

DAILY **CURRENT AFFAIRS**

SPECIAL FOR UPSC & GPSC EXAMINATION

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The pendency of cases in the Supreme Court has reached an all-time high of 88,417 (September 2025), despite the Court functioning at its full sanctioned judicial strength of 34 judges. This highlights a structural problem in India's judicial system where backlog and delay have become endemic, raising concerns about access to justice and the efficiency of the judiciary.

Current Affairs Context

- Pendency data (Sep 2025): 69,553 civil + 18,864 criminal cases pending.
- Filing vs Disposal (Aug 2025): 7,080 cases filed vs 5,667 disposed → disposal rate 80.04%.
- Annual trend (2025): 52,630 cases filed; 46,309 disposed (~88%).
- Historical trend: Pendency touched 82,000 in 2024; rising continuously since the pandemic years.
- **Administrative efforts:**
 - CJI B.R. Gavai turned summer recess (May–July 2025) into "partial working days" → 21 benches functioned.
 - Government clearing collegium recommendations within 48 hours (unlike past delays).
- Yet: backlog continues to rise, showing systemic mismatch between inflow and outflow of cases.

Static Dimension: Judicial Backlog in India

- Article 21 (Right to speedy trial): Long pendency undermines fundamental rights.
- Article 32 & 136: SC as guardian of Constitution and final appellate authority → workload inherently high.

Case pendency continues to plague the SC as backlog hits all-time high of 88,417

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The pendency of cases in the Supreme Court has reached an all-time high of 88,417, even when the court is currently functioning with its full sanctioned judicial strength of 34 judges.

The court has 69,553 civil cases and 18,864 criminal matters pending currently, the National Judicial Data Grid shows. The filing of fresh cases in August surpassed the disposal rate. A total of 7,080 cases were instituted in the court in August. The court has managed a disposal rate of 5,667 cases in the month, that is, 80.04% of the cases filed. The escalation in pendency is despite Chief Justice B.R. Gavai's decision to have more Benches working through the long summer recess of the court in a bid to decrease the case log.

Working on holidays

The CJI had renamed the summer holidays from May 23 to July "partial working days". The CJI and five senior-most judges of the court had presided over the first batch of Benches hearing cases during the summer recess. A total of 21 Benches sat in batches throughout the "partial working days", hearing and disposing of cases, till the court reopened in July.

In 2025, 52,630 cases were filed while 46,309, nearly 88%, were disposed of during a year which has already seen two Chief Justices of India with a third, Justice Surya Kant, expected to be sworn in in late November. The corres-

Delayed justice

The Supreme Court continues to battle the problem of pendency of cases

Current pendency

88,417 cases, an all-time high

Civil cases **69,553**

Criminal cases **18,864**

AUGUST DATA

Cases instituted **7,080**

Cases disposed **5,667**

Disposal rate **80.04%** (of cases in August)

2025 ANNUAL DATA

Cases filed **52,630**

Cases disposed **46,309** (nearly 88%)

Judicial strength: The court is currently functioning with its full sanctioned strength of 34 judges

The escalation is despite decision to have more Benches working during the SC's summer recess

ponding period in 2024 had seen a similar climb in pendency to a then peak of over 82,000 cases. The increase in pendency persists despite successive Chief Justices, from Justice D.Y. Chandrachud to Justice Gavai, taking care to maintain judicial vacancy in the top court to a minimum, if not zero.

The unceasing increase in backlog has become a perennial phenomenon since the pandemic years, and especially since 2023. The pendency had continued to rise steadily despite Justice Chandrachud, when he was CJI, acting swiftly to fill vacancies in the top court. His successors to the top judge post, Justices Sanjiv Khanna and Gavai, have spearheaded

their own collegiums to promptly recommend names of judges to the government.

Past Chief Justices and even collegium resolutions have raised the issue of "huge workload".

A November 2023 collegium resolution had mentioned the bare truth that the court cannot afford even one vacancy, taking into account the "ever mounting pendency of cases". "The workload of judges has increased considerably. Bearing in mind the above, it has become necessary to ensure that the court has full working judge-strength leaving no vacancy at any point of time," the collegium had underscored.

The recent months have seen the government approve collegium recommendations for appointment to the Supreme Court without delay, often within 48 hours. Yet, the backlog continues to rise steadily.

- Judge-to-population ratio: India ~21 judges per million (HC+SC+subordinate) vs US ~107, UK ~51.
- **Causes of pendency:**
 - Rising litigation culture.
 - SC entertaining routine appeals instead of focusing only on constitutional matters.
 - Procedural adjournments, frequent PILs.
 - Lack of technology adoption at full scale.
 - Shortage of judges at lower judiciary feeding pendency upward.

Challenges

1. Mismatch between institution and disposal – More cases filed than disposed each year.
2. Structural overload – SC acting both as Constitutional Court and appellate court.
3. Administrative inefficiency – Long vacations, despite partial reforms.
4. Resource limitations – Courtrooms, infrastructure, and research support staff inadequate.
5. Socio-economic cost – Delay erodes trust in judiciary, affects business climate, and denies timely justice to common citizens.

Reforms & Way Forward

- Constitutional Court Model: Restrict SC to constitutional matters; set up a National Court of Appeal for routine appeals (recommended by Law Commission & various expert committees).
- Technology adoption: AI-enabled case management, e-filing, digital courts, “virtual benches.”
- Process reforms: Curtail adjournments, streamline PIL admission, strict case management rules.
- Judicial capacity building: Increase sanctioned strength in lower judiciary; create specialised benches.
- ADR mechanisms: Mediation, arbitration, LokAdalats to reduce inflow.
- Balanced vacations: Continue partial working during recess with rotation system.

Conclusion

The record pendency in the Supreme Court despite full judicial strength, fast-tracked appointments, and partial working holidays shows that India’s judicial backlog is not merely an issue of vacancies but of systemic design. Unless India reimagines the role of the Supreme Court, strengthens lower courts, and embraces technology-driven reforms, the principle of “justice delayed is justice denied” will remain a lived reality. The challenge is not only administrative but constitutional – to ensure that the apex court remains the true guardian of rights and justice for all citizens.

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Ques: With reference to the pendency of cases in the Supreme Court of India, consider the following statements:

1. The sanctioned judicial strength of the Supreme Court is 34 judges including the Chief Justice of India.
2. In August 2025, the disposal rate of cases in the Supreme Court was higher than the filing rate.
3. The judge-to-population ratio in India is significantly lower compared to the USA and the UK.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Ans: (b)

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques: The Supreme Court of India continues to face mounting pendency despite functioning at its full sanctioned strength. Analyse the reasons behind this rising backlog and suggest reforms to address the challenge. **(250 Words)**

India's quest for energy self-reliance (Atmanirbharta in energy) got a major boost with the inauguration of the world's first green bamboo bioethanol plant at Golaghat, Assam. This aligns with India's clean energy commitments, ethanol blending targets, and the larger vision of Viksit Bharat 2047.

PM inaugurates India's first bamboo-based ethanol plant

Golaghat facility billed as world's first green bamboo bioethanol plant; ₹7,230-crore polypropylene project also initiated at Numaligarh Refinery; the facility aims to reduce dependence on fossil fuels

The Hindu Bureau
GUWAHATI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday underscored the need for India to be self-sufficient in energy. He was speaking after inaugurating the country's first bamboo-based ethanol plant in eastern Assam's Golaghat district.

He laid the foundation stone for a ₹7,230-crore polypropylene plant at the Numaligarh Refinery. The project will be established near the ₹5,000-crore bioethanol plant, a "zero-waste" facility described as the world's first to produce ethanol from green bamboo.

Terming the bioethanol plant a step toward ensuring energy security, Mr. Modi said the facility aimed to promote clean energy and reduce dependence on fossil fuels.

"Assam is a land that supports India's energy efficiency. The petroleum products from Assam are accelerating the development of India. The BJP government is trying to take this capacity of Assam to a new level," he said at a public event.

"India is one of the fastest-growing economies in



Clean energy: Prime Minister Narendra Modi during the inauguration of Assam Bio-Ethanol Private Ltd. (ABEL), Numaligarh Refinery Plant, in Golaghat on Sunday. PTI

the world now. Our energy needs have been increasing with our Viksit Bharat dream. We spend crores of rupees on imports as we are dependent on other countries for energy. We want to change this by trying to achieve self-sufficiency in energy," the Prime Minister said.

Deep-water exploration

"While we are focusing on hydrocarbon exploration, we are also laying stress on green energy like solar," he said, highlighting the country's national deep-water exploration mission to

look for hydrocarbons under the sea. Referring to the bioethanol plant, Mr. Modi said it would benefit local farmers and tribal communities.

"The government will help them grow and procure the products to ensure a win-win situation," he said. He criticised the erstwhile Congress governments for penalising people for cutting bamboo, which was earlier categorised as a tree. He said the BJP government removed the ban on bamboo cutting and stressed that the decision was helping the locals

in this part of the country.

Numaligarh Refinery Limited (NRL) officials said five lakh tonnes of green bamboo would be sourced yearly from four northeastern States, including Arunachal Pradesh and Assam, to produce 48,900 tonnes of ethanol, 11,000 tonnes of acetic acid, 19,000 tonnes of furfural, and 31,000 tonnes of food-grade liquid carbon dioxide. A joint venture of NRL and Finland's Fortum and Chempolis OY, the plant is expected to give a ₹200-crore boost to Assam's rural economy.

Current Affairs Context

- Project details: Assam Bio-Ethanol Pvt. Ltd. (ABEL), set up at Numaligarh Refinery, Golaghat.
- Scale: Investment of ₹5,000 crore; additional ₹7,230 crore polypropylene project initiated.

- Production capacity: Annually 48,900 tonnes of ethanol, 11,000 tonnes of acetic acid, 19,000 tonnes of furfural, and 31,000 tonnes of food-grade CO₂.
- Feedstock: 5 lakh tonnes of bamboo to be sourced from Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, and other NE states.
- Economic impact: ₹200 crore boost to Assam's rural economy, benefiting tribal and bamboo-growing communities.
- Technology: Joint venture of Numaligarh Refinery Ltd., Finland's Fortum, and Chempolis OY; "zero-waste facility."

Static Linkages

- Ethanol Blending Programme (EBP): India aims for 20% ethanol blending by 2025-26 (advanced from 2030 target).
- National Biofuel Policy 2018: Encourages 2G ethanol from non-food biomass (crop residue, bamboo, agri-waste).
- Energy Security: India imports ~85% of crude oil; biofuels reduce import dependence.
- Environmental Benefits: Bioethanol reduces CO₂ emissions, supports India's Net Zero 2070 pledge.
- Tribal livelihood & bamboo: Bamboo reclassified as a "grass" in 2017 amendment to the Indian Forest Act → freer cultivation and sale.

Socio-Economic Significance

1. Rural empowerment: Provides stable income for bamboo farmers and tribal communities.
2. Industrial growth: Promotes bio-economy and value-added products like acetic acid & furfural.
3. Regional development: Positions Northeast India as an energy and biofuel hub.
4. Import substitution: Reduces crude import bill, saving foreign exchange.
5. Sustainability: Zero-waste technology ensures environmental responsibility.

Challenges

- Feedstock supply chain: Sustainable sourcing of bamboo at such scale is critical.
- Transport & storage: Infrastructure gaps in NE India.
- Cost competitiveness: Bioethanol often costlier than fossil fuels without policy incentives.
- Farmer participation: Requires assured procurement and fair pricing.
- Technology adoption: Scaling up advanced biofuel plants across India remains slow.

Conclusion

The bamboo-based ethanol plant at Golaghat is not just an energy project—it is a socio-economic catalyst linking clean energy with tribal empowerment, regional development, and national energy security. If replicated, such initiatives can help India balance its energy trilemma: affordability, sustainability, and security, while also fulfilling its climate commitments and rural prosperity goals.

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Ques: Consider the following statements regarding India's first bamboo-based ethanol plant:

1. It has been inaugurated in Golaghat district of Assam.
2. It is the world's first zero-waste bioethanol plant producing ethanol from green bamboo.
3. The project is a joint venture between Numaligarh Refinery Ltd. and Finland's Fortum&Chempolis OY.
4. The plant will produce only ethanol as its final output.

Which of the statements are correct?

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

Ans: (a)

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques: The inauguration of India's first bamboo-based ethanol plant marks a step towards energy self-reliance, rural empowerment, and sustainable development. Discuss the socio-economic and environmental significance of this project, while also highlighting the challenges in scaling such initiatives. **(150 Words)**

Food security has been a central challenge for India since Independence. The Green Revolution ensured cereal sufficiency, but nutrition insecurity continues. Recently, FAO Chief Economist Maximo Torero Cullen highlighted that 40.4% of Indians (~60 crore people) cannot afford a healthy diet (2024). Although a major improvement from 74.1% in 2021 (SOFI report), the figure still reveals deep nutritional inequality.

India must invest more in accelerating diversification of food production: FAO Chief Economist Maximo Cullen

A.M. Jigeesh
NEW DELHI

About 40.4% of the Indian population (approximately 60 crore people) are unable to afford a healthy meal, says Maximo Torero Cullen, Chief Economist, Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations.

Talking to *The Hindu*, Dr. Cullen said the number was a significant decrease from the FAO's assessment in 2023 that 74.1% of India's population was unable to afford a healthy diet in 2021.

He said India needed to start to invest more in accelerating the diversification of food production.

Dr. Cullen said India played a crucial role in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals of zero hunger by 2030 because of

the level, size, and population of the country.

"Reduction of hunger in India affects the world and affects, of course, South Asia. So India, I think, has a huge role to play. That's why we believe it's so important that they continue and accelerate the transformation. India needs to move to the higher level – that is access to healthy diets, which right now is 40.4% of the population. So we need to improve that even more and also to find ways to assure this today and tomorrow," he said.

"The Green Revolution played its role, but now it's time to do more. So don't forget about it, but do more. We need to do more," Dr. Cullen said.

On the FAO's assessment in 2023 that 74.1% of India's population was unable to afford a healthy diet



Maximo Torero Cullen

in 2021, he said that in 2024, the percentage of the population that could not afford a healthy meal was 40.4.

"The methodology is improved. So yes, there is an important decrease. So the number to compare is basically to look at the State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World [SOFI] of this year to look at

the previous year's number. But yes, there is a significant improvement, but still it's too high. Healthy diet is diversity. It means fruits and vegetables, proteins, and also means cereals. More than 40% of the country's population cannot afford a healthy diet. So it's a minimum cost to healthy diet," the FAO Chief Economist said.

Address the situation

Dr. Cullen added that the immediate step the Indian government should take to address the situation was diversification.

"India needs to start to invest more in accelerating the diversification of production. To move from cereals to high-value commodities. Pulses could be an option because they are more nutritious, they also have proteins. So pulses is

an option and this is very consistent with your culture. But India should move more to fruits and vegetables and that requires an effort because you will need to substitute at some point," he said.

Tariff war

On the tariff war, he said the first problem of tariffs was inefficiencies.

"You will be more inefficient in the way you move commodities. Because before you were optimising the world, now the world is segmented. The world that wants low tariffs, but the world that has now high tariffs. The second issue is uncertainty. The changes of tariffs every day has created a lot of uncertainty and that complicates markets. Although markets have already learned how to manage this uncertain-

ty, so things don't change too much," he said.

He, however, said the impact of food insecurity due to tariffs was not so high, but inefficiencies would be high.

"But assume they get into a situation where you play tit-for-tat, then this could be very dangerous. It's not happening at this point, countries are not responding. So let's see how it evolves, but uncertainty and inefficiencies will make us less resilient for sure, because we will have less places where to have food access because of the tariffs. It will affect farmers, it will affect the smallholders, especially will affect the farmers who are more linked to the markets. But what will happen at the end is that you will have a segmented trade," he said.

Current Affairs Context

• FAO Data:

- 2021 – 74.1% of population couldn't afford a healthy diet.
- 2024 – reduced to 40.4% (methodological improvement + economic growth).

• Healthy diet definition: Balance of cereals, pulses, proteins, fruits, vegetables.

• FAO recommendation:

- Diversify food production from cereals → pulses, fruits, vegetables.
- Invest in nutrition-sensitive agriculture.
- Move beyond calorie sufficiency to *dietary diversity*.

Static Linkages

- Food Security in India:

- NFSA 2013 covers ~75% rural and 50% urban population → ensures cereal access, not full nutrition.
- PDS is still heavily cereal-centric (rice, wheat).
- ICDS & Mid-Day Meal schemes aim at nutrition but face quality gaps.
- SDGs: Goal 2 → Zero Hunger by 2030.
- Economic context: 18–20% Indians still undernourished (FAO estimates).

Key Issues

1. Cereal-centric policy: Success of Green Revolution has locked focus on wheat & rice.
2. Nutrition gap: Pulses, fruits, vegetables, animal proteins still costly → unaffordable for poor.
3. Climate stress: Rising temperatures & erratic rainfall impact nutrition-rich crops.
4. Smallholder vulnerability: Farmers lack incentives to diversify; procurement focuses on rice/wheat.
5. Trade/tariff issues: Global tariff wars raise inefficiency & uncertainty, affecting food access and farmers.

Way Forward

- Diversification: Incentivise pulses, millets (IYM 2023 momentum), fruits, vegetables.
- Reform PDS: Move gradually towards nutrient basket instead of only cereals.
- Agri-investments: Cold chains, storage, processing for perishables.
- Nutrition-sensitive policies: Integrate agriculture, health, education (nutrition gardens, biofortification).
- International cooperation: Ensure stable trade regime to avoid tariff shocks.
- Local solutions: Empower smallholders & tribal communities to grow diverse crops.

Conclusion

India has achieved foodgrain sufficiency, but true food security means ensuring access to affordable, diverse, and nutritious diets. The reduction from 74.1% to 40.4% population unable to afford healthy food is progress, but still far from satisfactory. As FAO underscores, the next revolution must be a “Nutrition Revolution” — shifting from quantity to quality, from cereals to diversity. By doing so, India can not only achieve SDG-2 but also set a global example in linking agriculture with nutrition security.

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Ques : With reference to Food Security in India, consider the following statements:

1. As per FAO's 2024 assessment, about 40.4% of India's population cannot afford a healthy diet.
2. Pulses are considered a good diversification option because they are protein-rich and culturally relevant to India.
3. The Green Revolution has ensured complete nutritional security in India.
4. Diversification of agriculture towards fruits and vegetables is necessary to achieve SDG-2 (Zero Hunger).

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

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

Ans : c)

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques: Examine how tariff wars and global trade uncertainties impact India's food security and smallholder farmers. Suggest policy measures to build resilience in agricultural trade. **(150 Words)**

Page 09 : GS 2 : Social Justice / Prelims

India has entered a transformative phase in higher education with top foreign universities establishing campuses in India under UGC's 2023 regulations. A U.K. university has already begun operations in Gurugram (2025–26 session), with more to follow in Bengaluru, Chennai, Mumbai, and NCR. This marks a significant step in realising the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 vision of making Indian higher education globally competitive while remaining locally rooted.

Current Context

- **Policy Reform:** UGC (2023) allowed top-ranking foreign universities to set up campuses with operational autonomy and regulatory clarity.
- **Implementation:** 12 LoIs (Letters of Intent) issued; one campus functional already.
- **Demand Factors:** Rising aspirational youth, India's growing economy, and demand for new-age fields (AI, design, data science, sustainability).
- **Institutional Ecosystem:** Reforms like multidisciplinary curriculum, Anusandhan National Research Foundation (research funding), digital infrastructure, and outcome-based accreditation.

Bringing global education home

Based on the University Grants Commission's recommendations, the Ministry of Education has handed over twelve letters of intent to top foreign universities to establish their campuses in India during the last year. One U.K. university has already opened its doors in Gurugram, launching its programmes for the 2025-26 academic session, with the remaining universities setting up campuses in Bengaluru, Chennai, Mumbai and the National Capital Region. The fact that world-class universities are establishing their physical campuses in India shows our conscious policy realignment. It opens new opportunities for our students and expands educational horizons in ways we could hardly imagine a decade ago.

The beginning point for this development is a regulation introduced by the University Grants Commission (UGC) in 2023. The idea is to allow top-ranking foreign universities to establish campuses in India with operational autonomy and regulatory clarity. The UGC took this calibrated decision to align with the vision of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. At its core, NEP 2020 calls for re-imagining higher education to be globally competitive while remaining locally rooted. Facilitating the establishment of global university campuses in India constitutes a direct implementation of that objective.

Why now?

India stands at an inflexion point. With a large aspirational youth population, India has a rapidly expanding and stable economy. Our start-up economy ranks among the fastest-growing globally and is a crucible of global innovation. There is a demand for quality higher education, especially in new-age fields such as AI, design, data science, sustainability, and finance.

Foreign universities are not arriving on empty ground. They are coming into a country already



Mamidala Jagadeesh Kumar

is former Chairman, University Grants Commission, and former Vice-Chancellor, Jawaharlal Nehru University

undergoing serious educational reform. Multidisciplinary is being actively built into the curriculum. We are adopting hybrid educational delivery mechanisms using digital public infrastructure. Research funding is being streamlined through the Anusandhan National Research Foundation. Quality assurance mechanisms are becoming more outcome-oriented due to the reforms in accreditation. Foreign universities see the potential. Many western institutions face diverse challenges, including rising operational costs, demographic changes, and expanding globally. Establishing campuses in countries with a high youth population and growing intellectual capital makes strategic sense. India offers both.

Local advantage, global gains

For students in India, its long-term impact could be truly consequential. Access to international-quality education without the high costs of going abroad changes the game entirely. Families no longer have to stretch their finances or send their children halfway across the world. The benefits go beyond academic degrees. Students will have exposure to diverse peer networks, industry partnerships, and entrepreneurial ecosystems embedded within the country.

And here lies a critical point. Students who might not have considered international education due to economic or social constraints can make that possibility real now. From the parents' perspective, the appeal is straightforward. They want their children to have the best possible education, and they want to feel secure in that choice. Sending a child abroad involves logistical, emotional, and financial complications. With global campuses coming to Indian cities, that equation changes.

This situation, in turn, raises the bar for Indian institutions as well. Healthy competition never hurts a system. When foreign

university campuses in India offer cutting-edge programmes, our universities must innovate, reflect, and re-energise their models. There is a strong case for research collaboration, too. For instance, we have seen IITs, IISERs, AIIMS, central universities, and State universities collaborate with global partners on areas such as renewable energy, public health, and engineering. Australian and U.K. universities share strong educational collaborations with Indian universities. European and U.S. universities are intensifying linkages. These collaborations support research, innovation, and skills development.

Education powerhouse

India is a rising power in technology, diplomacy, and manufacturing. Yet, we rarely speak of our potential in global education with the same conviction. India must position itself as an emerging force in international education not by imitating the western university model, but by drawing the world to engage with us on our terms, within our cultural, intellectual, and societal landscape. India's centuries-old tradition of scholarship, from Nalanda to Shantiniketan, should not be seen as relics of the past, but as living sources of credibility in shaping a distinctive, modern learning environment. India already draws thousands of international students each year, yet the scale is negligible compared to our potential. Some claim that prioritising global education is a distraction from India's domestic needs. The truth is the opposite. Inviting the world's students, researchers, and institutions to work with us here also lifts our universities' quality, resources, and ambitions. To ignore this is to allow other nations to monopolise the narrative of what "world-class education" means, while we remain consumers instead of shapers of that narrative.

The views expressed are personal

Students who might not have considered international education due to economic or social constraints can make that possibility real now

Static Linkages

- **NEP 2020:** Calls for internationalisation of education and academic collaboration.
- **Historic role:** India has been a global knowledge hub (Nalanda, Takshashila, Shantiniketan).
- **Brain Drain Issue:** India sends 13–15 lakh students abroad annually, spending ~\$30–40 billion in forex outflow. Local campuses can reduce this outflow.
- **Soft Power:** Education as a tool of diplomacy, enhancing India's global influence.

Socio-Economic Significance

1. Accessibility: Students get world-class education without high costs of going abroad.
2. Equity: Opens doors for middle-class and socially constrained families who couldn't afford overseas education.
3. Competition & Quality: Raises the bar for Indian universities to innovate and modernise.
4. Research Collaboration: Potential for joint research in renewable energy, public health, engineering, AI.
5. Economic Value: Boosts local industry linkages, creates jobs, and strengthens India's knowledge economy.
6. Global Positioning: Helps India emerge as a hub of international education, complementing its rising status in tech and manufacturing.

Challenges

- Level Playing Field: Indian institutions may struggle to compete with foreign universities in resources and brand appeal.
- Affordability: Even in India, fees of foreign campuses may remain high, limiting inclusivity.
- Regulatory Clarity: Need for strong safeguards to ensure academic freedom without exploitation.
- Domestic Priorities: Balancing globalisation of education with urgent reforms in India's vast state universities facing infrastructure and faculty shortages.

Conclusion

The arrival of foreign universities in India represents a paradigm shift in higher education policy — from being a consumer of global education to becoming a shaper of it. While challenges of affordability, equity, and regulatory balance remain, this move can reduce brain drain, spur innovation, and integrate India into global knowledge networks. If aligned with India's civilisational ethos and NEP 2020 goals, this initiative could help India position itself not only as an economic powerhouse, but also as a global education hub for the 21st century.

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Ques: Consider the following statements regarding the recent initiative of establishing foreign university campuses in India:

1. It is enabled under University Grants Commission (UGC) regulations of 2023.
2. It is aligned with the objectives of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.
3. Foreign universities will have complete operational autonomy.
4. Only universities from G-20 countries are allowed to open campuses in India.

Which of the statements are correct?

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

Ans :a)

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques: Allowing top-ranking foreign universities to establish campuses in India may create opportunities but also challenges for Indian higher education institutions. Critically examine. **(150 Words)**

Page 10 : GS 3 : Science and Technology / Prelims

The Supreme Court in *Kattavellai Devakar v. State of Tamil Nadu* (2025) has issued uniform guidelines on the handling of DNA samples in criminal cases. The intervention came after the Court noticed lapses in the *chain of custody* and unexplained delays in sending samples for forensic analysis, raising doubts about contamination and reliability.

What do SC guidelines say on DNA?

Why did the Supreme Court intervene in DNA samples in criminal cases? What lapses did the court uncover? What has the court said about DNA reliability in past rulings? What do the new guidelines mandate? Is DNA alone enough to convict?

EXPLAINER

R.K. Vij

The story so far:

The Supreme Court, in *Kattavellai @ Devakar v. State of Tamil Nadu*, recently issued guidelines to maintain the integrity of deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) samples in criminal cases. The court directed the Director Generals of Police of all States to prepare sample forms of the Chain of Custody Register and all other necessary documentation as directed, and to ensure their dispatch to all districts with instructions.

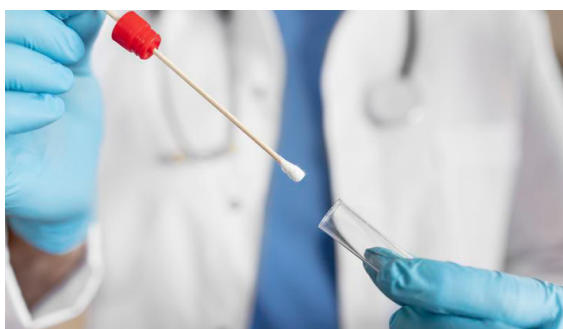
What was the need to issue such directions?

The court, in the above case involving rape, murder, and robbery with an attempt to cause death, found significant unexplained delays in sending samples of the vaginal swabs to the Forensic Science Laboratory (FSL) for DNA analysis. Moreover, the chain of custody of the sample could not be established. Under such circumstances, the court held that the possibility of sample contamination could not be ruled out.

The court observed that although some guidelines have been issued by various bodies, there is neither uniformity nor a common procedure required to be followed by all investigating authorities. Even though 'Police' and 'Public Order' are subjects mentioned in the State List of the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution, the Supreme Court deemed it necessary to issue these guidelines to have uniformity of procedure.

What are the guidelines?

The Supreme Court issued four guidelines for cases where DNA evidence is involved. The first guideline states that the collection of DNA samples once made



DNA is a molecule that encodes the genetic information in all living organisms. GETTY IMAGES

after due care and swift and appropriate packaging, including FIR number and date, the sections and statutes involved, details of the investigating officer, the police station, and the requisite serial number, shall be duly documented. The document recording the collection must include the signatures and designations of the medical professional present, the investigating officer, and independent witnesses.

Second, the investigating officer shall be responsible for the transportation of the DNA evidence (sample) to the concerned police station or hospital, as the case may be. He must also ensure that the samples reach the concerned FSL within 48 hours of collection. In the event of any delay, the reasons must be recorded, and all efforts should be made to preserve the samples.

Third, while samples are stored pending trial or appeal, no package shall be opened, altered, or resealed without express authorisation from the trial court.

The fourth guideline states that from the time of collection to the logical end, i.e., conviction or acquittal of the

accused, a Chain of Custody Register must be maintained. This register must be appended to the trial court record. The investigating officer is responsible for explaining any lapses in compliance.

What has the Supreme Court said so far?

The DNA profiles have a tremendous impact on criminal investigations. In *Anil v. State of Maharashtra* (2014), the Supreme Court observed that a DNA profile is valid and reliable, but this depends on quality control and procedure in the laboratory. However, in the *Devakar* case, the court said that quality control and procedure outside the laboratory are equally important to ensure that the best results can be derived from collected samples.

In a three-judge Bench decision in *Manoj and Ors. v. State of Madhya Pradesh* (2022), the Supreme Court rejected a DNA report on the ground that recovery was made 'from an open area and the likelihood of its contamination cannot be ruled out'. It was also observed that the blood stains found on the articles were

disintegrated, and the quantity was insufficient to run any classification test.

In another case, *Rahul v. State of Delhi, Ministry of Home Affairs* (2022), DNA evidence was 'rejected because it remained in the police Malkhana for two months and during such time, the possibility of tampering could not be ruled out'. It was said that 'the collection and sealing of the samples sent for examination were not free from suspicion'. The court also said the trial court and the High Court did not examine the underlying basis of the findings in the DNA reports or whether the techniques used had been reliably applied by the concerned expert.

Therefore, while the investigating agency needs to ensure that samples are collected properly, without any possibility of contamination, and sent to the FSL without any (unexplained) delay, the expert must also ensure proper quality control and procedure in the FSL.

How important is the DNA evidence in criminal cases?

DNA is a molecule that encodes the genetic information in all living organisms. It can be obtained from biological materials, such as bone, blood, semen, saliva, hair, or skin. Generally, when the DNA profile of a sample found at a crime scene matches the DNA profile of a suspect, it can be concluded that both samples have the same biological origin. However, it is not substantive evidence in criminal cases.

The Supreme Court, in the *Devakar* case, stated that DNA evidence is in the nature of opinion evidence as envisaged under Section 45 of the Evidence Act (Section 39 of the Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam, 2023), and like any other opinion evidence, its probative value varies from case to case. Therefore, DNA evidence must be proved scientifically and legally.

R.K. Vij is a former IPS officer

THE GIST

The Supreme Court has issued uniform guidelines to ensure the integrity of DNA samples in criminal cases, directing strict documentation, swift transfer, and a clear chain of custody.

Past rulings show that lapses in handling have led to DNA reports being rejected, making both proper collection and quality control essential.

Why the Intervention?

- In the case, delays and mishandling of vaginal swab samples meant possible contamination.
- SC found no uniform procedure across States.
- Since 'Police' and 'Public Order' fall under the State List, procedures varied widely.
- Court therefore mandated standard guidelines for all States to ensure integrity of DNA evidence.

Supreme Court Guidelines (2025)

1. Proper Documentation: DNA sample collection must be packaged with FIR details, statutes involved, investigating officer's particulars, and signatures of the doctor, IO, and independent witnesses.
2. Timely Dispatch: Samples to reach FSL within 48 hours; delay must be explained and preservation ensured.
3. Storage: No package shall be opened or resealed without trial court authorisation.
4. Chain of Custody Register: To be maintained from collection till trial/appeal and appended to court records. IO must justify lapses.

Judicial Position on DNA Evidence (Static + Case Law)

- Anil v. State of Maharashtra (2014): DNA profile is reliable, but quality control in labs is critical.
- Manoj v. State of MP (2022): DNA rejected as recovery was from open area, risk of contamination high.
- Rahul v. State of Delhi (2022): DNA discarded as samples stayed in police *Malkhana* for 2 months → tampering suspected.
- Devakar case (2025): Reliability depends not just on lab process but also on handling before lab.

Significance of DNA Evidence

- Nature: DNA evidence is opinion evidence under Section 45 of Evidence Act (now Section 39, Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam, 2023).
- Probative value: Not substantive proof; must be corroborated with other evidence.
- Utility: Powerful tool in sexual offences, homicide, missing persons, paternity disputes.
- Limitations: Risk of contamination, chain-of-custody lapses, misinterpretation.

Challenges

- Lack of forensic infrastructure & trained staff in India.
- Low forensic budget (less than 1% of police expenditure).
- Heavy reliance on confessions & witnesses, not scientific evidence.
- Judicial delays in sending samples, reducing evidentiary value.

Conclusion

DNA technology is a double-edged sword: it can decisively link an accused to a crime, but mishandling makes it unreliable. The SC's new guidelines strengthen integrity, uniformity, and admissibility of DNA evidence in Indian courts. Yet, DNA alone is insufficient for conviction—corroboration is essential.

Going forward, India must invest in forensic infrastructure, training, and technology-driven policing to ensure justice is not only done, but scientifically seen to be done.

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Ques: Consider the following statements about DNA evidence in India:

1. DNA evidence is treated as substantive evidence under the Indian Evidence Act.
2. The Supreme Court has directed that DNA samples must reach the Forensic Science Laboratory (FSL) within 48 hours of collection.
3. A Chain of Custody Register must be maintained until the logical end of the trial.
4. Only the medical professional present during collection needs to sign the DNA evidence documentation.

Which of the above are correct?

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

Ans: b)

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques: "India's West Asia policy represents a delicate act of balancing between moral principles and realpolitik." Critically analyse with reference to the Israel-Palestine conflict. **(150 Words)**

Positioning India in an unruly world

An article, in *Foreign Affairs*, titled "India's Great Power Delusions - How New Delhi's Grand Strategy Thwarts Its Grand Ambitions" (July/August 2025), is creating a storm in the proverbial tea cup. The article's key point is that India had 'delusions' of grandeur, and about becoming a Great Power, and that this lacked substance. More to the point, the article talks disparagingly about India, stating that it stood nowhere in the race between China and the United States, as far as the Great Power sweepstakes are concerned.

Not unexpectedly, this has ruffled feathers, at a time when India had begun to believe that it was on the cusp of overcoming the 'middle income trap' and emerging into the category of a Big Power. This may be termed delusional by some, but India's belief in its future is not new and has strong foundations. What may be faulted is the writer's premise that India and China are on the cusp of a conflict, and that India would need the United States' assistance to counter Chinese aggression. Both India and China are civilisational powers, though they have adopted different paths to progress. Neither country is, however, ready for a round of conflict, notwithstanding the existence of certain border issues between them. However, given India's experience in 1962 and 1971, when the U.S. went out of its way to remove any doubts that India might have had about U.S. support, the former is not looking for its aid in any future conflict.

The tenor of this article would suggest that the U.S. currently thinks that it can wield the big stick of the 'tariff war' to compel India to fall in line with its wishes. Lost in translation, however, is that Donald Trump's America is unable to comprehend the fact that the more advanced civilisations of the east, such as India and China, are not thinking of war or conflict at this time. Recent events and the meetings in Tianjin confirm this, and further demonstrate that India and China, along with Russia, constitute a strong phalanx against those anxious to disrupt the current world order – at least as far as Asia is concerned.

A closer look at the India story

It may, nevertheless, be worth analysing whether India's Big Power ambitions are indeed out of sync with reality. Also, whether it is wrong for India to start believing that achieving Great Power status is within reach. The first mistake made by critics is that India has never made the claim that it was about to overtake China in the near future. Or that it was within striking distance of the U.S. The worst that India can be accused of is to start believing that it had indeed pulled well ahead of a pack of nations that had started with similar hopes, and that India had succeeded in overcoming the 'middle income trap' – reaching striking distance of their main objective.



M.K. Narayanan

is a former Director, Intelligence Bureau, a former National Security Adviser, and a former Governor of West Bengal

The derisive tone adopted by the writer of the article does seem to reflect an element of outrage at India's claims to progress. There is, however, a great deal to be said in favour of India's growth story, and, even more so, in the manner in which it has been achieved, in sharp contrast to that of countries such as China.

The Americans cannot be faulted for not reading or understanding history since this is not in their DNA. But India's spectacular transformation, from a 'famine affected' nation, through the Green Revolution, to becoming an exporter of food grains is, perhaps, unrivalled in the history of modern or even ancient times. Economic progress, rather than accumulating military strength, was the sine qua non of India's existence during its early years of independence, and provided the backbone for future progress. Butter before guns was the motto.

Nevertheless, and throughout this period, India exercised a degree of moral authority – that most countries including the U.S. have seldom exercised – to emerge as a balancing factor in international relations. This has few, if any, equals in politics post the Second World War. It is India that coined and propagated a new philosophy in international relations, viz., the concept of Non Alignment, at a time when the world was split into two rival and conflicting orthodoxies; it helped safeguard the identity and hopes of newer nations post 1945, that did not wish to be aligned with either of the two rival blocs headed by the U.S. and Russia, respectively. India often acted as an arbiter in conflicts at the time (such as the Korean War in the 1950s), gaining international acclaim.

In the eyes of the West

The U.S.-China 'bromance' in the 1970s – achieved through the mesmerising diplomacy of then U.S. Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, and his friendship with China's Deng Xiaoping – which transformed the attitude of the U.S. and of the West to China's potential as a market, had the effect of diminishing India's importance in western eyes, especially that of the U.S. Simultaneously, India's close friendship with Russia proved to be an irritant, further cemented with the signing of the India-Soviet Treaty of 1971. The 1974 nuclear test in the Pokhran desert – 'Buddha is Smiling' – aggravated this situation further.

The imperious tone of the *Foreign Affairs* article betrays a lack of understanding about India's ability to manage contradictions of every kind. India's relations with the U.S. vastly improved since the turn of the century, reaching a high point following the India-U.S. Civil Nuclear Agreement in 2008. But this happened even as India-U.S. relations were still far from warm. Many irritants remain, the most nagging of them being India's reliance on Russian weapons, and,

more recently, Russian oil, despite U.S. opposition.

This is despite India having more than made up for this by joining the Quad (Australia, India, Japan, the U.S.). Managing contradictions is among the key strengths that this country has derived from its civilisational past, which is little understood by countries in the West, specially those in the far West such as the U.S. The mandarins in the U.S. are, hence, unable to comprehend how India and China, despite being embroiled in a border dispute, can also be friends, as evidenced during the recent Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Summit. Even more confusing for the West is the 'entente cordiale' between China, India and Russia, as demonstrated on this occasion.

Technological superiority is the driver

What is truly delusional, however, is the failure of the West to recognise the real impetus in world affairs today, which stems from the 'empires of the mind'. In this respect, the U.S. today has far fewer cards to deal. This is the age of the 'cybernated generation' and the digital fortress is being breached today by countries with evolved civilisations such as China, India, Japan and Vietnam.

Harvesting data is today the main weapon of choice – and this is very different from employing 'laser weapons'. Technological superiority is leading to new digital colonies, and the U.S. can at best, and only for now, claim a marginal advantage over countries such as India. India's intrinsic capacity in this area, meanwhile, shows strong and steady growth. Those like the writer of the *Foreign Affairs* article, who scoff at India's strength may, hence, have to repent at leisure.

Rather than casting stones at India, the U.S. and the West would do well to contemplate whether their current lead in critical technologies may soon prove illusory. As a new wave of technology 'geeks' storm and overturn the citadels of the past, and usher in a new world order, this is a real possibility. The West would also do well to realise that the 'Sherpas' that dominate Silicon Valley today, are mainly of Indian and Asian origin.

The U.S.'s lead of today is, thus, at best, ephemeral. India, for its part, is betting on this leap of faith as far as technologies of the future are concerned, and the West would do well to understand them rather than depend on hackneyed themes of countries seeking U.S. support to protect themselves. The sun may well set on the U.S., and much earlier than it realises, even as an India, steeped in the virtues of an ancient civilisation and based on knowledge derived from centuries of civilisational existence, gains ground. Better positioning is more important today rather than indulging in vague concerns.

India's belief in its future is not new and has strong foundations, which the West should understand

GS. Paper 02 – International Relations

UPSC Mains Practice Question : India's ability to manage contradictions in its foreign policy is rooted in its civilisational past." Discuss with reference to India's balancing role between major powers.(150 Words)

Context :

A recent *Foreign Affairs* article titled “*India’s Great Power Delusions*” (July–August 2025) has sparked debate by questioning India’s grand strategy and ability to emerge as a global power. Critics claim India lags far behind the U.S. and China, while Indian analysts argue that such views underestimate India’s civilisational resilience, strategic autonomy, and rising technological and economic capabilities. The debate offers a lens to examine how India positions itself in a turbulent global order.

Static Dimension: India’s Great Power Quest

- Civilisational legacy: India has historically exercised *moral authority* in international relations through *Non-Alignment*, peace diplomacy (e.g., Korean War mediation), and advocacy for the Global South.
- Strategic autonomy: Since independence, India has resisted alignment with great power blocs, instead adopting a multi-vector foreign policy.
- Economic foundations: India prioritised “butter before guns” in the early decades, emphasising food security (Green Revolution) and industrialisation over militarisation.

Current Context: India’s Global Position

- Economic growth: Poised to become the world’s third-largest economy, overcoming the “middle-income trap.”
- Strategic role: Member of QUAD, BRICS+, SCO; balancing ties with U.S., Russia, and China simultaneously.
- Energy and defence: Despite U.S. displeasure, India maintains Russian defence imports and oil purchases, underscoring autonomy.
- Tech frontier: India is investing in *digital public infrastructure, AI, cyber capabilities, and space technology*—critical drivers of future power.
- Geopolitical balancing: Despite border disputes with China, India engages in forums like SCO, while also aligning with U.S.-led security groupings.

Challenges Highlighted by Critics

1. Military asymmetry: India’s defence spending and military capabilities lag behind China and the U.S.
2. Dependence on imports: Heavy reliance on Russian weaponry and global supply chains.
3. Geopolitical vulnerability: Border tensions with China; volatile neighbourhood (Pakistan, Afghanistan).
4. Perception gap: Western scholars often misread India’s civilisational approach as “hesitant” or “delusional.”

India's Strengths in Positioning

- Managing contradictions: Ability to balance U.S. partnership with Russian ties and engage with China where needed.
- Civilisational depth: India leverages history, culture, and diplomacy for global soft power.
- Technology and knowledge economy: From Silicon Valley engineers to indigenous digital platforms, India is emerging as a "knowledge power."
- Global South leadership: Championing reforms in the UN, WTO, and climate negotiations; seen as a voice of developing nations.

Conclusion

India's claim to Great Power status may appear ambitious, but it is not delusional. Unlike China's state-driven rise or the U.S.'s military-industrial dominance, India's ascent rests on civilisational resilience, strategic autonomy, and technology-driven growth. In an unruly world marked by power shifts and uncertainty, India's strength lies in *balancing contradictions while shaping multipolarity*. Rather than accepting dismissive Western narratives, India must continue positioning itself as a knowledge and technology power with moral authority, ensuring its rise is inclusive, sustainable, and uniquely Indian.
