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Edition: International Table of Contents

Page 04 Syllabus : GS 2 : International Relations	India, Fiji call for open Indo-Pacific region, agree to deepen defence ties
Page 06 Syllabus : GS 3 : Science and technology / Prelims	Stealth frigates Udaygiri, Himgiri to join Navy today
Page 08 Syllabus : GS 2 : Indian Polity	Beyond debate : Dysfunction of legislatures is due to concentration of power in the executive
Page 08 Syllabus : GS 2 : International Relations	Friends and foes : Pakistan is filling the void created by the alienation of India from Bangladesh
Page 09 Syllabus : GS 2 : Indian Polity	About 30% of MPs and MLAs face serious criminal cases
Page 08 : Editorial Analysis Syllabus : GS 2 : Indian Polity	The new Constitution Bill, the need for a balancing act

Page 04:GS 2 : International Relations

The recent meeting between Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Fijian Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka marks a significant step in India's Indo-Pacific outreach. Against the backdrop of intensifying geostrategic competition in the Pacific, especially with China's expanding presence, the India-Fiji partnership underlines New Delhi's efforts to build resilient defence, maritime, and developmental cooperation with Pacific Island countries (PICs).

Key Highlights of the Meeting

1. Maritime Security & Defence Cooperation

- India to provide training, equipment, and capacity-building support to Fiji's armed forces.
- Agreement to cooperate on UN peacekeeping operations, military medicine, and White Shipping Information Exchange.
- Establishment of a Defence Wing at the Indian High Commission in Suva and gifting of two ambulances to Fiji's military.

2. Shared Indo-Pacific Vision

- Both countries reaffirmed support for a free, open, inclusive, and secure Indo-Pacific.
- India's Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) was welcomed as a framework for cooperation.
- This aligns with the strategic pushback against China's attempts to expand military presence in the Pacific islands.

3. Developmental Cooperation

- Seven MoUs signed, including one on building a super-specialty hospital in Fiji and another on migration and mobility.
- Cybersecurity cooperation enhanced with the creation of a training cell in Fiji.

India, Fiji call for open Indo-Pacific region, agree to deepen defence ties

As per a joint statement, both the sides emphasise the importance of their 'shared interests in advancing regional peace, stability, and prosperity'; both the countries agree to work together on UN peacekeeping operations, military medicine

Kallol Bhattacharjee
NEW DELHI

India will provide training and equipment to upgrade Fiji's maritime security, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Monday.

Welcoming visiting Fijian Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka, Mr. Modi said India and Fiji "strongly support a free, open" Indo-Pacific region as both sides declared that India would work to build capacity for the armed forces of Fiji.

"In our cooperation with the Pacific Island nations, we see Fiji as a hub. Both our countries strongly support a free, open, inclusive, secure, and prosperous Indo-Pacific. We warmly welcome India's Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative," Mr. Modi said, announcing the collaboration between India and the Fijian military forces.

A joint statement issued at the end of consultation said the two sides emphasised the importance of their "shared interests in advancing regional peace, stability, and prosperity".

"Prime Minister Modi reaffirmed India's commitment to advancing the priority areas of cooperation outlined in the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Defence Cooperation signed in 2017, and to supporting Fiji's strategic priorities in these areas," the joint statement said.

Welcomes India's aid
The two sides agreed to work together on UN peacekeeping operations, military medicine, the White Shipping Information Exchange, and capacity-building for Fijian military forces.

Speaking on the occasion, Mr. Rabuka emphasised the need to protect Fiji's Exclusive Economic Zone, and welcomed India's assurance to assist with Fiji's security needs.

"Prime Minister Rabuka welcomed the planned port call by an Indian naval ship to Fiji which will enhance maritime cooperation and interoperability."

During the talks at Hyderabad House here, India and Fiji signed seven MoUs that included an agreement on building a super-specialty hospital in Fiji, and one on migration and mobility. Both the leaders agreed to strengthen cooperation against terrorism, and reiterated condemnation for the terror attack in Pahalgam. Mr. Modi announced the gifting of two ambulances to Fiji's military forces, and the opening of the defence wing in the High Commission of India in Fijian capital Suva. The countries agreed to enhance cooperation in cybersecurity, and welcomed the setting up of a cybersecurity training cell in Fiji.

Mr. Rabuka had in July opposed China's reported plans to establish a naval base in the Pacific islands. As a signal to the Chinese side, the statement also called for a "free, open Indo-Pacific region".

Strategic meeting: Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Fiji Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka at Hyderabad House in New Delhi on Monday. **SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA**




4. Geopolitical Context

- Fiji, located at a strategic juncture in the South Pacific, has previously resisted China's reported naval base plans.
- By engaging deeply with Fiji, India positions itself as a credible partner, balancing security and development needs in the region.

Significance for India

- Strategic Outreach: Strengthens India's position as a security provider in the Indo-Pacific beyond the Indian Ocean.
- Countering China: Consolidates partnerships with Pacific Island nations to resist Chinese naval/military influence.
- Soft Power & Diplomacy: Hospital project, mobility agreements, and medical aid enhance India's goodwill.
- Maritime Security: Collaboration improves monitoring of the Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) of small island nations.

Conclusion

The India–Fiji defence and development partnership reflects New Delhi's broader strategy of integrating Pacific Island states into its Indo-Pacific vision. By blending security cooperation with developmental assistance, India positions itself as a reliable and balanced partner. As geostrategic contestations sharpen in the Pacific, such collaborations not only deepen bilateral ties but also strengthen collective regional resilience against unilateral power assertions.

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Ques: Fiji is geographically a part of which group of islands in the Pacific Ocean?

- (a) Polynesia (b) Melanesia (c) Micronesia (d) Australasia

Ans: (b)

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques: India and Fiji's emphasis on a "free, open, inclusive, and secure Indo-Pacific" is also seen as a balancing response to China's growing presence in the Pacific Islands. Critically evaluate. **(250 Words)**

Page 06 : GS 3 : Science and technology / Prelims

India commissioned two Project 17A stealth frigates, INS Udaygiri and INS Himgiri, at Visakhapatnam, marking the first-ever simultaneous induction of frontline warships built at different shipyards. This highlights India's growing indigenous shipbuilding capacity and strengthens the Navy's blue-water operational capability in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).

Key Highlights

1. Project 17A Stealth Frigates

- Follow-on variants of the Shivalik-class frigates.
- Equipped with enhanced stealth features, advanced weaponry, and modern sensors for full-spectrum maritime operations.
- Designed in-house by the Warship Design Bureau (WDB) — Udaygiri being the 100th vessel designed indigenously.

2. Construction & Indigenous Content

- INS Udaygiri: built by Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Ltd. (MDL), Mumbai.
- INS Himgiri: built by Garden Reach Shipbuilders & Engineers (GRSE), Kolkata.
- Nearly 75% indigenous content, supported by MSMEs → aligns with Aatmanirbhar Bharat.
- Adoption of modular construction techniques reduced delivery time (Udaygiri fastest of its class).

3. Technological Features

- Propulsion: Combined Diesel or Gas (CODOG) system.
- Systems: Integrated platform management system, Indian-made weapons & sensors.
- Blue-water capability: enhances Navy's long-range operational reach in IOR.

4. Strategic Significance

- Strengthens Eastern Fleet → critical for safeguarding trade routes & countering Chinese naval presence.
- Symbolizes inter-yard collaboration, promoting India's shipbuilding ecosystem.
- Heritage factor: Revives names of earlier warships, carrying forward naval tradition.

Stealth frigates *Udaygiri*, *Himgiri* to join Navy today

The vessels are follow-on variants of Shivalik-class frigates; they have advanced weaponry, modern sensor systems designed to execute full spectrum of maritime operations in blue-water conditions

Saurabh Trivedi
NEW DELHI

The Indian Navy is set to commission the state-of-the-art Project 17A stealth frigates *Udaygiri* and *Himgiri* at the Naval Base in Visakhapatnam on Tuesday.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh will preside over the event, which will mark the first-ever simultaneous commissioning of two frontline warships built at different shipyards.

Enhanced capability

Mr. Singh said that both vessels were follow-on variants of the Shivalik-class frigates. They featured enhanced stealth capabilities, advanced weaponry, and modern sensor systems designed to execute the full spectrum of maritime operations in blue-water conditions. *Udaygiri*, built by Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Ltd. in Mumbai, and *Himgiri*, constructed by Garden Reach Shipbuilders & Engineers



Ready to serve: INS Udaygiri during its launch at Mazgaon Docks Limited in Mumbai in May 2022. PTI

(GRSE) in Kolkata, showcase India's growing shipbuilding expertise and inter-yard collaboration. Notably, *Udaygiri* was the fastest of her class to be delivered after launch, owing to the adoption of modular construction techniques.

Designed in-house by the Navy's Warship Design Bureau (WDB), *Udaygiri* is

the 100th vessel to be designed, marking a milestone in five decades of indigenous warship design. Both frigates are fitted with combined diesel or gas (CODOG) propulsion, an integrated platform management system, and advanced Indian-made weapons and sensors. With nearly 75% indigenous con-

tent – supported by several MSMEs – the ships embody the vision of Aatmanirbhar Bharat, the Ministry added.

Reviving the heritage of earlier warships that bore these names, the new frigates will now join the Eastern Fleet, substantially enhancing the Navy's reach in the Indian Ocean.

Conclusion

The induction of INS Udaygiri and INS Himgiri under Project 17A is a milestone in India's journey towards self-reliance in defence manufacturing. With advanced stealth, indigenous design, and blue-water capabilities, these warships will enhance India's maritime security posture, reinforce its vision of SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region), and consolidate India's role as a net security provider in the Indo-Pacific.

UPSC Prelims Practice Question

Ques: With reference to Project 17A Frigates, consider the following statements:

1. They are follow-on variants of Shivalik-class frigates.
2. They are designed by the Indian Navy's Warship Design Bureau.
3. They are built entirely with imported weapons and systems.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Ans: (a)

Parliament and State Legislatures are the pillars of India's representative democracy. Their primary functions—law-making, oversight of the executive, and debate—are increasingly undermined by frequent disruptions, rushed legislations, and declining sittings. Recent data from PRS Legislative Research shows the 18th Lok Sabha functioning at its lowest levels, with only 29% of scheduled time utilized, highlighting a systemic democratic deficit.

Core Issues of Dysfunction

1. **Concentration of Power in the Executive**
 - Dominance of Prime Ministers and Chief Ministers sidelines collective deliberation.
 - Assemblies met for an average of only 20 days in 2024 (down from 28 in 2017).
2. **Declining Legislative Scrutiny**
 - Over half of Bills passed the same day without meaningful debate.
 - Question Hour rendered ineffective—only 8% of starred questions answered in Lok Sabha.
3. **Weakening of Institutions within Legislatures**
 - No Deputy Speaker in Lok Sabha since 2019; 8 State Assemblies also lack one.
 - Parliamentary committees, once bipartisan platforms, now face partisanship.
4. **Erosion of Opposition's Role**
 - Lack of dialogue and consensus-building fuels acrimony.
 - Debates replaced by protests and adjournments, obstructing legislative business.

Implications

- **Democratic Deficit** – Weakens accountability and transparency.
- **Policy Inefficiency** – Laws passed without deliberation risk poor implementation.
- **Public Distrust** – Citizens see legislatures as non-functional "theatres of diatribe".
- **Weak Federalism** – Reduced sittings in State Assemblies undermine state-level accountability.

Beyond debate

Dysfunction of legislatures is due to concentration of power in the executive

Addressing the two-day All India Speakers' Conference in New Delhi on August 24, Union Home Minister Shah called attention to the frequent disruptions that have paralysed deliberations in Assemblies and Parliament. His point that "debate must take place in a democracy" is beyond any debate. But when one goes beyond the truism, a picture of India's representative democracy in distress emerges. Bitterness between the government and the Opposition has erased the scope for any common ground, and Parliament has been reduced to a theatre of mutual diatribe. His remarks followed soon after the Opposition's protests, demanding a debate on the Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls in Bihar, that led to repeated adjournments. Most of the legislative business was carried out with little or no debate. In a session with 21 sittings spread out over 32 days, 15 Bills were passed. According to PRS Legislative Research's analysis, the Lok Sabha functioned for 29% of its scheduled time, and the Rajya Sabha for 34% – the lowest functioning seen during the 18th Lok Sabha. Two-thirds of the planned time was lost to repeated adjournments. In the Lower House, only 8% of starred questions received an oral reply, while it was 5% in the Upper House. On 12 days in the Rajya Sabha and on seven in the Lok Sabha, no questions were answered orally over the 21 days. Question Hour, an instrument of executive accountability, has been rendered ineffective.

The dysfunction of legislatures is linked to concentration of power in the chief executive, the Prime Minister and Chief Ministers. According to the Annual Review of State Laws 2024 by PRS Legislative Research, State Assemblies met for an average of just 20 days in 2024, down from 28 in 2017. Larger States such as Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh recorded only 16 sitting days, while Odisha and Kerala led with 42 and 38 days, respectively. More than half the Bills were passed on the same day, with little debate. Eight Assemblies do not have a Deputy Speaker; the Lok Sabha has not had a Deputy Speaker since June 2019. Parliamentary committees that used to be a platform for more deliberative and less acrimonious debates have also become vulnerable to partisanship. It is propitious that Mr. Shah thinks that there should be more debate in legislatures, but it will be meaningful only when the government translates that view into action by engaging with the Opposition. A starting point can be a consensus election of an Opposition leader as the Deputy Speaker of the Lok Sabha.

Way Forward

1. Institutional Reforms

- Fix minimum sitting days for Parliament and Assemblies (e.g., 100 days for Parliament, 50 for State legislatures).
- Mandatory referral of significant Bills to parliamentary committees.

2. Strengthening Opposition Role

- Restore convention of electing Deputy Speaker from the Opposition.
- Engage in consensus-building on national issues.

3. Reviving Question Hour & Committees

- Ensure uninterrupted Question Hour.
- Insulate committees from partisanship to enhance detailed scrutiny.

4. Behavioral & Political Reforms

- Enforce stricter rules against disruptions.
- Encourage structured debates on contentious issues.

Conclusion

The dysfunction of legislatures is less a reflection of lack of capacity and more of the concentration of power in the executive and political unwillingness to deliberate. As Union Home Minister rightly pointed out, “debate must take place in a democracy”—but debate must be backed by genuine executive intent to share power, engage with the Opposition, and revive parliamentary traditions. Strengthening legislative institutions is vital for India’s democratic future and for ensuring that Parliament remains a forum for reasoned deliberation, not partisan theatre.

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques : The increasing dysfunction of Indian legislatures is closely linked to the concentration of power in the executive. Critically examine the causes and consequences of this trend. Suggest reforms to restore deliberative democracy in India. **(250 words)**

Page 08 : GS 2 : International Relations

South Asia's geopolitics is witnessing a subtle but important shift. Pakistan's recent diplomatic outreach to Bangladesh marks the first high-level visit in over a decade, filling a space left vacant due to India's strained ties with Dhaka. While Pakistan's engagement signals its intent to rebuild lost ground, India faces the challenge of recalibrating its diplomacy in a region already shaped by Chinese influence and internal political churn.

Core Analysis

1. Background of Tensions

- India and Bangladesh shared historically close ties, particularly under Sheikh Hasina's government (2009–2024), which cooperated with New Delhi on counter-terrorism, connectivity, and regional stability.
- Relations with Pakistan, however, remained frosty due to the 1971 Liberation War legacy, war crimes trials, and Dhaka's demand for an apology, reparations, and resolution of the "Stranded Pakistanis" issue.

2. Pakistan's New Outreach

- Pakistan's FM Ishaq Dar's visit to Dhaka marks a reset, with agreements on visa facilitation, direct flights, scholarships, and trade enhancement.
- China reportedly nudged this rapprochement, convening trilateral discussions in Kunming, underlining Beijing's expanding regional influence.
- Symbolically, the visit projects Pakistan as a potential partner at a time when Dhaka is recalibrating its foreign policy after Sheikh Hasina's exit.

3. India's Position and Concerns

- Despite PM Modi's and EAM Jaishankar's meetings with Bangladesh's interim leadership, India's engagement appears less proactive.
- Concerns:
 - Reports of Pakistani diplomatic support to Jamaat-e-Islami student activists during anti-Hasina protests.
 - Emerging military and intelligence contacts between Dhaka and Islamabad.
- India risks losing influence in a country that has historically been central to its "Neighbourhood First" policy.

Friends and foes

Pakistan is filling the void created by the alienation of India from Bangladesh

In the first such visit in 13 years, Pakistan's Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar travelled to Dhaka over the weekend to meet with members of the Bangladeshi interim government, headed by Muhammad Yunus, and hold talks with his counterpart, Touhid Hossain. Ties had been tense since 2009, when Sheikh Hasina came to power, and under strain over the prosecution of those who colluded with Pakistan during the 1971 liberation war – and the assassination of her father Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and most of her family in 1975. In 2015, Bangladesh demanded the expulsion of a Pakistani diplomat over links to a terror group and recalled its High Commissioner to Islamabad after Pakistan protested the hanging in Bangladesh of those found guilty of collusion in 1971. Although the two nations subsequently restored envoys, they began to repair ties after Ms. Hasina's ouster last August. The process was also nudged by China, which convened a trilateral mechanism with Bangladesh and Pakistani officials in Kunming. In Dhaka, there was agreement to restore visa facilitation for diplomats, have direct flights, grant scholarships for Bangladeshi students and ways to enhance trade from current lows of less than a billion dollars. However, the Yunus government has refused to move on decades-old Bangladeshi demands for reparations from Pakistan. These include a formal apology for the genocide in 1971 perpetrated by Pakistani forces, financial compensations and the repatriation of thousands of "Stranded Pakistanis" or Urdu-speaking Muhajirs who had migrated there after Partition and still held allegiance to West Pakistan. While meeting Mr. Dar, Mr. Yunus also called for strengthening regional cooperation, including a revival of the SAARC process. India has eyed the thaw in Islamabad-Dhaka ties with some suspicion, given reports that Pakistani diplomats supported Jamaat-e-Islami student activists during the anti-Hasina protests last year. Of greater concern has been military and intelligence contacts.

While there is no question that New Delhi has cause to feel cut out and bruised by the newfound bonhomie between an erstwhile ally and a long-time foe, it is time that South Block adopts a more realistic prism. Pakistan is stepping into the breach caused by the strain in India-Bangladesh ties. Although Mr. Modi met Mr. Yunus in April and External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar met Mr. Hossain on the side-lines of other international events, neither has contemplated a visit, nor has Mr. Yunus been invited. With the announcement of elections in Bangladesh, in February, New Delhi must also broaden its political engagement with political parties there, even as it nudges the Yunus government to a more inclusive process. In the absence of a stronger regional South Asian grouping, New Delhi has a difficult task in holding sway over bilateral ties between any of its neighbours, especially Bangladesh and Pakistan.

4. Regional Dimensions

- Bangladesh has called for revival of SAARC, which India has deprioritised due to Pakistan's obstructionist stance.
- Pakistan's moves, aided by China, could weaken India's primacy in South Asia if New Delhi does not re-energise its bilateral and multilateral diplomacy.
- The vacuum highlights the limits of India's influence in the absence of a robust regional grouping.

Way Forward for India

- Broaden Political Engagement: Engage not just with the interim government but also opposition parties ahead of Bangladesh's elections to secure long-term ties.
- Economic and Connectivity Push: Reinforce regional connectivity, trade corridors, and development projects that directly benefit Bangladesh.
- Diplomatic Visibility: High-level visits from Indian leadership to Dhaka would counter the perception of distance.
- Regional Strategy: Consider constructive re-engagement with SAARC or push for alternate sub-regional platforms like BIMSTEC with stronger political will.

Conclusion

Pakistan's renewed outreach to Bangladesh highlights the fluidity of South Asian geopolitics. While Dhaka's long-standing demands from Islamabad remain unresolved, the symbolic and material steps taken by Pakistan expose the cracks in India-Bangladesh ties. For India, adopting a more proactive, inclusive, and regionally coordinated diplomacy is essential to safeguard its strategic interests and retain its role as the primary partner of choice in South Asia.

UPSC Mains Practice Question

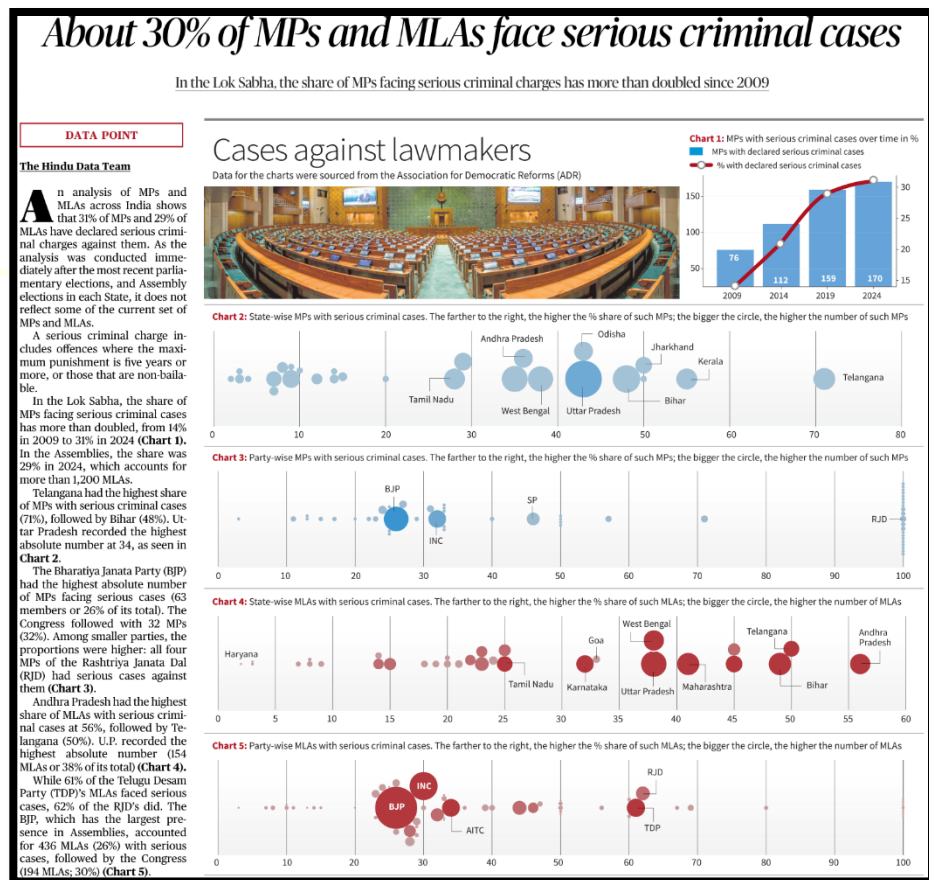
Ques: The recent thaw in Pakistan-Bangladesh relations signals a shift in South Asian geopolitics. Discuss its implications for India's foreign policy and suggest measures that New Delhi should adopt to safeguard its strategic interests. **(150 Words)**

Page 09 : GS 2 : Indian Polity

A recent analysis reveals a disturbing trend: about 30% of MPs and MLAs face serious criminal charges. In the Lok Sabha, the percentage of MPs with such cases has more than doubled from 14% in 2009 to 31% in 2024. This raises deep concerns about the quality of India's democracy, governance, and public trust in institutions.

Current Status of Criminalisation

- Parliament: 31% MPs face serious criminal cases; highest in Telangana (71%), Bihar (48%), and U.P. (highest absolute number, 34).
- State Assemblies: 29% MLAs have serious cases; Andhra Pradesh (56%) and Telangana (50%) are the worst affected. U.P. leads in absolute numbers (154 MLAs).
- Parties:
 - BJP (largest party) → 63 MPs & 436 MLAs with serious cases.
 - Congress → 32 MPs & 194 MLAs.
 - RJD → 100% of its 4 MPs and 62% of MLAs have serious charges.
 - TDP → 61% MLAs face such cases.



Implications

- Democratic deficit – Elected representatives with criminal backgrounds undermine faith in democracy.
- Policy capture – Politics becomes a tool for vested interests and protection from prosecution.
- Weak rule of law – Lawmakers turning into law-breakers dilutes institutions like police, judiciary, and vigilance bodies.
- Impact on governance – Legislatures function less on policy debate and more on patronage and protection.

5. Voter paradox – Despite awareness, voters often choose candidates with muscle/money power due to caste, community ties, or weak alternatives.

Judicial and Institutional Interventions

- **Supreme Court Judgments:**
 - 2002: Mandatory disclosure of criminal records of candidates.
 - 2013: Disqualification of convicted legislators.
 - 2018: Parties must publish criminal background of candidates.
- Election Commission proposals: Ban on candidates with serious charges framed by a court.
- Law Commission (244th Report): Recommended barring those with serious charges from contesting.

Way Forward

1. Legal reforms – Amend the Representation of the People Act to disqualify candidates with serious charges (after framing of charges, not conviction alone).
2. Electoral reforms – State funding of elections, stricter ceiling on election expenditure, fast-track courts for politicians' cases.
3. Political will – Parties must adopt internal reforms and deny tickets to tainted candidates.
4. Voter empowerment – Awareness campaigns, strengthening NOTA, and civil society activism to demand cleaner candidates.
5. Institutional strengthening – Independent ECI, police reforms, and depoliticisation of investigation agencies.

Conclusion

The rise in criminalisation of politics — from 14% MPs in 2009 to 31% in 2024 — shows that democracy is being hollowed out from within. Mere judicial directives are insufficient; political parties and voters must actively reject criminal elements. If India is to achieve the vision of a clean, transparent, and accountable democracy, addressing criminalisation of politics must be a top national priority.

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques: The rising criminalization of politics poses a grave challenge to the quality of democracy and governance in India. In the light of recent data, critically analyse. Also suggest reforms needed to curb the criminalization of politics. (250 words)

India-Japan ties — old partners, new priorities

P rime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Japan and China, that begins from August 29, comes at a time of flux in global geopolitics. While there is a tentative easing of tensions between India and China after years of strain, there is also growing uncertainty about New Delhi's ties with Washington as the Trump administration seems to be doing everything in its power to push India away. Thus, Mr. Modi's engagement in Tokyo carries weight well beyond the bilateral.

Japan's major investment plan

At the heart of the visit lies Japan's announcement of a ¥10 trillion (about \$68 billion) investment plan in India to be spread over the next decade. This pledge, among the most ambitious Tokyo has ever made to New Delhi, is designed to boost the infrastructure, manufacturing, clean energy, and technology partnership. It signals Japan's long-term stake in India's growth story at a time when many global investors remain cautious about China. The fact that Japan is also investing in the next-generation EIO series Shinkansen for the Mumbai-Ahmedabad high-speed rail corridor reflects economic collaboration alongside Tokyo's willingness to transfer cutting-edge technology to India.

On the strategic front, the two countries are expected to revise the 2008 Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation, reorienting their security and defence partnership in accordance with contemporary realities. The proposed Economic Security Initiative – it covers semiconductors, critical minerals, pharmaceuticals, and clean energy – anchors Japan more firmly within India's quest for diversified supply chains. Also significant is the upgrade of their digital partnership, which is now expected to cover artificial intelligence and startup ecosystems. These initiatives place India-Japan ties at the forefront of technological and security



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The Prime Minister's Japan visit highlights India's steady strategic intent, with signals to China and the U.S.

cooperation in Asia, reinforcing their shared commitment to a free, open, and rules-based Indo-Pacific.

The U.S. factor, a case of strategic balancing

The timing of the visit is important. After the Tokyo meeting, Mr. Modi is scheduled to attend the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation summit in Tianjin, China. Bilateral ties, though scarred by the 2020 Galwan clash, are demonstrating tentative signs of stabilisation with the resumption of direct flights, visa relaxations, and trade facilitation efforts. The visit, from Tokyo to Beijing in a single week, reflects a strategic balancing in many ways. First, it underscores India's ability to engage with a trusted strategic partner and a neighbouring competitor without allowing one relationship to dictate the other. Second, it signals that India can compartmentalise. With Tokyo, the focus is on advancing economic security, defence cooperation, and Indo-Pacific stability. With Beijing, the emphasis will likely be on managing tensions, exploring limited confidence-building measures, and keeping communication lines open.

The balancing becomes even more consequential against the backdrop of Mr. Trump's unpredictability, which has cast a shadow on the reliability of the United States as a steady partner. Mr. Trump stands to unravel years of careful effort invested in building the New Delhi-Washington partnership. Successive administrations on both sides, from George W. Bush to Joe Biden, worked to transform a once-fractious relationship into a cornerstone of Indo-Pacific strategy, anchored in defence cooperation, technology sharing, and growing people-to-people ties. So far, Trump 2.0 risks eroding this progress. The Quad (India, Australia, Japan, the U.S.) too, remains essential to India's Indo-Pacific vision, but its trajectory appears rocky as U.S. engagement turns episodic. The

grouping was conceived as a platform to pool capacities among like-minded democracies, yet its momentum has always depended on Washington's willingness to commit consistently. Under Mr. Trump's second term, signals of disengagement and a narrower view of alliances risk diluting the Quad's strategic coherence. For India, Japan and Australia, this raises pressing questions about sustaining the initiative's credibility and operational depth.

Beyond economics and defence, there is a broader political signal embedded in the visit. By stepping up its engagement with India, Japan is not just diversifying its economic footprint but is also reinforcing the idea that dedicated long-term cooperation can deliver tangible outcomes.

The message

The Tokyo visit is thus less about short-term diplomatic outcomes and more about signalling steady strategic intent – that India is willing to keep channels with Beijing open, prepared to navigate U.S. unpredictability, and determined to deepen enduring partnerships with like-minded powers in the region. Japan's commitments also reinforce India as one of its most reliable partners in navigating the challenges of the Indo-Pacific, from economic resilience to maritime security.

The visit will highlight one of the most enduring features of Indian diplomacy in recent years: flexibility without losing strategic clarity. In a phase of protracted geopolitical uncertainty, it is Japan that emerges as India's anchor partner. Washington's commitment is wavering under Trump's short-sightedness, while Beijing remains a competitor whose gestures of normalisation cannot yet ease underlying mistrust. Tokyo offers consistency, resources and a shared strategic outlook rooted in democratic values and a free and open Indo-Pacific. Therefore, the visit to Japan is not just about consolidating an old partnership. It is about recognising where India's most dependable ballast lies.

GS. Paper 02 International Relations

UPSC Mains Practice Question: India and Japan share a "Special Strategic and Global Partnership" which has economic, strategic and Indo-Pacific dimensions. Discuss the significance of this partnership for India's growth and regional stability. (150 words)

Context :

India and Japan share a time-tested partnership, rooted in civilizational links, shared democratic values, and mutual trust. In recent years, the relationship has gained renewed momentum as both nations respond to shifting global power equations, particularly in the Indo-Pacific. Prime Minister Modi's recent visit to Tokyo, accompanied by Japan's historic ₹10 trillion investment pledge, marks a significant milestone in their bilateral and strategic trajectory. This visit is emblematic of how India is recalibrating partnerships amidst U.S. unpredictability and China's assertiveness.

Economic Dimension: Investment and Technology

- **Major Investment Plan:** Japan's commitment of nearly \$68 billion over the next decade is a bold step, signaling confidence in India's growth potential. It focuses on infrastructure, manufacturing, clean energy, and advanced technology.
- **High-Speed Rail Collaboration:** Tokyo's role in the Mumbai–Ahmedabad Shinkansen project reflects not just financial investment but also transfer of advanced technology, strengthening long-term interdependence.
- **Economic Security Initiative:** Joint cooperation in semiconductors, critical minerals, pharmaceuticals, and clean energy reflects a shared vision of resilient supply chains, reducing dependence on China.

Strategic and Security Cooperation

- **Defence Partnership:** The revision of the 2008 Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation signals a reorientation to contemporary challenges. Areas like maritime security, defence technology, and cyber cooperation are likely to gain traction.
- **Digital & AI Collaboration:** Expanding digital ties, including AI and start-up ecosystems, puts India–Japan cooperation at the forefront of next-generation technology in Asia.
- **Indo-Pacific Vision:** Both nations are central to the idea of a free, open, and rules-based Indo-Pacific, with Japan providing consistency and India providing strategic weight.

The U.S. Factor: Strategic Balancing

- India faces growing uncertainty in its ties with the U.S. due to Trump 2.0's erratic approach to alliances. This risks diluting the Quad's strategic coherence, making Japan a more reliable partner in Indo-Pacific calculations.
- India's diplomacy reflects strategic compartmentalisation: with Japan, the focus is on deepening trust and collaboration; with China, on limited stabilisation and confidence-building.
- This balancing highlights India's foreign policy flexibility—keeping multiple channels open without compromising strategic clarity.

Broader Political Signal

- Japan's proactive economic and strategic outreach reinforces India as a reliable partner in Asia.
- For India, Tokyo represents consistency and shared values, while Washington's reliability appears uncertain and Beijing remains a competitor.
- The partnership signals India's emphasis on long-term strategic intent over short-term diplomatic wins.

India–Japan Relations

Historical Ties

- Buddhism, cultural exchange, Tagore–Okakura interactions.
- Post-1947: Japan assisted in industrialisation (Maruti, metro projects, Delhi-Metro JICA loans).

Economic Cooperation

- Japan: 5th largest investor in India.
- Key projects: Bullet train (Mumbai–Ahmedabad), Delhi–Mumbai Industrial Corridor, Chennai–Bengaluru Industrial Corridor.
- 2025: ¥10 trillion investment pledge in infra, tech, clean energy.

Strategic Cooperation

- 2014: "Special Strategic and Global Partnership."
- 2008: Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation.
- Defence exercises: JIMEX (naval), Malabar (Quad with U.S., Australia).
- 2+2 Defence & Foreign Ministerial Dialogue.

Indo-Pacific Cooperation

- Both committed to Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP).
- Partnership in supply chain resilience, semiconductor cooperation.
- Japan: Strong Quad partner; India: balances between U.S., Japan, and China.

Challenges

- India–Japan trade still below potential (~\$22 billion, 2024).
- China factor — Japan wary of India's balancing with Beijing.
- Slow project implementation (bullet train delays).

Way Forward

- Deepen economic security cooperation (AI, semiconductors, rare earths).
- Accelerate infrastructure projects.
- Strengthen defence tech transfer and joint production.
- Use partnership as a pillar for Indo-Pacific stability.

Conclusion

India–Japan ties today stand at the intersection of economic ambition and strategic necessity. While old partners in trust, they are embracing new priorities — resilient supply chains, digital technologies, defence cooperation, and Indo-Pacific stability. In an era of uncertainty marked by U.S. unpredictability and China’s assertiveness, Japan emerges as India’s anchor partner. For New Delhi, the Tokyo visit underlines a fundamental principle of its diplomacy: flexibility without losing strategic clarity. Going forward, India–Japan collaboration will not only shape bilateral ties but also the larger Indo-Pacific balance.
