



VAJIRAM & RAVI
Institute for IAS Examination

The Analyst

CURRENT AFFAIRS Handout

02nd January 2025



'Grand Strategy' for India's Foreign Policy



CONTEXT: Three writers explore the past and present of India's relations with the world, and ties in the neighbourhood, to trace the path ahead.

World Order?

Strategic Autonomy: 'ability of a state to pursue its own national interest; without being constrained'

But why?

Evolution of India's Foreign Policy

- **1st phase** - Non-Alignment (1947-1961) - Bipolar World
 - NAM
 - Panchsheel Policy
 - Preservation of Autonomy
- **2nd phase** - Realism (1962-71)
 - Pragmatic choices
- **3rd phase** - Regional Assertion (1971-91)
 - Tilt towards USSR
 - Creation of Bangladesh
 - Nuclear Test, 1974
 - Peacekeeping Operation
 - US-China-Pakistan Axis
 - **4th phase** - Strategic Autonomy (1991-2005)
 - Economic reforms
 - Started Multi alignment
- **5th phase** - India's Strategic Autonomy in a Multipolar World (after 2005)
 - Shift from a P2 mindset
 - 'free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific'
 - Balancing Diplomacy
 - De-Hyphenation Policy
 - Issue-based cooperation
 - Intensified cooperation with 'Middle Powers'
 - Critical Defence Deals
 - 2+2 Dialogue
 - Military Logistics Agreements
 - Pulling out of RCEP
 - Use of Hard power
 - Expanding Soft Power
 - 'Balancing Power' to 'Leading Power'

Challenges to Strategic Autonomy

- Perception of Weakness
- Fear of becoming a 'US Ally'
- Assertive rise of China
- Assertion of Power
- Dependence on other Developed Countries

Way forward

- Multi vector Foreign Policy Approach
- Creative Diplomacy and Flexibility
- Cooperate and Compete
- Active Engagement with Middle Powers
- Utilising Multilateral Institutions

Friends: India's Closest Strategic Partners

by Sreeram Chaulia

- Bilateral relationships > multilateral frameworks.
- Countering Chinese dominance - partnerships.

The Unfinished Quest: India's Search for Major Power Status by T.V. Paul

- India's evolution - to its current quest for global power status.
- Stresses India's civilizational soft power; warns against abandoning its liberal ethos.
- India's limited leverage in South Asia.

Viswa Shastra: India and the World by Dhruva Jaishankar

- Marks 1991 as a turning point
- Lists 14 priorities for India's strategy, emphasizing managing China, strengthening the Quad, and deepening ties with neighbours
- Distinct approach toward Pakistan.

MAINS PRACTISE QUESTION

"India's foreign policy has traditionally been guided by the principle of strategic autonomy, reflecting its desire to maintain independence in decision-making while balancing partnerships with global powers. Discuss how strategic autonomy can be effectively integrated into this strategy to achieve India's aspirations as a global power." (15 Marks, 250 words)



2nd January 2025

CONTEXT: The disruptions of Parliament by both the Opposition and, more surprisingly, the Treasury benches, made the recently-concluded winter session of the legislature a travesty.

Parliament

- Legislation
- Representation
- Deliberation
- Accountability

What is 'Decline in Parliamentary Functioning'?

- Erosion of the role, effectiveness, and significance of Parliament
- W.r.t. Constitutionally Mandated Responsibilities

Indicators of Decline

- **Decline in Legislative Output:** Quality of Deliberations – 16th Lok Sabha – 25% Bills ; Farm Laws (2020) & Repeal of Article 370 (2019)
- **Reduction in Parliamentary Sessions:** Meets less frequently; 1950s- 120 days – 2021 – 58 days; Limits meaningful debates
- **Frequent Disruptions:** walkouts and adjournments; Monsoon Session of 2021 – 22% LS, 28% RS
- **Rise in Executive Dominance:** Ordinance Route; Tribunal Reforms Ordinance, 2021
- **Inadequate Scrutiny of Bills:** Underutilised DRSCs; 71% – 15th LS; 25% – 16th LS
- **Misuse of Money Bill Provisions:** Bypass RS; Aadhar Act
- **Weakening of Question Hour:** During the COVID-19 pandemic, Question Hour was suspended
- **Partisan Politics and Lack of Consensus:** Polarisation; CAA, 2019 – limited deliberation

Causes of Decline

- **Hyper-Partisanship** – Political polarization
- **Over-Centralization** – Executive sidelining Legislature

- **Weak Institutional Frameworks** – Chair of House; Resource constraints
- **Public Disengagement:** Limited public pressure
- **Structural Issues:** Overburdened agenda

Consequences of Decline

- Weakening of Checks and Balances
- Diminished Representation
- Erosion of Trust in Institutions:
- Poor Quality of Legislation
- Reduced Global Standing

Suggestions for Revitalizing the Legislature

- **Increase Parliamentary Sitting Days:**
 - The **NCRWC** – at least **120 days a year**.
- **Strengthen Committee System:**
 - mandatory referral of all major bills; better resources and transparency.
- **Curb Disruptions:**
 - Stricter rules for maintaining order; penalties.
- **Revive Private Member Bills:**
 - Institutionalise a mechanism
- **Focus on Capacity Building:**
 - Equip MPs with research support and training
- **Anti-Defection Law Reforms:**
 - Greater freedom for MPs to express dissent
- **Public Engagement:**
 - Public hearings and transparent legislative processes.

MAINS PRACTISE QUESTION

"The declining effectiveness of the Indian Parliament has raised concerns about its ability to fulfill its constitutional responsibilities. Critically analyze the factors contributing to this parliamentary decline and suggest measures to revitalize the Parliament's role as a cornerstone of Indian democracy." (15 Marks, 250 words)



SYLLABUS : GS 3: Environment; Pollution
Newspaper : The Hindu Page No : 12

Excessive nitrates have been found in groundwater in 440 districts as of 2023, an increase from 359 such districts in 2017, a report by the Central Groundwater Board (CGWB) said on Wednesday. This is a health hazard, particularly for young children, and a source of environmental toxicity.

The data suggest that about 56% of India's districts have excessive nitrates – defined as more than 45 mg per litre – in groundwater, largely due to the use of subsidised synthetic nitrogenous fertilizer, a key input for farming.

49%, 48%, and 37%, respectively, of their tested samples reporting numbers beyond the safe limit.

Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and Gujarat have a long-standing nitrate problem with relative levels fairly constant since 2017, the report says. However, regions in central and southern India are reporting an increasing trend, provoking worry.

“Maharashtra (35.74%), Telangana (27.48%), Andhra Pradesh (23.5%) and Madhya Pradesh (22.58%) also show notable levels of nitrate contamination, pointing towards growing concern in central and

Of the 15,239 groundwater samples collected from across the country for testing, 19.8% had nitrates or nitrogen compounds above the safe limits. This proportion has not shifted much since 2017. In the 13,028 samples analysed in 2017, 21.6% had excessive nitrates.

Rajasthan, Karnataka, and Tamil Nadu reported the highest nitrate contamination problem, with

southern regions of India,” the report notes.

The monsoon rain tends to increase nitrate levels, with 30.77% of samples contaminated in the pre-monsoon period compared with 32.66% after the rainy season.

Other major chemical contaminants affecting groundwater quality are fluoride and uranium. Fluoride concentrations exceeding the permissible limit are “a major concern” in Rajasthan, Haryana, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, and Telangana. Rajasthan and Punjab reported the highest number of samples with uranium con-

centration exceeding 100 ppb (parts per billion).

Anything over 30 ppb of uranium is considered unsafe and several of these samples were predominant in regions of Rajasthan, Gujarat, Haryana, Punjab, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, and Karnataka, where groundwater is being over-exploited, with more water being drawn out than is being replenished by rain or other means.

In an accompanying report on the availability of groundwater across India, the CGWB estimates that on the whole, the stage of groundwater extraction across the country is 60.4%, roughly the same as it has been since 2009, when measurements began biennially (and annually since 2022).

About 73% of the blocks analysed for groundwater levels are in the “safe” zone, meaning that they are replenished enough to compensate for the water drawn out.



SYLLABUS : GS 3: Environment; Pollution
Newspaper : The Hindu **Page No :** 12

Nitrate Contamination

Health Impacts:

- **"Blue Baby Syndrome"**: High nitrate levels interfere with the oxygen-carrying capacity of blood in infants.
- Increased risk of **gastric cancer** and other gastrointestinal disorders.
- Nitrate reacts with amines in the human body - **nitrosamines** - carcinogenic.

Environmental Impacts:

- **Eutrophication** - water bodies, leading to algal blooms and aquatic ecosystem disruption.
- **Loss of biodiversity** in aquatic habitats.

Fluoride Contamination

Health Impacts:

- **Dental Fluorosis**: Mottling and discoloration, especially in children.
- **Skeletal Fluorosis**: Weakening of bones, joint pain, and stiffness - immobility
- Neurological problems and developmental delays in children..

Agricultural Impacts:

- Fluoride accumulation in soil reduces crop yields and affects food safety.

Uranium Contamination

Health Impacts:

- **Kidney Damage**: Uranium is nephrotoxic and causes chronic kidney disease (CKD).
- Increased risk of **lung and bone cancer** due to radioactive decay of uranium isotopes.
- Developmental issues in children, such as low IQ and growth delays.
- Potential genetic mutations and birth defects in exposed populations.

Environmental Impacts:

- Radioactive contamination of soil and water, posing long-term risks to ecosystems.
- Challenges in safe disposal of uranium-rich sludge from water treatment processes.



SYLLABUS : GS 3: Space
Newspaper : Indian Express Page No : 11

There will be a series of space-docking experiments before the Indian Space Research Organisation embarks on its Chandrayaan-4 mission to bring soil samples from the moon to earth, the ISRO has said.

On Monday, the C60 mission of the Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV) placed two satellites, each weighing 220 kg, in orbit. They will rendezvous and dock with each other as part of the ISRO's first Space Docking Experiment (SpaDeX).

ISRO Chairman S. Somnath said "the nominal time" for the docking "will be approximately January 7". He added, "The two SpaDeX satellites have

ISRO Chairman S. Somnath said "the nominal time" for the docking "will be approximately January 7". He added, "The two SpaDeX satellites have

moved one behind the other, so over a period of time, they will pick up further distance. The distance will increase by 20 km over the next few days and then the rendezvous and docking process will start."

docking of modules in space. ... There will be five modules in BAS, all of which require docking. This technology is crucial for bringing back the lunar soil samples and for India's constant presence in space."

The two satellites in the current SpaDeX mission are in a circular orbit 475 km above the earth. "At that height, the two satellites will be moving at a speed of 28,000 km an hour," said former ISRO Associate Director B.R. Guruprasad. "You must establish the orbit of both the satellites. To bring them together, you have to match their speeds. It is not easy to match and adjust their speeds precisely, make them come close to each other and then dock. There lies the challenge."

Key for future missions

Docking is a crucial technology for India to master for the Chandrayaan-4 as well as its forthcoming orbital Bharatiya Antariksh Station, expected to be ready by 2035, and for its goal to send an Indian astronaut to the moon.

Chandrayaan-4 Study Director P. Veeramuthuvel said, "Docking is important for all future missions of the ISRO because you cannot launch everything in one go. So you need

SpaDeX (Space Docking Experiment)

Purpose:

- India's maiden attempt to demonstrate autonomous docking technology, a critical capability for future space missions.
- Envisioned by **ISRO** to enable space-station construction, satellite servicing, and on-orbit fuel transfer.

Features:

- Comprises two small spacecraft, one serving as a **chaser** and the other as a **target**.
- Will test **proximity operations, rendezvous, and docking** technologies.

Significance:

- A stepping stone towards India's manned and unmanned missions requiring modular structures or assembly in space.
- Advances India's technical expertise for future collaborative or independent space station missions.



SYLLABUS : GS 3: Space
Newspaper : Indian Express Page No : 11

Bhartiya Antariksha Station (Indian Space Station)

Objective:

- India's indigenous **low-Earth orbit space station** proposed by ISRO.
- Envisaged as a **modular structure** for conducting experiments in microgravity, life sciences, material sciences, and fundamental physics.

Features:

1. **Planned Size & Altitude:**
 - Smaller compared to the ISS.
 - Operational altitude around 400 km.
2. **Crew Capacity:**
 - Accommodates 3–4 astronauts for short durations (~20 days).
3. **Modules:**
 - Initially designed with research and habitation modules; expandable over time.

Significance:

- Enables India's sustained presence in space, enhancing its global stature.
- Boosts India's capability for **long-duration space missions**, critical for interplanetary exploration.

Timeline:

- Expected deployment by the **2030s** as part of ISRO's long-term goals, following the success of the **Gaganyaan Mission**.



2nd January 2025

SYLLABUS : GS 2: Social Sector; Education
Newspaper : The Hindu Page No : 12

The total enrolment of students has dropped by over a crore in 2023-24 from that of the previous years, show the latest data released by the Education Ministry.

A total of 24.8 crore students enrolled in the academic year 2023-24, the Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISE+) report released by the Ministry said. Over the past four years, the enrolment number has hovered around 26 crore.

In 2022-23, there was a drop in enrolment with 25.18 crore students being registered and there was a further fall in 2023-24 to 24.8 crore in the total enrolment, a drop of 6% (nearly 1.22 crore students) as compared with 2018-19.

In 2022-23, the Ministry started a revitalised UDISE+ ecosystem which captures data on more than 60 fields for each student and to maintain the uniqueness of the child, the Aadhaar details were also collected on a voluntary basis.

In 2018-19, the total enrolment of students in school was 26.02 crore, which increased in 2019-20 by 1.6% and crossed 26.45 crore, an increase of more than 42 lakh students. The

Apart from Aadhaar, a separate unique educational ID (EID) for every student has been created in the UDISE+ portal to cover each and every child under the ecosystem of UDISE+, officials said.

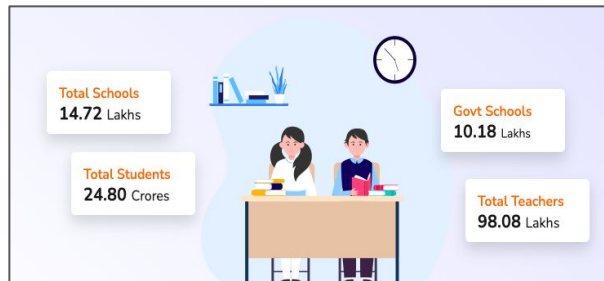
“Through the creation of unique student and teacher identities, credentials of individuals students and teachers in the education ecosystem can be established more accurately leading to weeding out of duplicate or ghost entries resulting in precise identification of beneficiaries for benefit transfers of Samagra Shiksha scheme, PM POSHAN Scheme, National Scholarship scheme etc. (and) can bring significant savings to government in future years,” the report

States like Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra saw among the highest drop in enrolments. In

भारत सरकार | शिक्षा मंत्रालय | स्कूल शिक्षा और साक्षरता विभाग
Government of India | Ministry of Education | Department of School Education & Literacy



UDISE+ is one of the largest Management Information Systems initiated by Department of School Education and Literacy, Ministry of Education, Govt covering more than 14.72 lakhs of schools, 98.08 lakhs of teachers and 24.80 crores of children.
(Schools, Teachers and Students Statistics As Per Academic Year 2023-24)



SYLLABUS: GS 2: NGOs

Newspaper: The Hindu Page No: 10

The Union Home Ministry on Wednesday notified that chartered accountants filing audit returns on behalf of NGOs need to specify if the organisation violated provisions of the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 2010 (FCRA) or not.

The Act requires a CA to certify if an association or NGO has utilised foreign contribution received for the purposes it was registered for and the annual statements are to be uploaded on the FCRA portal.

A member of a voluntary group said the Home Ministry notification will make it more difficult for NGOs who are critical of the government to find auditors to file returns on their behalf. "Even if you find an FCRA donor, CAs will be scared to prepare certificates on the behalf of NGOs who are perceived to be not in the good books of the government," said the member.

Earlier in 2021, the Ministry advised chartered accountants to ensure that foreign funds are received and utilised by NGOs "within the four corners of law".

In a December 31 notification, the Ministry said that CAs will have to mention the name, email address, and registration number of the auditor while issuing the audit certificate and specify if the NGO has "violated the provisions of FCRA, 2010 or rules made thereunder or notifications issued thereunder," with the details of the violations.

The auditors will also have to specify if the NGO has not made any violation.

Foreign Contribution Regulation Act

The FCRA, enacted in **1976** and amended in **2010** and **2020**, regulates the acceptance and utilization of foreign contributions by individuals, associations, and NGOs in India. Its primary aim is to ensure that foreign donations do not adversely impact national interests.

Key Features of FCRA

- **Applicability:**
 - Applies to NGOs, registered societies, educational institutions, and individuals receiving foreign donations.
 - Political parties, candidates, government officials, and journalists face stringent restrictions.
- **Purpose of Regulation:**
 - To prevent foreign influence on **political, economic, religious, or social domains** of India.
- **Registration Requirement:**
 - Organizations must register with the MHA to receive foreign contributions.
- **Usage Restrictions:**
 - Contributions must be used only for approved purposes such as education, health, or charitable work.
 - Diversion of funds for unapproved purposes is prohibited.



SYLLABUS: GS 2: NGOs

Newspaper: The Hindu Page No: 10

FCRA Amendment 2020

Key Changes Introduced:

- **Prohibition on Sub-Granting:**
 - NGOs receiving foreign funds cannot transfer funds to other NGOs or entities.
- **Reduction in Administrative Expenses:**
 - Limit on using foreign funds for administrative expenses was reduced from **50% to 20%**.
- **Mandatory Aadhaar for Registration:**
 - All office-bearers of NGOs must provide Aadhaar numbers for identity verification.
- **Exclusive FCRA Account:**
 - Foreign contributions must be received in a **designated account** at the State Bank of India, New Delhi branch.
- **Suspension Period:**
 - The government can suspend FCRA registration for up to **180 days** during an investigation.
- **Compliance and Reporting:**
 - More stringent reporting requirements for NGOs regarding fund usage.



2nd January 2025

SYLLABUS: GS 3: Conservation
Newspaper: The Hindu Page No: 10

The Hindu Bureau
BHUBANESWAR

Zeenat, the three-year-old tiger that had been wandering for three weeks near the boundaries of three States before being brought to Odisha's Similipal Tiger Reserve, was released into a soft enclosure in the reserve's southern division on Wednesday, marking a new home for the big cat as the New Year begins.

Zeenat was translocated from the Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve in Maharashtra to the Similipal Tiger Reserve on November 14 as part of a strategy to boost the genetic diversity of the reserve's big cat population.

It has been a matter of concern that a significant number of tigers in Similipal displayed pseudo-melanism, characterised by black stripes that are much more pronounced than the typical colouration of a Royal Bengal Tiger. This is



Zeenat had been keeping forest officials on their toes for over three weeks.

largely a result of inbreeding.

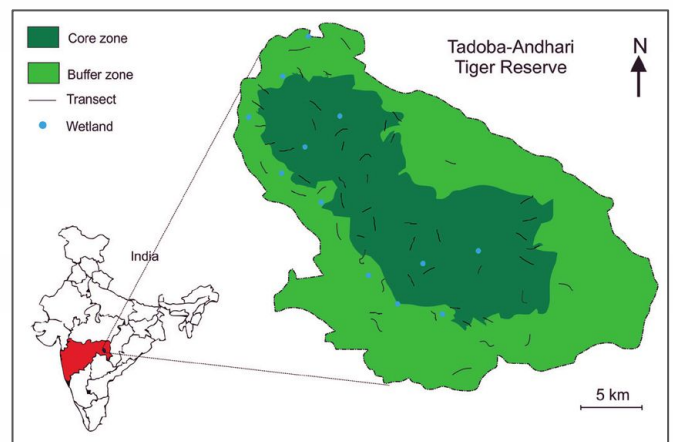
Under the supervision of the National Tiger Conservation Authority, Zeenat, and another tiger Jamuna, were released into the Similipal Tiger Reserve.

Zeenat was released into the wild following 10 days of acclimatisation in the core area of Similipal's northern division. The dispersing female tiger, in process of establishing her territory, strayed into Jharkhand and then West Bengal in the first week of December. After weeks of hide and seek, Zeenat was captured in West Bengal on December 29.

Similipal Tiger Reserve

- **Location:**
 - Situated in the **Mayurbhanj district, Odisha**, part of the Eastern Ghats.
- **Significance:**
 - Declared a tiger reserve in **1973** under **Project Tiger**.
 - Named after the abundance of **Simul (silk cotton) trees**.
 - Recognized as a **UNESCO Biosphere Reserve** in **2009**.
- **Flora and Fauna:**
 - Home to Bengal tigers, Asian elephants, gaurs, and four-horned antelopes.
 - Known for rich biodiversity, including rare orchids and medicinal plants.

- **Unique Features:**
 - Contains **barely cultivated regions**, dense forests, waterfalls (Barehipani and Joranda), and tribal communities.
 - Vulnerable due to **forest fires** and **poaching**.
- **Threats:**
 - **Forest fires**, illegal timber smuggling, and poaching.



2nd January 2025

SYLLABUS : GS 3 : Conservation
Newspaper : The Hindu Page No : 10

Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve

- **Location:**
 - Situated in **Chandrapur district, Maharashtra.**
 - Maharashtra's **oldest and largest national park**, established as a tiger reserve in **1995.**
- **Significance:**
 - Part of **Project Tiger**, known for **high tiger density.**
 - Named after the local deity **Tadoba** and the Andhari River.
- **Flora and Fauna:**
 - Home to Bengal tigers, Indian leopards, sloth bears, and Indian bison.
 - Dense forests predominantly comprising **teak** and **bamboo.**
- **Unique Features:**
 - Hosts many water bodies, supporting rich aquatic biodiversity.
 - Popular for **wildlife safaris**
- **Threats:**
 - **Human-wildlife conflict**, encroachments, and forest degradation.



Q1. Which of the following diseases is caused by Nitrate Contamination?

- a) Minamata Disease
- b) Blue Baby Syndrome
- c) Fluorosis
- d) Kwashiorkor

Answer: b

Q2. Consider the following statements regarding the Space Docking Experiment (SpaDeX):

- 1. SpaDeX is India's first attempt to demonstrate autonomous docking technology, which is crucial for future space missions.
- 2. SpaDeX is intended to improve India's ability to conduct on-orbit fuel transfer, satellite servicing, and space station construction.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Answer: c

Q3. Consider the following statements regarding the Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISE+):

- 1. The Department of School Education & Literacy developed this system of online data collection from the schools.
- 2. It was mainly developed to overcome the issues related to the erstwhile practice of manual data filling in paper format.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Answer: c

Q4. Which of the following statements regarding the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) are correct?

- 1. The FCRA was enacted in 1976 and amended in 2010 and 2020 to regulate the acceptance and use of foreign contributions by individuals and organizations in India.
- 2. The FCRA aims to prevent foreign influence in political, economic, religious, or social affairs in India.
- 3. Funds received through FCRA can be used for any approved or unapproved purposes.

Select the correct answer using the codes given below.

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

Answer: a

Q5. Consider the following pairs:

- 1. Simlipal Tiger Reserve: Odisha
- 2. Bandipur Tiger Reserve: Tamil Nadu
- 3. Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve: Karnataka

How many of the above-given pairs is/are correctly matched?

- a) Only One
- b) Only Two
- c) All Three
- d) None

Answer: a





VAJIRAM & RAVI

Institute for IAS Examination

A unit of Vajiram & Ravi IAS Study Centre LLP

9-B, Bada Bazar Marg, Old Rajinder Nagar,
New Delhi - 110060 • Ph.: 41007400, 41007500

New No. 62, P Block, 6th Avenue, Anna Nagar,
Chennai - 600040 • Ph.: 044-4330-2121

Visit us at : www.vajiramandravi.com