act on the emotional, lived intelligence of local communities.

What distinguishes the KUPC isn't one big idea – it's the collision of several game-changing ones.

The KUPC is the first State-level commission built for sub-national realities and not recycled from national frameworks. In its report, climate resilience is embedded and not appended – every pillar integrates disaster awareness. The report also calls for the emancipation of public finance through municipal bonds and green levies which give local bodies fiscal agency.

It also re-defines governance from passive bureaucracies to dynamic election-led city cabinets, guided by youth technocrats. Rich stories fuel data, and data fuels policy, closing the feedback loop between lived reality and institutional action. Together, these features dismantle silos – in planning, finance, governance – and re-assemble them into a 360° urban system.

Does it offer lessons for other States?

Kerala's Urban Commission offers a template with tangible takeaways for other States – mandate a time-bound commission; combine technical data with lived experience and create dialogic systems where citizen inputs are mapped into data observatories; empower local bodies with green levies, bonds, and risk premiums; and insert youth and specialists in governance.

What next?

The KUPC changed more than planning – it rewired the DNA of how a State conceives its cities and towns. It entwined climate awareness, community narrative, financial empowerment, digital governance, and identity economy into a living document-functional plan.

As the first such State-level commission in the country, KUPC isn't an end – it's a beginning. For Kerala, it's a chance to grow not just richer, but wiser; not just bigger, but better; not just more urban, but more human.

For others, it's a call to action: urban transformation isn't a problem to solve. It's a story to be authored – together.

Tikender Singh Panwar is a Member of the KUPC and a former deputy mayor, Shimla.

Current Affairs Context

- Kerala's urban population projected to cross 80% by 2050.
- Rising threats: floods, landslides, coastal erosion, climate variability.
- KUPC (2023–25): Mandated to reimagine cities as organic, climate-aware ecosystems.
- Submitted a 2,359-page report (March 2025) structured around 10 thematic pillars — a blueprint for resilient and inclusive urbanisation.

Static Background

- Urbanisation in India: 35% population urban (Census 2011), projected to reach 50%+ by 2050.
- Challenges: Infrastructure deficits, slums, water scarcity, waste management, weak urban finance.
- Schemes: Smart Cities Mission, AMRUT, PMAY–Urban → mostly project-based, centralised models.
- Constitutional Framework: 74th Amendment (1992) → empowered Urban Local Bodies (ULBs), but fiscal and functional autonomy remains weak.
- Climate Context: Kerala's vulnerability → 2018 floods, frequent landslides, coastal inundation.

Key Recommendations of KUPC

1. **Climate & Risk-Aware Zoning**
    - Hazard mapping for floods, landslides, coastal erosion integrated into planning.
2. **Digital Data Observatory**
    - Real-time data hub (LIDAR, satellite, weather feeds) at Kerala Institute of Local Administration.
    - Evidence-based planning for all municipalities.
3. **Urban Finance Empowerment**
    - Municipal and pooled bonds.
    - Green fees & climate insurance for eco-sensitive projects.
4. **Governance Reforms**
    - City Cabinets led by mayors replacing bureaucratic dominance.
    - Specialist cells (climate, waste, mobility).
    - "Jnanashree" program to deploy youth tech talent in municipalities.
5. **Economic & Cultural Revitalisation**
    - Region-based clusters: FinTech hub (Thrissur–Kochi), Knowledge corridor (Thiruvananthapuram–Kollam).
    - Preservation of wetlands, waterways, heritage.
    - City health councils for migrants, gig workers.

6. **Community-Driven Data Systems**
    - Citizen narratives integrated into planning (fishermen, vendors, youth groups).
    - Bottom-up intelligence feeding policy design.

Analysis for Prelims & Mains

1. **Prelims Pointers:**

- Kerala Urban Policy Commission → 2023, first State-level urban commission.
- 10 pillars → climate, finance, governance, culture, identity, etc.
- Municipal bonds, pooled bonds, green levies recommended.

2. Mains Relevance (GS-I/II/III):

- Governance Innovation: Moves beyond centralised Smart Cities approach; empowers ULBs with finance and authority.
- Climate Mainstreaming: Unlike most Indian urban plans where resilience is an "add-on," here it is embedded.
- Data Revolution: Real-time observatories integrate local narratives with scientific data →evidence-based + participatory planning.
- Fiscal Federalism: Promotes municipal bonds and local resource mobilisation, reducing dependence on state/centre grants.
- Citizen-Centric Model: Incorporates lived experiences into urban design (UN-Habitat principles of inclusive planning).
- Template for Other States: Shows the possibility of time-bound commissions that balance growth with ecology.

Conclusion

Kerala's KUPC has redefined urban planning in India by shifting from project-based fixes to systemic thinking. It offers a replicable template:

- Empower local bodies with finance & governance autonomy.
- Integrate climate and disaster resilience into every stage of planning.
- Fuse citizen narratives with digital data for context-sensitive policies.

For India, where urbanisation is inevitable, the lesson is clear: cities must be seen as living ecosystems — not just growth engines. Kerala's approach shows how to make urbanisation not only smarter, but also more sustainable, inclusive, and human.

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Ques: Which of the following is/are part of the key recommendations of the Kerala Urban Policy Commission?

1. Hazard mapping and climate-risk zoning in urban planning.

2. Green fees and climate insurance for eco-sensitive projects.

3. Replacement of bureaucratic-led city administration with elected city cabinets.

4. Exclusive reliance on centrally sponsored schemes for urban finance.

Select the correct answer using the code below:

(a) 1 and 2 only

(b) 1, 2 and 3 only

(c) 2, 3 and 4 only

(d) 1, 3 and 4 only

Ans: b)

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques: The Kerala Urban Policy Commission (2023–25) represents a paradigm shift in urban governance. Critically analyse its recommendations in the context of empowering Urban Local Bodies under the 74th Amendment. **(150 Words)**

Page : 08 Editorial Analysis

The long march ahead to technological independence

India celebrated its hard-won political freedom on the 79th Independence Day, on August 15, 2025. But we must recognise that true independence today requires more than political autonomy. It also demands technological sovereignty, as technology aids every walk of life today.

Geopolitics has taken a darker turn recently. Modern wars are fought with software and drones, not bullets and bombs. The most damaging war is in cyberspace. Our banks, trains and power grids run on information and communication technology. A small number of companies, primarily from a single country, build and control these systems.

This dependence is a serious vulnerability. What happens if these companies turn off their cloud or Artificial Intelligence services under national diktat or out of malice? The capacity to inflict serious harm on the country is very real. We saw this when cloud services were stopped to a company recently. This is not a hypothetical threat, but a reality that we must confront.

Building the foundation

Technological autonomy is the solution. India has no operating system, database, or other foundational software that it builds and can trust completely. This leaves the country dependent on external sources that its cannot control or trust. However, the path to independence is not as difficult as it might seem.

The open-source model offers a path to a solution. India can create its own versions of Linux and Android that are safe and free of backdoors. It is possible for a dedicated group of professionals to do this. The real challenge lies in long-term support and maintenance. A large, supportive user base is necessary for a home-grown operating system (OS) to be viable. If we are to adopt an OS that is a little behind, we can make them competitive and viable. This is a mission for India's sizeable technology community. The problem affects everyone, but the solution lies with IT professionals who build the digital world. They must join hands to remove this debilitating dependence. This is too big a task for any single institution, but is achievable if many unite behind this goal.

P.J. Narayanan

is Professor and former Director of IIIT Hyderabad, and a researcher in computer vision, computer graphics and parallel computing

True independence today demands that India pursues technological sovereignty, as dependence is now a vulnerability

The path to hardware sovereignty

Achieving hardware sovereignty is a greater challenge than software sovereignty. Building sophisticated semi-conductor fabs requires massive, long-term national investment in chip design, manufacturing and supply chain management. Do we have the resources and, more importantly, the patience to build them? A crucial first step is to focus on specific hardware components and invest in partnerships to build expertise in chip design and assembly, even if fabrication is outsourced.

India's journey to political independence was defined by non-violence. Its quest for technology independence should be through open-source software, which is a gift of society to itself. This is about supporting ourselves and not opposing others.

The global open-source movement is no longer the powerful socio-political force that it was. Much of the software today is open-source, including Android, Linux, and Hadoop. However, key control is with centralised cloud and data managed externally by powerful companies. A social movement for autonomy in software and hardware is needed today. India has the necessary talent and the capability. The way exists.

What India needs is the collective will. Let it start an urgent mission of planning, development, and execution before a crisis forces its hand.

Assembling a crack team to create India's own versions of essential software from the open source resources is the first step. India must build client-side components (such as database, email client, calendar) and server-side components such as web server, email server, and cloud server. Open source versions are available for all of them. India needs to set up teams to continually update and maintain these components, which is the harder task. These teams should work like product teams in companies. This is possible only when there is a sound business model behind it, outside of government or private funds. The mission has to be self-supporting or better.

While this may have been a difficult idea to sell in the past, the current climate is different. Previously, only the strategic sectors were concerned with having trusted and secure software. Now, private companies and individuals are concerned about being dependent on outside forces for critical needs. People are already paying, either directly or indirectly, for the free and open-source software that they use. The shift to a model where these costs are explicit and support trusted software would be a small one.

A mission as the core

The immediate step is to establish a mission to plan the necessary actions. This will be an implementation mission and not a research and development mission aimed at academic/research communities. It will primarily involve strong development and support teams of engineers and a capable project management team to coordinate activities.

There is ample expertise in both industry and academia to make it happen, provided a viable model is established. The government will need to play an enabling role, but should focus on establishing a self-sustaining model as early as possible.

Let us embark on the long march toward technological independence.

GS. Paper 03 – Science & Technology

UPSC Mains Practice Question: India's political independence will remain incomplete without technological independence." Discuss the need for technological sovereignty for India and suggest measures to achieve it.(150 Words)

Context :

India celebrated its 79th Independence Day in 2025, but political sovereignty alone does not guarantee true independence. In today's world, technological sovereignty is critical as modern economies, security, and governance depend on digital systems, hardware, and software controlled by a few global players.

Current Affairs Context

- Modern wars are increasingly cyber-driven — drones, AI, and cyberattacks on critical infrastructure (banks, grids, railways).
- Dependence on foreign cloud, AI, and software platforms exposes India to serious vulnerabilities.
- Example: cloud services being cut off to a company highlighted real-world risks.
- India lacks indigenous foundational software and hardware ecosystems.
- Call for a national mission to build software and hardware autonomy, leveraging open-source models.

Static Background

- Technological Sovereignty: The ability of a nation to design, build, and control critical technological infrastructure without external dependence.
- India's current position:
  - Heavy reliance on imported hardware (semiconductors, servers).
  - Software ecosystems (OS, cloud platforms, databases) dominated by U.S.-based corporations.
  - Growing cyber security threats → e.g., ransomware attacks on AIIMS (2022), repeated power grid cyberattacks.
- Relevant Policies & Initiatives:
  - National Policy on Electronics 2019.
  - India Semiconductor Mission (2021) with ₹76,000 crore incentive scheme.
  - Digital India, National Cyber Security Policy, Make in India, Startup India.

Key Issues Identified

1. **Software Dependence:**
   - India lacks its own OS, databases, or cloud platforms.
   - Reliance on proprietary U.S. platforms (Microsoft, Google, AWS).

2. **Hardware Vulnerability:**
   - No indigenous semiconductor fabs.
   - Supply chains concentrated in East Asia.
   - Risk of disruptions during geopolitical tensions.
3. **Open-Source Potential:**
   - Linux, Android, Hadoop → available but need long-term support, adaptation, and user base.
   - Challenge: sustainable funding and maintenance.
4. **National Security Concerns:**
   - Backdoors in foreign tech can be exploited.
   - Critical infrastructure (banking, defence, power grids) vulnerable to remote shutdowns.

Way Forward / Recommendations

1. **Software Sovereignty:**
   - Build indigenous OS (Linux/Android-based, with security vetting).
   - Develop client-side (databases, email, calendar) & server-side (web, cloud, mail) solutions.
   - Establish continuous update teams → "Product Teams" like private companies.
2. **Hardware Sovereignty:**
   - Focus first on chip design and assembly partnerships.
   - Long-term investment in fabs with global collaboration.
   - Encourage fabless startups and semiconductor R&D.
3. **Open-Source as Social Movement:**
   - Mobilise India's large IT workforce into collaborative national projects.
   - Build sustainable business models (subscriptions, support services) instead of pure government dependence.
4. **Institutional Mission:**
   - Launch a National Mission on Technological Independence.
   - Implementation-driven, not academic.
   - Include academia + industry experts + startup ecosystem.
   - Government to play facilitator role, not sole funder.

Analysis for UPSC

Prelims Pointers

- India Semiconductor Mission (2021).
- Forest Rights Act (2006) vs Protection of Aboriginal Tribes Act (1956) (from earlier Nicobar Q).
- Linux & Android → examples of open-source foundational software.

Mains (GS-III: S&T, Security, Economy)

- Criticality: Tech dependence = strategic vulnerability.
- Opportunities: India's large IT talent pool + startup culture.
- Challenges: Lack of funding, fragmented ecosystem, absence of indigenous fabs.
- Comparative Insight:
    - U.S. & China investing heavily in AI, quantum, chips.
    - EU pushing "technological sovereignty" through GDPR, Gaia-X (cloud independence).

Conclusion

India's political independence in 1947 was hard-earned. But in 2025, true independence requires technological sovereignty. Building indigenous software and hardware ecosystems is not optional — it is essential for economic resilience, cyber security, and strategic autonomy. The way forward is a collective national mission combining open-source innovation, sustainable business models, and long-term investment in hardware.

India's journey to technological independence must be a peaceful, collaborative, and inclusive march, just like its freedom struggle — ensuring that the nation's digital backbone is trusted, indigenous, and future-ready.