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Page 01: GS 2 : International Relations

India has launched a significant diplomatic outreach involving multi-party parliamentary delegations to over 25 countries across Asia, Africa, Europe, and the Middle East. The move aims to present a united national front on the issue of cross-border terrorism from Pakistan, particularly in the aftermath of Operation Sindoor, which was conducted in response to the Pahalgam terror attack.

Diplomatic outreach visits begin today

Three multi-party delegations will start their journey today and tomorrow, says Ministry

They will highlight cross-border terror from Pakistan while presenting India's doctrine of zero tolerance

The teams will visit countries such as Japan, South Korea, Singapore, Malaysia, DRC, and the UAE

Kallol Bhattacharjee
NEW DELHI

The first three multi-party delegations to international capitals to brief global community about Operation Sindoor will start their journey on Wednesday and Thursday, the Ministry of External Affairs said on Tuesday.

The delegations, over the next fortnight, will highlight that cross-border terrorism from Pakistan continues to be a major disruptor for India while presenting the Indian doctrine of zero tolerance of terror, according to veteran diplomat Syed Akbaruddin, who is part of the diplomatic outreach effort.

"In various countries of

the world, the salience of terrorism over the past two decades has gone down as they are prioritising other issues. For example, T stands for tariff but for us in India, T also stands for terrorism because over several decades now, cross-border terrorism from Pakistan has been a challenge to our social harmony and developmental goals," said Mr. Akbaruddin, who will visit Egypt, Qatar, Ethiopia, and South Africa between May 24 and June 1, along with eight MPs in a delegation led by Supriya Sule of the NCP (SCP).

The first three teams that will leave during Wednesday and Thursday were briefed by Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri on Tuesday.

A united front

The multi-party delegations are expected to meet government functionaries, including Ministers, think-tanks and media during their visits to foreign capitals



■ The group led by Janata Dal (United) leader Sanjay Jha will visit Indonesia, Republic of Korea, Japan, Malaysia, and Singapore



■ The team headed by Shrikant Shinde of Shiv Sena will visit UAE, Liberia, Democratic Republic of Congo, and Sierra Leone



■ The delegation led by DMK leader Kanimozhi is set to visit Russia, Spain, Greece, Slovenia, and Latvia

day. These three teams will also visit Japan, Republic of Korea, Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, the United Arab Emirates, Democratic Republic of Congo, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Russia, Slovenia, Greece, Latvia, and Spain. The other four teams will start their journey during May 23 to 25.

BJP MP Aparajita Sarangi said that apart from the members of the UN Security Council, five other countries have been selected that will become members of the UNSC in the coming days. "So, representatives are going to over 25 nations...This is our message that India stands united

Trinamool, Sena (UBT) relent

The Hindu Bureau
DELHI/KOLKATA

The Trinamool Congress and the Shiv Sena (UBT) have changed their stance on nomination of their MPs to the diplomatic teams after Union Minister Kiren Rijiju reached out to

the party leaders on Tuesday. The Trinamool has named Abhishek Banerjee in place of Yusuf Pathan, while the Sena has endorsed Priyanka Chaturvedi.

FULL REPORT ON
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against terrorism," said Ms. Sarangi.

'Proxy war'

"We will be interacting with a cross-section of people there like the principal state actors, ministers, members of Parliament, academicians. These would be general meetings

set on the general background of Indo-Pak issues and the terror being exported to India from Pakistan," said CPI(M) MP John Brittas, who will be part of the delegation being led by Sanjay Kumar Jha of the Janata Dal (United). This delegation will start its tour in Japan on May 22 and then

proceed to visit the Republic of Korea, Singapore, Indonesia, ending with Malaysia.

Speaking to the media, Mr. Jha said the focus of their campaign would be on the involvement of the Pakistan state and military in the terror attacks against India. "Pakistan State and Pakistan Army are both involved in this. This was done like a proxy war against India," said Mr. Jha.

The government had constituted seven groups consisting of 51 MPs from various political parties to project a united national front before the world community while briefing them about Operation Sindoor that targeted nine terror hubs in Pakistan in response to Pahalgam attack.

Objectives of the Outreach:

- Global sensitization on Pakistan's continued role in sponsoring terrorism against India.
- Reinforcement of India's doctrine of zero tolerance towards terrorism.
- Projecting national unity by including MPs from diverse political backgrounds.
- Strengthening India's position in international diplomatic forums, especially before key members and incoming members of the UN Security Council.

Key Features of the Initiative:

- Seven delegations comprising 51 MPs are visiting various capitals including Tokyo, Seoul, Jakarta, Kuala Lumpur, Abu Dhabi, and Moscow.
- The delegations are engaging with state actors, parliamentarians, academicians, and policy influencers to shape global opinion.

- Emphasis is placed on terrorism being a long-term threat to India's social harmony and development goals, unlike many countries where it is now a lower priority.

Geopolitical Significance:

- The campaign aligns with India's long-standing efforts to isolate Pakistan diplomatically over its terror infrastructure.
- By choosing strategic countries—both regional powers and UNSC stakeholders—India aims to gain multilateral support against terrorism.
- This diplomatic campaign is also a way to counter Pakistan's international narrative, especially in forums like the OIC, UNHRC, and global media.

Unity in Domestic Politics:

- The involvement of MPs across the political spectrum—including from BJP, CPI(M), JD(U), and NCP—conveys strong internal consensus on issues of national security.
- It reflects a rare moment of bipartisan unity in Indian politics, lending credibility to India's external messaging.

Critique and Strategic Considerations:

- While such diplomatic efforts enhance India's soft power and narrative-building, their long-term success depends on sustained engagement and follow-up.
- The real challenge remains in converting diplomatic sympathy into concrete action, such as counter-terror financing mechanisms, blacklisting of entities, and restrictions on arms transfers to Pakistan.
- India must also ensure that this outreach does not appear to internationalize the Kashmir issue, a stance it has historically resisted.

Conclusion:

- India's latest diplomatic initiative post-Operation Sindoor signifies a proactive foreign policy shift, combining hard security responses with soft diplomatic campaigns. By leveraging global platforms and reaching out to influential nations, India seeks to reshape the global discourse on terrorism, ensuring that cross-border terrorism from Pakistan remains a central concern in the global security agenda. The inclusion of opposition MPs adds democratic legitimacy and projects India's national unity in the face of external threats.

UPSC MiansPractice Question

Ques : India has increasingly adopted a proactive diplomatic approach to counter cross-border terrorism. In the context of Operation Sindoor and the recent multi-party delegations, analyze how soft power and parliamentary diplomacy can reinforce national security objectives.

Page 01: GS 2 : Polity and Governance

The Waqf (Amendment) Act, 2025 has come under judicial scrutiny following multiple petitions alleging that the law enables the State to indirectly expropriate Muslim community properties without compensation, thereby violating constitutional guarantees under Articles 25 and 26. Petitioners, led by senior advocates including Kapil Sibal and A.M. Singhvi, have called it a case of "creeping acquisition" that undermines religious freedom and minority rights.

Key Legal and Constitutional Issues Raised

1. Presumption of Constitutionality vs. Prima Facie Breach

- The Supreme Court observed that any parliamentary statute enjoys a presumption of constitutionality.
- However, petitioners argue that this presumption can be rebutted if there is a prima facie violation of fundamental rights, especially when irreparable injury may result from immediate implementation.

2. Alleged Violation of Article 25 and 26

- Petitioners contend that the amendments interfere with the religious and charitable use of Waqf properties, which are protected under Articles 25 (freedom of religion) and 26 (right to manage religious affairs).
- The law allegedly permits the State to unilaterally reclassify Waqf properties as non-Waqf without adequate procedural safeguards.

New Waqf law 'creeping acquisition' of property, petitioners argue in SC

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

Countering the Supreme Court's observation that a parliamentary statute like the Waqf (Amendment) Act, 2025 enjoys a presumption of constitutionality, petitioners on Tuesday termed the new law a "creeping acquisition" of Waqf properties owned by the Muslim community, the largest religious minority group in India.

A Bench of Chief Justice of India B.R. Gavai and Justice Augustine George Masih heard petitioners for a full day on their plea for an interim order to stay the implementation of the 2025 Act, which came into force on April 8. "Today, you [petitioners] are only arguing for interim relief. You have to make a strong case for interim relief. The presumption in favour of a parliamentary law is that of constitutionality," Chief Justice Gavai said, addressing senior advocate Kapil Sibal, the lead counsel for the petitioners.

Mr. Sibal said a presumption of constitutionality could be rebutted if a *prima facie* breach was shown. The court could intervene and stay the law in public interest if its execution caused irreparable injury, he said.

'Ruse for acquisition'

"The 2025 amendments are a ruse to capture Waqfs. Property can be acquired by the government through a legislative diktat, that too without payment of compensation, which is usual in cases of acquisition. These amendments directly encroach on a minority community's rights under Article 25 [freedom of religion]," Mr. Sibal submitted.

The senior lawyer noted

You have to make a strong case for interim relief. The presumption in favour of a parliamentary law is that of constitutionality

B.R. GAVAI
Chief Justice of India



The 2025 amendments... directly encroach on a minority community's rights under Article 25 [freedom of religion]

KAPIL SIBAL
Advocate for petitioners



how Section 3C of the 2025 Act gave free rein to any encroacher to start a dispute.

The inquiry into the dispute would be conducted by a designated officer, who is a government servant or an "agent of the government".

There is no timeline or procedure prescribed for the inquiry in the Act. A dispute over even a fragment of the land would freeze the Waqf status of the entire property, Mr. Sibal noted.

"This means existing uses of the property, whether it be for schools, hospitals, burial, community centres etc., would have to immediately cease. There is also no restriction on demolition or on the government creating irreversible third-party rights in such properties during the inquiry period. The government can unilaterally deem a property as non-Waqf," Mr. Sibal submitted.

He referred to the "subordination" of Muslim members in Waqf administrative bodies by including non-Muslims in them. He pointed out that no other religious endowments, Hindu or Sikh, allowed room for people of other faiths to run their temples or gurdwaras.

Mr. Sibal pointed out that a Waqf property, once declared a protected mon-

ument or area under the Ancient Monuments Preservation Act, 1904 or the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958, would become void as a Waqf under Section 3D of the 2025 Act.

Senior advocate A.M. Singhvi argued that this "super-imposing" of ancient monument laws on religious Waqfs would have a ripple effect on the protection given to them under the Places of Worship Act, 1991.

Unregistered Waqfs

He submitted that half of the country's eight lakh Waqfs are unregistered Waqfs-by-user, which have been effectively invalidated by the 2025 Act as they have been barred from approaching court. Many of these age-old Waqfs have no documents or deeds to support their identity, though they have been used for charitable and religious purposes for centuries, he said.

Mr. Singhvi alleged that the government's claim of a 116% "explosion" in Waqf properties from 2013 to 2024 was intended to pre-judge the court.

The Centre is expected to begin its counter-arguments today.

KERALA MOVES SC
» PAGE 4

3. Government Control and Administrative Interference

- Section 3C allows government-designated officers to initiate and conduct inquiries into the Waqf status of properties.
- The absence of clear procedural timelines and the freezing of Waqf status during inquiries, regardless of how small the dispute is, can disrupt essential services like education, health, and burial grounds.
- Inclusion of non-Muslims in Waqf Boards is seen as inconsistent with the autonomy granted to other religious institutions such as temples and gurdwaras.

Impact on Unregistered Waqfs and Heritage Laws

- Over 50% of Waqf properties are unregistered but have traditionally served religious and charitable purposes. These are now barred from approaching the courts, leading to fears of disenfranchisement.
- Section 3D of the amended Act provides that once a Waqf is declared a protected monument, it ceases to be Waqf, potentially conflicting with the Places of Worship Act, 1991 and threatening the sanctity of historical religious usage.

Larger Concerns and Implications

1. Minority Rights and Secularism

- Critics argue that the law undermines the constitutional promise of secularism, as it allegedly discriminates against the Muslim community by treating their endowments differently from those of other religions.
- The inclusion of non-Muslims in religious property management is perceived as infringement on community autonomy.

2. State Power and Legislative Overreach

- The use of legislative tools to bypass acquisition norms (such as payment of compensation) is viewed as a form of indirect expropriation, setting a dangerous precedent for property rights.
- The move is interpreted by some as part of a broader trend of centralizing control over religious endowments, reducing community agency.

Conclusion

- The Waqf (Amendment) Act, 2025 has raised serious constitutional, religious, and property rights concerns. At its core, the legal challenge is about the balance between state authority and minority rights, and whether procedural flexibility granted to the State violates basic principles of justice,

equality, and religious freedom. The Supreme Court's verdict in this matter will likely have far-reaching implications for minority protection, religious autonomy, and the limits of legislative power in a secular democracy.

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques: The Waqf (Amendment) Act, 2025 has triggered a debate on the balance between state authority and minority rights. Critically examine the constitutional concerns raised against the Act in light of Articles 25 and 26.

Page : 02 :GS 1 : Social Issues

The Sample Registration System (SRS) report 2021, released by the Registrar General of India, reveals that Delhi has recorded the lowest Total Fertility Rate (TFR) in the country at 1.4, a significant decline from 1.9 in 2011- marking a 26.3% drop. This is well below the replacement level fertility of 2.1 and far from states like Bihar, which has the highest TFR at 3.0.

More good news than bad in Delhi's fertility rate dip

Ashna Butani
NEW DELHI

Delhi has not only recorded the lowest Total Fertility Rate (TFR), the average number of children per woman, but also the highest decline in the TFR in recent years. The Sample Registration System (SRS) report by the Registrar General of India for 2021, released on May 7, stated that Delhi's TFR was 1.4 in 2021 against 1.9 in 2011, a 26.3% decline.

At 3.0, Bihar registered the highest TRF against the national average of 2.0.

Academics and reproductive health specialists have cited inflation, more women in the workforce, independent decision-making, better maternal and infant health, and infertility as possible reasons for Delhi's lowest TFR.

"Earlier, the maternal or paternal family took the fa-

mily planning decision. But as women are now more empowered and independent, they are able to take decisions independently," pointed out Praveen K. Pathak, Professor at JNU's Centre for the Study of Regional Development, who specialises in population health and demographic changes.

Dr. Rashmi Gera, head of the family planning unit at Guru Teg Bahadur Hospital, also noted similar trends. "Cultural and social change, such as women getting better education and participating more in the workforce, is leading to changes in family planning," she said.

Social change

Dr. Gera said another reason couples are preferring fewer children is that most of them have migrated to Delhi and find it difficult to raise a child without grand-

Changes in fertility patterns

In 2011, Delhi's Age Specific Fertility Rate (ASFR), the number of women per 1,000 giving birth, in the age group of 20-24 was 139.7, which reduced to 65.4 in 2021

IN 2011		IN 2021	
Age group	ASFR	Age group	ASFR
15-19	9.2	15-19	2.7
20-24	139.7	20-24	65.4
25-29	130.3	25-29	95.2
30-34	60.8	30-34	72.8
35-39	15.7	35-39	25.1
40-44	4.2	40-44	14.0
45-49	0.3	45-49	4.0

Source: Sample Registration System report



Getty Images/iStockphoto

parents or relatives.

According to the SRS report, over the years, the city has seen a shift in the fertility cycle with an increase in fertility in the

middle age group (30-44) and a decrease in lower age groups (15-29).

In 2011, Delhi's Age Specific Fertility Rate, the number of women per

1,000 giving birth, in the age group of 20-24 was 139.7, which reduced to 65.4 in 2021.

Niharka Tripathi, an Assistant Professor of Sociology at a Delhi University college whose research focuses on gender and population, cited women's priority to careers in their twenties and family planning after becoming financially independent as possible reasons for the shift in the fertility cycle.

"Additionally, inflation, nannies or childcare professionals' fees, and education expenses keep couples away from having more children," said Ms. Tripathi.

Anju Sharma, an Accredited Social Health Activist in east Delhi, said she had observed that couples prefer one child due to limited earnings. "Several women in my locality say that they have one child as they

want to give the best care, rather than having two or three children and struggling with expenses," said Ms. Sharma.

However, Dr. Shama Batra, a gynaecologist at Patel Hospital in Laxmi Nagar, cited infertility due to a sedentary lifestyle as a reason for the low TRF. "Polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS), infertility due to sedentary lifestyle, long working hours and a higher intake of junk food are now common in cities," said Dr. Batra.

Another gynaecologist, Dr. Surbhi Singh, who works in a private clinic, noted that stress and pollution, common in cities like Delhi, are also a cause for PCOS. "In recent years, I have noticed many young couples aspiring towards the trend of having no kids primarily due to inflation or infertility," Dr. Surbhi added.

Key Highlights of the Report:

- Delhi's TFR (2021): 1.4
- National average TFR: 2.0
- Decline in Delhi's TFR (2011-2021): 26.3%
- Shift in age-specific fertility: Decrease in births among 15–29 age group; increase among 30–44 age group

Reasons Behind Declining Fertility in Delhi:

1. Economic Factors:

- Inflation and high cost of child-rearing (education, healthcare, housing)
- Cost of childcare professionals (nannies, crèches) discourages larger families

2. Socio-Cultural Shifts:

- Rising female literacy, economic independence, and workforce participation
- Cultural shift toward nuclear families and individual decision-making
- Migration to Delhi leads to lack of extended family support for childcare

3. Changing Aspirations and Lifestyle:

- Focus on career-building during 20s
- Late marriages and delayed childbirth
- Preference for quality upbringing of one child over quantity

4. Health and Medical Factors:

- Rising infertility due to:
 - Sedentary urban lifestyle
 - Increase in PCOS and lifestyle disorders
 - Stress, pollution, and poor dietary habits
- Awareness of maternal and infant health leading to fewer, well-spaced pregnancies

Implications of Low TFR:

Positive Implications:

- Indicates progress in women's empowerment, education, and reproductive autonomy
- Reflects successful outreach of family planning and public health awareness
- May lead to reduced population pressure on urban infrastructure in the short term

Concerns:

- Below-replacement fertility raises the specter of future demographic imbalances
- Ageing population and shrinking workforce in the long term
- Potential rise in dependency ratio

- Greater burden on pension systems, healthcare, and social security infrastructure

Way Forward:

- Promote balanced population policies- neither coercive nor incentivising only fewer births
- Encourage work-life balance, flexible workspaces, and affordable childcare to support working parents
- Improve access to fertility treatment and reproductive health services
- Address lifestyle-related health issues contributing to infertility
- Recalibrate urban planning to accommodate child-friendly infrastructure

Conclusion:

Delhi's declining fertility rate is both a reflection of social progress and an emerging policy challenge. While it showcases achievements in women's empowerment, healthcare access, and family planning, it also flags concerns about a rapid demographic transition. Policymakers must anticipate these shifts and design holistic responses to sustain both economic growth and social welfare in the long run.

UPSC MainsPractice Question

Ques: The declining fertility rate in Delhi is as much a sign of social progress as it is a demographic concern. Critically examine in the context of India's urban socio-economic transformation. (250 words)

Legacy of Two Scientific Stalwarts – Jayant Narlikar and M.R. Srinivasan

Jayant Narlikar, Indian astrophysicist who challenged Big Bang theory, passes away

He first gained international recognition when, alongside the British astronomer Fred Hoyle, he proposed the 'steady state' model of the universe; a prolific writer, Narlikar explored themes ranging from alien encounters to the moral quandaries arising from the rapid technological progress

Jacob Koshy
NEW DELHI

Jayant Narlikar, one of India's most distinguished astrophysicists who combined profound theoretical insight into cosmology with a lifelong commitment to science communication, passed away at his residence in Pune on Tuesday. He was 86.

Describing what made Dr. Narlikar one of the "greats", Tarun Souradeep, Director of the Raman Research Institute (RRI), Bengaluru, told *The Hindu* that it was his "sense of justice and equality" and his "unwavering commitment" to popularising science and combating "non-science-based superstition and astrology" that set him apart.

As a gifted institution-builder, Dr. Narlikar played a pioneering role in establishing the Inter-University Centre for Astronomy and Astrophysics (IUCAA), Pune, where he served as Founder-Director. Under

his stewardship, IUCAA emerged as a globally recognised centre for theoretical physics, cosmology, and astrophysics.

"He spawned a number of leading scientists who set new directions and schools: Thanu Padmanabhan (cosmology, gravitation, and quantum gravity); Sanjeev Dhurandhar (gravitational waves); Ajit Kembhavi (data-driven observational astronomy), to name a few," Dr. Souradeep, who completed his doctoral research under Dr. Narlikar's guidance, said.

'Science populariser'

A prolific writer and science populariser, Dr. Narlikar once recalled, in a blog post, "playing table tennis with Stephen Hawking (prior to his muscular atrophy)" when they were both students at the University of Cambridge.

Dr. Narlikar first gained international recognition when, alongside the British astronomer Fred Hoyle, he proposed the "steady



JAYANT NARLIKAR (1938-2025)

state" model of the universe – a theory positing a timeless cosmos in which matter is continuously created.

This stood in contrast to the dominant Big Bang model, a term ironically coined by Sir Fred to disparage it, which posits that the universe began at a single point in time.

Vocal critic

Although subsequent observational evidence has since firmly supported the

Big Bang theory, Dr. Narlikar remained a persistent and vocal critic of it, adapting and refining the steady state view throughout his career.

"He wore his remarkable learning in various disciplines very lightly and he combined to an unusual degree formidable scholarship with humility. He was well and truly a most luminous star of Indian science, who reflected the noblest of our civilisational traditions," Congress communi-

cations in-charge and Rajya Sabha member Jairam Ramesh tweeted. He shared an excerpt from the 1964 edition of *Yojana* – a Planning Commission publication – which debated whether India should lure the young Narlikar back from Cambridge.

In a rare feat, Dr. Narlikar was awarded the Padma Bhushan in 1965, even before formally beginning his career in India at the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR), Mumbai. He later received the Padma Vibhushan in 2004.

Among his many accolades were the UNESCO Kalinga Prize for the popularisation of science in 1996 and the prestigious Prix Jules Janssen from the French Astronomical Society in 2004.

Literary contributions

Dr. Narlikar was also widely admired for his literary contributions. His science-fiction story *Dhoomaketu* (*The Comet*) was adapted into a film, while his auto-

biography *Chaar Nagaran-tale Maze Vishwa* (*My Tale of Four Cities*) was awarded the Sahitya Akademi Prize. His writing – marked by clarity, an avoidance of jargon, and philosophical depth – explored themes ranging from alien encounters to the moral quandaries arising from the rapid technological progress.

His key influences

He was frequently featured in science programmes on television in the 1990s and credited Carl Sagan's outreach work, as well as the fiction of Sir Fred, Isaac Asimov, Arthur C. Clarke, and Ray Bradbury, as key influences in his approach to communicating science.

Born to eminent parents – Vishnu Vasudev Narlikar, a mathematician at Banaras Hindu University (now IIT-BHU), and Sumati Narlikar, a Sanskrit scholar – Dr. Narlikar received his early education in Varanasi before moving to the University of Cambridge, where he completed his Ph.D. under Sir Fred's mentorship.

1. Jayant Vishnu Narlikar (1938–2025)

Key Facts:

- Renowned Indian astrophysicist, known for challenging the Big Bang Theory.
- Co-developed the 'Steady State Theory' with British astronomer Fred Hoyle.
- Founder-Director of Inter-University Centre for Astronomy and Astrophysics (IUCAA), Pune.
- Known for his work in theoretical cosmology and science communication.
- **Awards:**
 - Padma Bhushan (1965) – awarded unusually early, before formal work in India.
 - Padma Vibhushan (2004).
 - UNESCO Kalinga Prize (1996) for science popularisation.
 - Prix Jules Janssen (2004) – highest award of the French Astronomical Society.

- **Popular works:**
 - Dhoomaketu (The Comet) – science fiction adapted into a film.
 - Autobiography – *Chaar Nagarantale Maze Vishwa* (Sahitya Akademi award).
- Known for opposing pseudoscience and promoting rationalism.

M.R. Srinivasan, a key architect of India's nuclear programme, no more

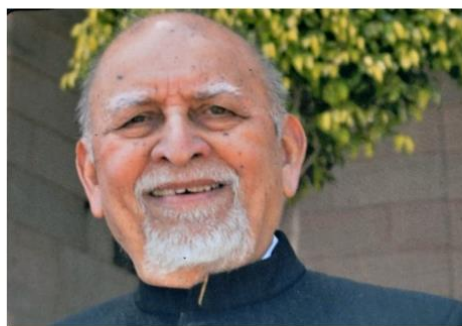
The Hindu Bureau
UDHAGAMANDALAM

M.R. Srinivasan, former Chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission and Secretary of the Department of Atomic Energy, passed away in Udhagamandalam on Tuesday. He was 95.

Dr. Srinivasan joined the Department of Atomic Energy (DAE) in September 1955 and began his distinguished career working alongside Dr. Homi J. Bhabha on the construction of India's first nuclear research reactor, Apsara, which achieved criticality in August 1956.

In August 1959, he was appointed Principal Project Engineer for the construction of India's first atomic power station. His leadership continued to shape the nation's nuclear programme when, in 1967, he took charge as Chief Project Engineer of the Madras Atomic Power Station.

Dr. Srinivasan held several key positions of na-



M.R. SRINIVASAN (1930-2025)

tional importance. In 1974, he became Director of the Power Projects Engineering Division, DAE, and in 1984, Chairman of the Nuclear Power Board. In these roles, he oversaw the planning, execution, and operation of all nuclear power projects across the country.

In 1987, he was appointed Chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission and Secretary of the Department of Atomic Energy. That same year, he became

the Founder-Chairman of the Nuclear Power Corporation of India Ltd. (NPCIL). Under his leadership, 18 nuclear power units were developed – seven of which were operational, seven under construction, and four in the planning stage.

His contributions to India's nuclear energy landscape will be remembered for generations to come, his daughter Sharada Srinivasan said in a statement released by the family. In

He began his career working alongside Homi Bhabha on the construction of India's first nuclear research reactor

recognition of his contributions to India's nuclear energy programme, Dr. Srinivasan was awarded the Padma Vibhushan in 2015. "India will always be grateful to him for advancing scientific progress and mentoring many young scientists," Prime Minister Narendra Modi wrote on social media platform X.

"It has been my good fortune to have known him for a long time and he is someone who has left a deep and lasting impression on me by the strength of his commitments, his deep appreciation of the larger social functions of science, and his profound understanding of India's rich cultural traditions," Congress MP Jairam Ramesh wrote on X.

2. M.R. Srinivasan (1930–2025)

Key Facts :

- Former Chairman of Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) and Secretary, Department of Atomic Energy.
- **Played a foundational role in India's nuclear power programme:**
 - Worked with Homi J. Bhabha on Apsara – India's first nuclear reactor (1956).
 - Chief Engineer for Madras Atomic Power Station.
 - Oversaw development of 18 nuclear power units across India.
- Founder-Chairman of Nuclear Power Corporation of India Ltd. (NPCIL).
- **Awards:**
 - Padma Vibhushan (2015).

- Noted for blending technical excellence with a deep commitment to India's cultural and social values.

Page 10: GS 2 : Indian Polity

On May 20, 2025, a three-judge Bench of the Supreme Court of India reinstated the rule mandating three years of legal practice for candidates wishing to appear in subordinate judicial service examinations. The Court's decision has reignited debates over meritocracy, access, talent acquisition, and systemic reform in judicial appointments.

3-year rule: a setback to judiciary aspirant

The Supreme Court's hope is that three years' of practice may help future judges in addressing courtroom decorum, complex procedural cases and in understanding the perspectives of all stakeholders of the judicial system

LETTER & SPIRIT

Faizan Mustafa
Shrey Shalin

There has been growing anxiety for months around the anticipation of a verdict from the Supreme Court (SC) that would bring back a rule wherein an advocate would need three years of practice in order to become eligible to write the judicial services examinations. And now, on May 20, a three-judge Bench headed by the Chief Justice of India (CJI) B.R. Gavi, which also included Justices A.G. Mishra and K.V. Chandran, has made practical experience of three years a pre-requisite to appear for the subordinate judicial services exam. The judgment has substantiated the hypothesis that the SC has been consistently inconsistent on this issue. No empirical evidence was presented to the court about the 'lower quality' of fresh graduates (para 37), and neither was the number of fresh graduates who qualified for judicial services within a year of their graduation given in the judgment. The court simply went back to the three-year rule because majority of the High Courts advocated for it.

History of the rule

This matter has taken multiple twists since it was addressed in the 14th Law Commission of India (LCI) report in 1958, chaired by M.C. Setalvad. The Commission contended that persons with experience ranging from three to five years shall be eligible to compete in the examinations for lower subordinate judges in every State. This exam was to have questions of practical aspect and would not depend upon rote memorisation alone. Ability to draft pleadings, appreciate evidence and write judgments were also to be tested. Unfortunately, current question papers of most judicial services exams continue to test rote memory only.

For higher judiciary, an All India Judicial Services (AIJS), a centralised recruitment system for judges, was proposed. The Commission report was of the opinion that it was necessary to tap brilliant university graduates at the right time to judicial services. Therefore, the AIJS required no practical experience. Anyone holding a law degree, ranging from 21-25 years of age would be eligible, and practical experience was to be developed through a 'carefully devised scheme of training' which includes practical working in the courts. The exam was to be conducted at the National level. That is, the report contended for two different sets of eligibility criteria for recruitment at the State-level (lower subordinate judge exams) and at the national level (AIJS).

In the *All India Judges' Association versus Union of India*, 1992, the question of 'uniformity' in service conditions of judges across India was taken up. The judgment endorsed the LCI Report and its provisions on AIJS including the recommendation to allow fresh law graduates to compete in the exam. The top court issued directions to the Union of India to set up the AIJS. However, a review petition in the *Judges' Association case*, filed in 1993, held that a minimum legal practice of three years was essential to qualify for the subordinate judicial services examination.

The court in *All India Judges' Assn. (II) versus Union of India*, (1993) held 'in most of the States, the minimum qualifications for being eligible to the post of the Civil



Judge-cum-Magistrate First Class/Magistrate First Class/Munsiff Magistrate is minimum three years' practice as a lawyer in addition to the degree in law. In some States, however, the requirement of practice is altogether dispensed with and judicial officers are recruited with only a degree in law to their credit. The recruitment of raw graduates as judicial officers without any training or background of lawyering has not proved to be a successful experiment. Considering the fact that from the first day of his assuming office, the Judge has to decide, among others, questions of life, liberty, property and reputation of the litigants, to induct graduates fresh from the Universities to occupy seats of such vital powers is neither prudent nor desirable."

The court went on to observe, "the experience as a lawyer is, therefore, essential to enable the Judge to discharge his duties and functions efficiently..." The court thus gave a strong order, "We, therefore, direct that all States shall take immediate steps to prescribe three years' practice as a lawyer as one of the essential qualifications for recruitment as the judicial officer at the lowest rung."

Attracting talent

The Justice Shetty Commission, set up in 1996, found that while almost all States had complied with the three-year rule, some States had gone beyond and prescribed more than three years as minimum qualification. The report also stated that advocates with 4-7 years of experience were getting selected only at the age of 27 to 30. Therefore, in the *All India Judges' Association versus Union of India* (2002), the Supreme Court accepted the recommendation of the Shetty Commission that the three-year rule had failed to attract the best talent to judicial services, and scrapped the rule. The court was candid in admitting that, "with the passage of time, experience has shown that the best talent which is available is not attracted to the Judicial Service. A bright young law graduate after 3 years of practice finds the Judicial Service not attractive enough. It has been recommended by the Shetty Commission after taking into consideration the views expressed before it by various authorities, that the need for an applicant to have been an Advocate for at least 3 years

should be done away with..."

Now, the Supreme Court has again gone back to the three year rule, as the crucial question of how to balance attracting the best talent along with the necessary skills is still valid.

For that one must understand ground reality. No one can deny that the best law students today are in National Law Universities. Most of these students get lucrative corporate placements with huge pay packages. Many of them also need to repay education loans as almost all law universities' five-year fee ranges between ₹12-15 lakh. Reputed private law schools charge even more, between ₹20-40 lakh.

The SC yet again hopes that three years' of practice may help future judges in addressing courtroom decorum, complex procedural cases and in understanding the perspectives of all stakeholders of the judicial system. Young candidates are said to lack maturity, empathy and patience. The reality is, however, that most candidates wishing to practice don't see judicial services as a career option, while those who wish to enter judicial services rarely see practice as a career option. Most States find it difficult to fill vacancies of the higher judicial services due to the poor performance of candidates in the written examinations. Recently, Rajasthan notified that not a single candidate was found suitable.

The fact of the matter is that the mandatory three-years of practice rule will significantly discourage brighter minds from joining the judicial services. Economically backward and SC/ST/OBC candidates would be the worst hit, as they cannot afford to wait. It becomes necessary for them to start earning. These candidates would be keen to write examinations to enter civil services, public sector undertakings (PSUs), or even join academia.

Various challenges

The Bar Council of India has encouraged senior advocates and firms to pay a minimum of ₹15,000 in rural areas and ₹20,000 in urban centres to junior lawyers. This bare minimum stipend is not enough for a law student having no connections in the field. Non-matriculants in Delhi are paid ₹20,371 a month for clerical work or supervisory work in scheduled employment. An unskilled

worker is paid ₹18,456 a month as per the minimum Wages Act. Only financially sound candidates would have the luxury to appear for judicial services if the three year condition is brought back.

Additionally, as per the India Justice Report, women account for 38% of the judges in district judiciary. Nine out of the top 10 candidates from the recently held Bihar judicial services exam were female candidates. Now, if the three-year rule is implemented, a number of these women, going through career breaks or maternity leaves, will suffer a setback.

Another problem is with regard to age. To appear for the civil services examinations, the minimum eligibility criteria is to be a final year student of a three-year degree programme. But for the judicial services examination, five-six years of education together with three years of experience would make them highly financially vulnerable as well as older compared to their counterparts in the civil services. This classification would neither be based on intelligible differentia nor achieve the rational object of attracting the best minds. Moreover, unlike the civil services, the judicial services exam in most States is not held at regular intervals. Even if a candidate has fulfilled the three year criteria, he/she has to wait for another few years for the exam to be advertised.

What can be done?

The solution is to catch young talent and enhance the training period to two years or more and use the best of academic and practical skills to enhance efficiency of the lower rung of the judiciary. Trainee officers may be required to serve as probationers to serving District and Sessions Judge or Justices of the High Court to enhance their understanding of the courtroom. For six months, they may be attached to senior lawyers as well.

We must also reform the examination and come up with innovative questions. The examination should be based on scenario-based questions, and judgment writing should carry more weightage. Excluding fresh talent may do more harm than good to our judicial system.

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THE GIST

On May 20, a three-judge Bench headed by the Chief Justice of India (CJI) B.R. Gavi, which also included Justices A.G. Mishra and K.V. Chandran, has made practical experience of three years a pre-requisite to appear for the subordinate judicial services exam.

The Justice Shetty Commission, set up in 1996, found that while almost all States had complied with the three-year rule, some States had gone beyond and prescribed more than three years as minimum qualification.

The solution is to catch young talent and enhance the training period to two years or more and use the best of academic and practical skills to enhance efficiency of the lower rung of the judiciary.

Background of the Rule:

- 1958 (14th Law Commission Report): Advocated for 3–5 years of practice for lower judiciary but exempted AIJS candidates (All India Judicial Service).
- 1992 & 1993 (All India Judges' Association cases): SC supported the three-year rule, emphasizing that inexperienced law graduates lacked maturity and courtroom understanding.
- 2002 (Shetty Commission recommendations accepted by SC): SC scrapped the rule citing it discouraged the best talent from joining judiciary.
- 2025: SC reinstates the rule citing support from majority High Courts and hopes that practice would improve empathy, procedural understanding, and maturity.

Arguments in Favor of the 3-Year Rule:

- Judges are entrusted with decisions involving life, liberty, property, and must possess practical experience.
- Advocates gain courtroom decorum, exposure to procedural complexities, and stakeholder perspectives during early years of practice.
- Aims to avoid "raw graduates" deciding sensitive matters without adequate grounding.

Concerns and Criticisms:

1. Lack of Evidence:
 - No empirical data presented on performance decline due to fresh graduates.
 - No survey or statistics on failure of candidates due to lack of practice.
2. Deterrence to Talent:
 - Graduates from National Law Universities (NLUs) opt for corporate placements due to lucrative salaries and high education loans (₹12–₹40 lakh).
 - Brightest minds may skip judicial services due to delayed entry and financial constraints.
3. Socio-Economic Impact:
 - SC/ST/OBC and economically weaker candidates may be disproportionately affected.
 - Three-year delay affects those who urgently seek income post-graduation.
4. Gender Disadvantage:
 - Women—who constitute 38% of the lower judiciary—may face career interruptions due to marriage or maternity.
 - Imposing delays may reduce their participation.
5. Age and Recruitment Issues:
 - Judicial service aspirants become older than civil services aspirants.
 - Judicial exams are not held regularly in many states, adding to uncertainty.
6. Minimum Wages Paradox:
 - Junior lawyers often earn less than unskilled workers (₹15,000–₹20,000/month), making the profession unattractive for freshers.

Way Forward:

- Reform judicial training:
 - Instead of exclusion, improve post-recruitment training (1–2 years).
 - Attach probationers to High Court judges, senior lawyers, and trial courts.
- Reform examination pattern:
 - Shift away from rote memory.
 - Include scenario-based questions, judgment writing, and courtroom simulation.
- Create dual track eligibility:
 - Allow both fresh graduates and experienced advocates to appear with differentiated training modules.
- Institutional support:
 - Introduce stipend-based internships or pre-service roles.
 - Encourage legal aid involvement for practice exposure.

Conclusion:

While the Supreme Court's intention is to ensure competence and maturity in the judiciary, the three-year mandatory practice rule risks excluding meritorious and underprivileged candidates, especially women and students from less affluent backgrounds. Judicial reform must be based on evidence, inclusivity, and the changing dynamics of legal education and careers. A holistic approach that combines rigorous training, exam reform, and systemic support would be more equitable and effective in attracting the best legal minds to the bench.

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques: The reinstatement of the three-year legal practice rule for judicial services may ensure procedural maturity but risks excluding meritorious candidates. Critically examine in light of the recent Supreme Court verdict. **(250 words)**

Page : 08 Editorial Analysis

Scheme-based workers, the struggle for an identity

The central government employs millions of regular and contract workers who are recognised as government employees and are in the pay spectrum of the government. The government also employs several types of workers such as Anganwadi workers or AWWs (13,51,104 workers) and Anganwadi helpers or AWHs (9,22,522). Accredited Social Health Activists or ASHAs (10,52,322 workers), and Mid-Day-Meals workers or MDMWs (25,16,688) under The Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) Scheme since 1975, the National Rural Health Mission (NHRM) and the mid-day meals day scheme. Put together, around 60 million workers work in government schemes.

These schemes are those which carry out social and economic functions by taking care of children and lactating mothers and nutrition aspects. They are also a bridge between the community and the public health system, improving school enrolment and the nutritional health system.

The reality of their existence

Though there has been much recognition of their work (by the Prime Minister and even the World Health Organization), these workers face hardship – they have been denied basic labour market rights such as workers' status, minimum wages and social security. Three basic issues among others have affected scheme-based workers (SBW) – an identity as “workers” just like any government employee, minimum wages and social security. They have adopted three strategies to highlight their plight – strikes, legal action and social dialogue.

Major central trade unions (AITUC, BMS, CITU) have organised the SBWs extensively. Since there are no prescribed wage negotiation timelines, trade unions have gone on frequent strikes over the issue of wage revision at random. State governments are more generous depending more



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on the strength of unions, their proximity with the party in power, and political factors such as elections. In March 2025, Anganwadis in Kerala called off their 13-day indefinite strike. The frequent and large-sized struggles of and by SBWs is a feat of labour mobilisation in modern times as State governments have not always been kind to striking workers. In fact, the Maharashtra government imposed the Maharashtra Essential Services Maintenance Act in 2017 to curb the right of Anganwadis in the State to go on strike. In a sense, the government has recognised the “essential” nature of work done by Anganwadis.

The judiciary's approach

At the same time, Anganwadis have been knocking on the doors of the judiciary, with some success after initial setbacks. In *State Of Karnataka & Ors vs Ameerbi & Ors* (2006), the Supreme Court held that as Anganwadis do not carry out any function of the state, and do not hold a post under a statute, it did not consider them as workers. This was a judgment that was a blow against the struggles of these workers. But there was judicial relief.

The Court, in 2022, granted that Anganwadis are eligible for gratuity as they are covered under workers/employees under the Payment of Gratuity Act, 1972 (*Maniben Maganbhai Bhariya vs District Development Officer*, 2022). In 2024, the Gujarat High Court (*Adarsh Gujarat Anganwadi Union & Ors. vs State of Gujarat*) observed that Anganwadis perform onerous duties and responsibilities apart from performing important services under the Right to Education Act (RTE) and the National Food Security Act (NSF). It directed the central and State governments to jointly frame a policy under which the AWWs and AWHs could be regularised as Class III and Class IV grade State employees. Until then, they would be paid minimum wages (Class III and Class IV, respectively).

The central trade unions have been raising the issues concerning the SBWs at the tripartite forum, the Indian Labour Conference (ILC), which is a social dialogue forum created during colonial rule. It is notable that in the 45th ILC, its tripartite Conference Committee made unanimous recommendations to the central government to treat the SBWs as “workers” and not as volunteers or honorary workers, and pay them minimum wages, pension, health insurance and provident fund, among others.

The usual stand

The government is concerned with the huge cost implications as the employment of SBWs as government employees is set to grow as the population grows. On the other hand, the Labour Minister, in 2016, said in the Rajya Sabha, that the recommendations require long-time policy formulation and that there can be no fixed time-line for their implementation. Policy delay and avoidance at best – and outright denial policy at worst – has been the clever policy of the central government, irrespective of the party in power. The government has been dodging these important issues. On the other hand, there are attempts to privatise the Integrated Child Development Services Scheme (ICDS). SBW organisations have been waging relentless struggles at all levels to oppose the privatisation of the ICDS and strengthen the labour rights of SBWs. Their struggle, which involves multiple issues, will go on.

It is not “applause” that they seek but “worker” status. It is an existential struggle. It is interesting to note that in both the traditional and modern (gig) sectors, workers are battling for their labour market “identities” as “workers” and earn “wages and not “honorarium”. It is not charity that they seek but a legitimate demand for “workers” status by dint of hard work over long hours.

The demand of SBWs, of a labour market identity, is a legitimate one

Paper 02 : Social Justice

UPSC Mains Practice Question: Scheme-based workers (SBWs) are the backbone of India's welfare programmes, yet they continue to be denied basic labour rights." In the light of this statement, critically examine the challenges faced by SBWs and discuss the role of judiciary, trade unions and policy reforms in securing their rights. (250 words)

Context :

India's welfare delivery system relies on millions of scheme-based workers (SBWs) such as Anganwadi workers (AWWs), helpers (AWHs), ASHAs, and Mid-Day Meal Workers (MDMWs). Despite their critical contribution to public health, nutrition, and education, these workers are not recognised as formal employees, and are denied basic labour rights such as minimum wages, social security, and formal worker status.

Scale and Importance:

- Approximately 60 million workers are engaged in government-run social sector schemes like ICDS, NHM, and MDMS.
- Their responsibilities include:
 - Nutritional care for children and mothers.
 - Bridging communities with health services.
 - Boosting school enrolment and retention through mid-day meals.

These workers are essential to India's social infrastructure, yet face deep-rooted structural injustice.

Key Issues:

1. Lack of Recognition as 'Workers':
 - Officially termed as volunteers or honorary workers, not entitled to employment benefits.
 - Their legal identity remains undefined, affecting access to fair remuneration and job security.
2. No Minimum Wages or Social Security:
 - Ineligible for provident fund, health insurance, or pensions.
 - Paid honorariums, which are arbitrary and often delayed.
3. Judicial Stand:
 - 2006 (Ameerbi case): SC denied them status as government employees.
 - 2022 (Maniben case): SC granted Anganwadis gratuity under the Payment of Gratuity Act.
 - 2024 (Gujarat HC): Directed minimum wage payment and policy formulation to regularise AWWs and AWHs as Class III and IV employees.
4. Policy Inaction:
 - Despite the 45th Indian Labour Conference recommending worker status and benefits, implementation is pending.
 - Governments cite cost implications as a barrier to reform.
5. Privatisation Threat:
 - ICDS and other schemes face privatisation pressures, risking further job insecurity.
 - SBW unions are actively resisting this shift.

Wider Implications:

- Reflects the broader crisis of informalisation within India's public sector.
- Mirrors the identity struggle of gig workers, both demanding legal recognition as "workers".
- Highlights the contradiction between essential service status and exploitative employment conditions.

Recommendations:

1. Legislative Reform:
 - Amend laws to clearly define scheme-based workers as formal employees.
 - Ensure inclusion in labour welfare laws like EPF Act, ESI Act, and Minimum Wages Act.
2. National Policy Framework:
 - Jointly drafted by Centre and States.
 - Uniform terms of employment, timely payment, and grievance redressal mechanisms.
3. Reforming Social Dialogue:
 - Revive forums like the Indian Labour Conference for meaningful negotiation.
 - Include SBW representatives in tripartite labour bodies.
4. Capacity Building and Training:
 - Enhance skill development and provide upskilling incentives.
 - Recognise long-serving workers through promotions and reclassification.

Conclusion:

Scheme-based workers are the backbone of India's welfare delivery system, yet remain on the margins of the labour economy. Their struggle is not for benevolence but for legal identity, dignity, and justice. A reimagined labour policy that ensures formal recognition, fair wages, and social security is essential to uphold the constitutional principles of equality, social justice, and dignified work.