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IMPORTANT INSIGHTS

Proposed Amendment to NFSA Seeks Per Capita AAY Foodgrain Entitlement, Triggering Federal Debate over Food Security and Equity

Recent Developments:

- The **Union Government** has released the **Draft National Food Security (Amendment) Bill, 2026** for public consultation.
- The draft proposes replacing the existing **35 kg per household per month** entitlement for **Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY)** households with **7 kg per person per month**, subject to a maximum of **35 kg per household**.
- **Tamil Nadu** and **Kerala** have opposed the proposal, arguing that it would reduce foodgrain allocations for many poor households with smaller family sizes.

National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013:

Objective:

- The **National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013** provides legal entitlement to subsidised foodgrains and seeks to ensure **food and nutritional security** through the **Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS)**.
- The Act covers nearly **two-thirds of India's population**, making it one of the world's largest food security programmes.

Coverage:

- Covers up to **75% of the rural population**.
- Covers up to **50% of the urban population**.

Categories of Beneficiaries:

- **Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY):** Covers the **poorest households**, receiving higher foodgrain support.
- **Priority Households (PHH):** Covers eligible households identified by States under the Act.

Foodgrain Entitlements:

- **AAY households:** **35 kg of foodgrains per household per month**.
- **PHH beneficiaries:** **5 kg of foodgrains per person per month**.

Subsidised Issue Prices:

- **Rice:** ₹3 per kg.
- **Wheat:** ₹2 per kg.
- **Coarse grains:** ₹1 per kg.

Social Welfare Provisions:

- The **eldest woman aged 18 years or above** is recognised as the head of the household for issuing ration cards.
- **Pregnant women, lactating mothers, and children** receive statutory nutritional support.
- Pregnant and lactating women are entitled to a **cash maternity benefit of at least ₹6,000**.
- **Children up to six years** receive age-appropriate meals through **Anganwadis**, while **children aged 6–14 years** receive cooked midday meals in schools.

Transparency and Accountability:

- States must establish **State Food Commissions, District Grievance Redressal Officers (DGROs), and Vigilance Committees**.
- The Act mandates **public disclosure of PDS records** and publication of beneficiary lists to enhance transparency.

Proposed Amendment to NFSA:

Provision Proposed:

- The amendment modifies **Section 3(1) of the National Food Security Act, 2013** relating to **AAY foodgrain entitlements**.

Existing Provision:

- Every **AAY household** receives **35 kg of foodgrains per month**, irrespective of family size.

Proposed Provision:

- Every individual belonging to an **AAY household** will receive **7 kg of foodgrains per month**.
- The total entitlement will remain **capped at 35 kg per household per month**.
- The **Department of Food and Public Distribution** has invited public comments before finalising the amendment.

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Rationale Behind the Amendment:

Addressing Distribution Inequities:

- The existing household-based entitlement provides **higher per capita foodgrain allocation to smaller families**.
- Larger AAY households often receive **less foodgrain per person**, in some cases lower than **Priority Household** beneficiaries.

Objectives:

- Ensure **equitable per capita distribution** among AAY beneficiaries.
- Rationalise foodgrain allocation based on household size.
- Better align foodgrain distribution with nutritional requirements.

Limitation:

- The proposal does not address **ineligible beneficiaries**, outdated beneficiary databases, or exclusion and inclusion errors under the NFSA.

Reasons for Opposition by Tamil Nadu and Kerala:***Reduction in Foodgrain Allocation:***

- Both States have a high proportion of **nuclear families**, many with fewer than five members.
- Such households would receive **less than the existing 35 kg**, reducing their monthly entitlement.

Impact on Vulnerable Households:

- Kerala argues that **AAY beneficiaries represent the poorest households** and therefore require stronger social protection.

Higher Financial Burden:

- Tamil Nadu estimates that its monthly AAY allocation could decline substantially because **most beneficiary households contain fewer than five members**.
- Poor households may need to purchase additional foodgrains from the open market, increasing household expenditure.

Concerns over Regional Disparities:

- Civil society organisations argue that **States with larger average family sizes** could receive relatively higher allocations.
- States with smaller household sizes could witness a disproportionate reduction in foodgrain availability, raising concerns regarding regional equity.

Historical Context:***Kerala:***

- Kerala developed one of India's earliest organised **Public Distribution Systems (PDS)** in **1962**, before the establishment of the **Food Corporation of India (FCI)**.
- The State had also expressed reservations during the enactment of the **NFSA in 2013** over concerns relating to exclusion of beneficiaries and fiscal implications.

Tamil Nadu:

- Food security has remained a major political issue following severe food shortages during the **1950s and 1960s**.
- Since **2011**, the State has implemented a **universal free rice distribution system** through the PDS.
- During the enactment of the NFSA, Tamil Nadu secured protection to ensure that its existing foodgrain allocation would not be reduced.

Key Issues Involved:

Equity versus Social Protection:

- A per capita formula enhances distributional fairness but may reduce guaranteed support for smaller vulnerable households.

Federal Concerns:

- Uniform national criteria may not adequately reflect regional demographic patterns and household structures.

Food and Nutritional Security:

- Lower allocations for certain households could weaken food security among the poorest families.

Fiscal Implications:

- The proposal may rationalise the Union Government's food subsidy expenditure while shifting part of the financial burden to beneficiaries.

Coverage and Identification Challenges:

- NFSA coverage continues to be based on **2011 Census population estimates**, leading to exclusion of many eligible households because of population growth.

Way Forward:

Cooperative Federalism:

- Wider consultation with **States**, experts, and civil society organisations should precede any legislative amendment.

Balanced Entitlement Model:

- A minimum household entitlement alongside a per capita component could balance equity with social protection.

Periodic Beneficiary Revision:

- Beneficiary lists should be updated regularly using the latest population data to reduce exclusion errors.

Strengthening Food Security:

- Foodgrain reforms should complement broader nutritional interventions, efficient PDS delivery, and improved beneficiary identification.

Balancing Competing Objectives:

- Policy design should simultaneously uphold **equity, nutritional security, fiscal sustainability, and cooperative federalism.**

Value Addition for UPSC:***Important Constitutional Provisions:***

- **Article 21:** Right to life has been judicially interpreted to include the **Right to Food.**
- **Article 39(b):** Directs the State to ensure equitable distribution of material resources.
- **Article 47:** Makes improvement of nutrition and public health a **Directive Principle of State Policy (DPSP).**

Important Institutions:

- **Department of Food and Public Distribution** under the **Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution** administers the NFSA.
- **Food Corporation of India (FCI)** procures, stores, transports, and supplies foodgrains for the Public Distribution System.
- **State Governments** identify eligible households and implement the Public Distribution System within their jurisdictions.

Hummus Trail Controversy Revives Debate on Geneva Conventions, Universal Jurisdiction and India's Legal Obligations in War Crimes Cases

Recent Developments:

- The **Hind Rajab Foundation (HRF)** filed a complaint before the **Union Ministry of Home Affairs, Bureau of Immigration**, and police authorities seeking the arrest of an Israeli soldier vacationing in **Himachal Pradesh** over alleged war crimes committed during the Gaza conflict.
- The incident has renewed discussion on **India's obligations under the Geneva Conventions**, the scope of **Universal Jurisdiction**, and the implementation of the **Geneva Conventions Act, 1960.**

Hummus Trail:***Meaning:***

- The **Hummus Trail** is an informal travel circuit covering destinations in India that are particularly popular among young Israeli travellers, especially after completion of compulsory military service.
- The expression draws inspiration from the **Hippie Trail** or **Hashish Trail** of the **1970s–1980s**, although it is primarily associated with tourism rather than conflict.

Major Destinations:

- The principal destinations include **Kasol, Dharamkot, Rishikesh, Pushkar, Goa, Hampi, Gokarna, Kodaikanal**, and the **Andaman and Nicobar Islands.**

Tiul Gadol (Big Trip):

- Many young Israelis undertake **Tiul Gadol**, meaning the **Big Trip**, immediately after mandatory military service.
- The journey generally lasts between **6 months and 1 year** and is often financed through post-service benefits.
- Approximately **80,000 Israeli tourists** visit India annually, with a significant proportion participating in this travel tradition.

Recent Tourism Cooperation:

- In **2026**, Israel allocated **4 million NIS** to strengthen bilateral tourism cooperation and increase tourist exchanges with India.

Geneva Conventions and International Humanitarian Law:

Overview:

- The **Four Geneva Conventions of 1949** constitute the foundation of **International Humanitarian Law (IHL)** governing armed conflicts.
- Their primary objective is to limit human suffering by protecting persons who are not participating in hostilities or are no longer able to fight.
- The Conventions are supplemented by the **Additional Protocols of 1977 and 2005**, which expand humanitarian protections in modern conflicts.

Four Geneva Conventions:

- **First Geneva Convention:** Protects wounded and sick members of armed forces on land.
- **Second Geneva Convention:** Protects wounded, sick, and shipwrecked military personnel at sea.
- **Third Geneva Convention:** Provides legal protection to prisoners of war.
- **Fourth Geneva Convention:** Protects civilians living in areas affected by armed conflict and military occupation.

Grave Breaches under the Fourth Geneva Convention:

- Grave breaches include **wilful killing, torture, inhuman treatment, unlawful deportation, hostage-taking, extensive destruction of property without military necessity**, and denial of fair trial rights.
- Such violations constitute serious war crimes under international humanitarian law.

Universal Jurisdiction:

Meaning:

- **Universal Jurisdiction** enables a State to investigate or prosecute individuals accused of specified international crimes irrespective of:
 - The nationality of the accused.
 - The nationality of the victim.
 - The place where the offence occurred.

Legal Basis under Geneva Conventions:

- The Geneva Conventions require every State Party to search for persons alleged to have committed **grave breaches**.
- States must either prosecute such individuals before their own courts or extradite them to another competent jurisdiction.
- This principle seeks to prevent perpetrators of serious international crimes from escaping accountability by crossing international borders.

India's Legal Framework:

Geneva Conventions Act, 1960:

- India enacted the **Geneva Conventions Act, 1960** to implement its treaty obligations under the Geneva Conventions.
- The Act criminalises acts classified as **grave breaches** under all four Geneva Conventions.

Jurisdiction under the Act:

- Indian courts may exercise jurisdiction over any person accused of committing a grave breach irrespective of nationality.
- The location where the alleged offence occurred does not restrict the applicability of the Act if the accused is found within India.

Punishment:

- Wilful killing of protected persons may attract **death penalty or life imprisonment**.
- Other grave breaches are punishable with imprisonment extending up to **14 years** under the Act.

Absence of a Standalone War Crimes Law:

- India does not possess a comprehensive domestic statute separately defining and prosecuting war crimes outside the framework of the **Geneva Conventions Act, 1960**.

Administrative Powers Available to India:

Immigration Measures:

- Where criminal proceedings are not initiated, immigration authorities retain sovereign authority to regulate the presence of foreign nationals under domestic immigration laws.

Deportation:

- The **Ministry of Home Affairs** and the **Bureau of Immigration** may facilitate deportation of a foreign national in accordance with applicable legal procedures, where considered appropriate under Indian law.

Global Practice of Universal Jurisdiction:

International Trend:

- Human rights organisations have increasingly invoked universal jurisdiction before domestic courts in different countries to seek accountability for alleged international crimes.

Examples:

- Legal proceedings invoking universal jurisdiction have been initiated before authorities in **Chile, Brazil, Canada, United Kingdom, Italy**, and several European jurisdictions.

Issues Before India:

International Legal Obligations versus Strategic Interests:

- India must balance its obligations arising from international humanitarian law with its expanding strategic partnership with Israel.

Diplomatic Sensitivities:

- Any legal action involving foreign military personnel may have implications for bilateral relations and regional diplomacy.

Domestic Legal Capacity:

- Effective implementation depends upon evidence collection, judicial scrutiny, procedural safeguards, and executive coordination.

International Judicial Context:

- The controversy has emerged during ongoing proceedings instituted by **South Africa** against Israel before the **International Court of Justice (ICJ)** concerning alleged violations of the **Genocide Convention**, increasing international attention on accountability mechanisms.

Significance for International Humanitarian Law:

Protection of Civilians:

- The Geneva Conventions reinforce the principle that civilians must remain protected during armed conflict.

Ending Impunity:

- Universal jurisdiction seeks to ensure that perpetrators of grave international crimes cannot evade justice merely by travelling abroad.

Strengthening Rule-Based International Order:

- Consistent implementation of humanitarian law strengthens respect for international legal norms and enhances global accountability.

Way Forward:***Strict Adherence to Rule of Law:***

- Every allegation should be examined strictly in accordance with domestic law, treaty obligations, and principles of natural justice.

Strengthening Domestic Legal Framework:

- India may consider modernising its legal architecture governing international crimes to address evolving humanitarian challenges.

Balancing Diplomacy and Legal Commitments:

- Foreign policy considerations should remain consistent with India's international legal obligations while preserving strategic partnerships.

Capacity Building:

- Investigation agencies, prosecutors, immigration authorities, and judicial institutions should receive specialised training relating to **International Humanitarian Law** and international criminal accountability.

Value Addition for UPSC:***Difference between International Humanitarian Law and International Human Rights Law:***

- **International Humanitarian Law** applies specifically during armed conflicts and regulates the conduct of warfare.
- **International Human Rights Law** applies at all times, during peace as well as armed conflict, subject to limited permissible derogations.

Important International Institutions:

- **International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC):** Guardian and promoter of **International Humanitarian Law** and the Geneva Conventions.
- **International Court of Justice (ICJ):** Settles legal disputes between States and provides advisory opinions.
- **International Criminal Court (ICC):** Tries individuals accused of genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and the crime of aggression; **India is not a State Party to the Rome Statute.**

Important International Crimes:

- **Genocide.**
- **Crimes against Humanity.**
- **War Crimes.**

- **Crime of Aggression.**

NeoSep1 Clinical Trial Expands to India to Combat Drug-Resistant Neonatal Sepsis and Rising Antimicrobial Resistance

Recent Developments:

- The **NeoSep1 Clinical Trial**, funded by the **Global Antibiotic Research and Development Partnership (GARDP)** Foundation, has expanded to India to evaluate improved antibiotic treatment strategies for **drug-resistant neonatal sepsis**.
- The trial aims to generate evidence for treating newborn sepsis caused by multidrug-resistant bacteria, particularly in **low- and middle-income countries**, where resistance patterns differ significantly from high-income nations.

NeoSep1 Clinical Trial:

About the Trial:

- **NeoSep1** is the world's first large international clinical trial specifically designed to identify effective antibiotic regimens for **hospitalised newborns with sepsis**.
- The trial focuses on treating infections caused by **multidrug-resistant pathogens**, which are increasingly reducing the effectiveness of standard antibiotic therapies.
- The study is coordinated under the **Global Antibiotic Research and Development Partnership (GARDP)** in collaboration with international research institutions and participating hospitals.

Significance for India:

- India carries one of the world's highest burdens of **neonatal sepsis**, making the trial highly relevant for improving neonatal survival.
- The bacterial profile responsible for newborn sepsis in India differs from that observed in many developed countries, requiring locally appropriate treatment strategies.
- The trial is expected to generate evidence-based treatment protocols that can strengthen neonatal healthcare and reduce mortality associated with antimicrobial resistance.

Neonatal Sepsis:

Meaning:

- **Neonatal Sepsis** is a life-threatening bloodstream infection occurring in infants below **90 days** of age.
- Premature babies and infants with **low birth weight** are at significantly higher risk because of their immature immune systems.

Types:

- **Early-Onset Neonatal Sepsis (EONS):** Develops within the first **72 hours** after birth and is commonly associated with maternal infections transmitted during delivery.

- **Late-Onset Neonatal Sepsis (LONS):** Occurs between **72 hours and 28–90 days** after birth and is generally linked to hospital-acquired or community-acquired infections.

Major Causative Organisms in India:

- Unlike many developed countries where **Group B Streptococcus** is a leading cause, neonatal sepsis in India is predominantly caused by **drug-resistant Gram-negative bacteria**.
- Important pathogens include:
 - **Klebsiella pneumoniae.**
 - **Escherichia coli.**
 - **Acinetobacter** species.
 - **Pseudomonas aeruginosa.**

Clinical Features:

- Common symptoms include **fever, rapid breathing, fast heart rate, poor feeding, lethargy, confusion, and body pain.**
- Untreated infection may progress to **septic shock, multiple organ dysfunction, and death.**

Disease Burden in India:

- Neonatal sepsis contributes to nearly **30–40%** of neonatal deaths in India.
- An estimated **2–2.5 lakh** neonatal deaths each year are considered preventable through timely diagnosis and effective treatment.

Prevention:

- Maintaining **hand hygiene, infection prevention measures, clean water, safe sanitation, safe childbirth practices, vaccination, exclusive breastfeeding, and adequate maternal nutrition** significantly reduce the risk of neonatal infections.

Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR):

Meaning:

- **Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR)** refers to the ability of microorganisms to survive exposure to antimicrobial medicines that previously killed or inhibited them.
- The phenomenon affects **bacteria, viruses, fungi, and parasites**, reducing the effectiveness of antibiotics, antivirals, antifungals, and antiparasitic medicines.

Mechanism:

- Microorganisms develop resistance through **genetic mutations** and **natural selection**, particularly when antimicrobial medicines are misused or overused.
- Resistant microbes multiply and spread, making infections increasingly difficult to treat.

Consequences:

- Increased treatment failure.
- Higher disease transmission.

- Longer hospitalisation.
- Greater healthcare expenditure.
- Increased disability and mortality.
- Rising risk of untreatable multidrug-resistant infections.

Global Concern:

- The **World Health Organization (WHO)** recognises **Antimicrobial Resistance** as one of the top global public health threats of the **21st century**.
- Without effective interventions, antimicrobial resistance could become a major obstacle to modern medicine, affecting surgery, cancer treatment, organ transplantation, and neonatal care.

Factors Responsible for Rising Antimicrobial Resistance in India:***Excessive and Irrational Antibiotic Use:***

- Over-prescription, self-medication, and irrational use of antibiotics accelerate the emergence of resistant microorganisms.

Poor Infection Prevention and Hygiene:

- Inadequate sanitation and weak infection-control practices in healthcare facilities facilitate the spread of resistant pathogens.

Inadequate Diagnostic Capacity:

- Antibiotics are frequently prescribed without laboratory confirmation, increasing unnecessary antimicrobial exposure.

Pharmaceutical Waste:

- Improper disposal of antibiotic manufacturing waste contaminates the environment and promotes the evolution of resistant bacteria.

Unregulated Use in Livestock:

- Antibiotics are widely used in **animal husbandry, dairy farming, and poultry production**, contributing to resistance across human and animal populations.

High Population Density and Mass Gatherings:

- Large religious gatherings, political events, and crowded social functions create conditions favourable for rapid transmission of infectious diseases.

Weak Public Awareness:

- Limited awareness regarding appropriate antibiotic use and incomplete treatment courses further accelerates antimicrobial resistance.

Government Initiatives to Combat Antimicrobial Resistance:

National Programme on AMR Containment:

- Launched during the **12th Five-Year Plan (2012–2017)** to strengthen national surveillance and containment efforts.
- The programme focuses on:
 - Establishing laboratory-based **AMR surveillance**.
 - Monitoring antimicrobial consumption.
 - Promoting antimicrobial stewardship.
 - Strengthening infection prevention and control measures.

Red Line Campaign:

- Prescription-only antibiotics are marked with a **red line** to discourage indiscriminate use and self-medication.

National Action Plan on AMR (2017):

- India became one of the earliest countries to adopt a comprehensive **National Action Plan on Antimicrobial Resistance**.
- The plan follows the **One Health Approach** involving coordinated action across human health, veterinary health, agriculture, food safety, and environmental sectors.

AMR Surveillance and Research Network (AMRSN):

- Established by the **Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR)** in **2013**.
- The network monitors resistance trends, generates scientific evidence, and supports national policy formulation.

Research and International Collaboration:

- **ICMR** collaborates with national and international institutions for developing new antibiotics, improving diagnostics, and strengthening antimicrobial research.

National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC):

- The **National Centre for Disease Control** coordinates national surveillance, laboratory capacity building, and infection prevention programmes related to antimicrobial resistance.

Challenges in Combating AMR:

Limited Laboratory Infrastructure:

- Uneven diagnostic capacity delays accurate identification of resistant pathogens.

Implementation Gaps:

- Resource constraints affect effective implementation of the **National Action Plan on AMR**, particularly at State and district levels.

Shortage of New Antibiotics:

- Development of novel antimicrobial drugs remains limited because of high research costs and relatively low commercial returns.

Environmental Transmission:

- Antibiotic residues released into soil and water contribute to the environmental spread of antimicrobial resistance.

Way Forward:***Regulating Antibiotic Use:***

- Antibiotic use should be strictly regulated across human healthcare, veterinary medicine, agriculture, and food production.

Strengthening Diagnostic Capacity:

- Rapid and affordable diagnostic facilities should be expanded to ensure evidence-based antibiotic prescribing.

Improving Infection Prevention:

- Better sanitation, vaccination, hand hygiene, hospital infection-control practices, and clean water supply should be prioritised.

Promoting Rational Antibiotic Use:

- Doctors should prescribe antibiotics only when clinically indicated, while citizens should avoid self-medication and complete prescribed treatment courses.

Strengthening National Action Plan:

- Adequate financial resources, inter-ministerial coordination, and continuous monitoring should improve implementation of the **National Action Plan on AMR**.

Adopting the One Health Approach:

- Integrated action involving **human health, animal health, agriculture**, and the **environment** is essential because antimicrobial resistance transcends sectoral boundaries.

Value Addition for UPSC:***One Health Approach:***

- The **One Health Approach** recognises that the health of humans, animals, plants, and ecosystems is interconnected and requires coordinated policy interventions.

WHO AWaRe Classification of Antibiotics:

- The **World Health Organization (WHO)** classifies antibiotics into **Access, Watch, and Reserve** categories to promote rational prescribing and reduce antimicrobial resistance.

WHO Priority Pathogens List:

- The **World Health Organization** periodically identifies priority antibiotic-resistant bacteria requiring urgent research and development of new antimicrobial medicines.

Sustainable Development Goal Linkages:

- **SDG 3:** Good Health and Well-being.
- **SDG 6:** Clean Water and Sanitation.
- **SDG 2:** Zero Hunger through safer livestock and food production systems.

Third India–Australia Annual Summit Strengthens Comprehensive Strategic Partnership through Defence, Trade, Energy and Technology Cooperation

Recent Developments:

- The **Prime Minister of India** visited **Australia** to participate in the **Third India–Australia Annual Summit** held in **Melbourne**, where both leaders adopted a **Joint Statement** to further deepen the **Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP)**.
- The Summit witnessed significant progress in **defence cooperation, maritime security, critical minerals, clean energy, education, space collaboration, and economic integration**, while reaffirming commitment to a free, open, inclusive and rules-based **Indo-Pacific**.

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Third India–Australia Annual Summit:***About the Summit:***

- The **India–Australia Annual Summit** is the highest institutional mechanism for bilateral political engagement between the two countries.
- It provides annual strategic direction for implementing and expanding the **Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP)** established in **2020**.
- The Summit reviews progress across defence, trade, investment, critical technologies, education, energy security, people-to-people ties, and regional cooperation.

Major Outcomes of the Summit:

Defence and Maritime Security:

- The leaders adopted a **Joint Declaration on Defence and Security Cooperation** to deepen defence engagement and strengthen regional security architecture.
- Both countries agreed to establish an **Annual Defence Ministers' Dialogue** to improve strategic coordination and military interoperability.
- The **India–Australia Maritime Security Collaboration Roadmap** was launched to enhance cooperation across the **Indian Ocean Region (IOR)**.
- A **Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)** was signed between the **Australian Maritime Border Command** and the **Indian Coast Guard** to strengthen maritime domain awareness, law enforcement, search and rescue, and maritime security cooperation.
- Both sides agreed to conclude a **MoU on the Provision of Defence Articles and Defence Services**, strengthening defence industrial cooperation.
- India will post a military instructor at the **Australian Defence College** during **2028–2029**, expanding institutional defence exchanges.

Trade, Critical Minerals and Supply Chains:

- Both countries reaffirmed their commitment to conclude the **Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA)** by building upon the existing **Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (ECTA)**.
- The leaders agreed to strengthen resilient and diversified supply chains for strategically important sectors.
- A project-based **Critical Minerals Partnership** was launched to facilitate long-term investment in exploration, mining, processing, refining and value addition of critical minerals.
- Cooperation aims to support India's semiconductor, battery manufacturing and electric vehicle ecosystem through secure access to lithium, cobalt, rare earth elements and other strategic minerals.

Climate, Energy and Civil Nuclear Cooperation:

- Both countries operationalised the **Administrative Arrangement** under the bilateral **Civil Nuclear Cooperation Agreement**, enabling long-term Australian uranium exports to India under **International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)** safeguards.
- The **Joint Statement on Energy Security** strengthened cooperation in renewable energy, hydrogen, battery technologies and energy transition.
- The **Rooftop Solar Academy** was operationalised to promote decentralised renewable energy capacity building.

Space Cooperation:

- Australia confirmed continued support for India's **Gaganyaan Human Space Flight Programme**.
- A temporary space tracking facility on the **Cocos (Keeling) Islands** will support telemetry, tracking and communication requirements for Indian space missions.

Education, Skills and People-to-People Ties:

- The **University Grants Commission (UGC)** issued a **Letter of Intent** to **Flinders University** for establishing its campus in **Bengaluru**.
- The **University Grants Commission** also granted a **Letter of Approval** to **Victoria University** for establishing a campus in **Gurugram**.

- Australia allocated **10 million Australian Dollars** under the **Maitri Grants Programme** to strengthen bilateral educational, cultural and research cooperation.
- The **Government of Western Australia** partnered with India to establish the **National Centre of Excellence for Skilling in Mining** at **Bhubaneswar**, Odisha.

Strategic Significance of the Summit:

Economic Integration:

- Early conclusion of the **Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement** would reduce tariff and non-tariff barriers while expanding bilateral trade and investment opportunities.

Critical Minerals Security:

- Long-term cooperation strengthens India's resource security for semiconductors, electric vehicles, clean energy technologies and advanced manufacturing.

Supply Chain Resilience:

- Diversification of supply chains reduces dependence on concentrated global suppliers and enhances economic security.

Energy Security:

- Stable uranium supplies support India's clean energy transition while advancing long-term nuclear power generation.

Space Collaboration:

- Expanded tracking infrastructure strengthens India's deep-space communication, launch monitoring and human spaceflight capabilities.

Human Resource Development:

- Collaboration in higher education and vocational skills supports workforce development aligned with future industrial requirements.

Sports Diplomacy:

- Cooperation in sports infrastructure and event management supports preparation for future international sporting events and strengthens people-to-people engagement.

Challenges and Areas of Concern:

Economic Vulnerabilities:

- Heavy dependence on concentrated supply chains exposes both economies to geopolitical disruptions and trade restrictions.

Regional Security Challenges:

- Terrorism, violent extremism and emerging non-traditional security threats continue to affect regional stability.

Maritime Security Risks:

- Geopolitical tensions across **West Asia** and critical sea lanes threaten energy supplies, shipping routes and global commerce.

Trade Negotiation Complexities:

- Differences relating to tariffs, market access, agriculture, digital trade and regulatory standards continue to delay conclusion of the **Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement**.

Global Governance Reform:

- Progress on reforming multilateral institutions, particularly the **United Nations Security Council (UNSC)**, remains slow despite Australia's continued support for India's permanent membership.

Way Forward:***Early Conclusion of CECA:***

- Both countries should resolve remaining market-access issues to conclude the **Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement** at the earliest.

Operationalising Nuclear Cooperation:

- Early implementation of uranium supply arrangements will strengthen India's long-term clean energy security.

Strengthening Supply Chain Partnerships:

- Greater cooperation under the **Australia–India Partnership on Cyber and Critical Technologies (AI-PACT)** should enhance resilience in semiconductors, telecommunications and emerging technologies.

Enhancing Maritime Cooperation:

- Expansion of joint naval exercises, maritime information sharing and coordinated maritime surveillance should strengthen security in the **Indian Ocean Region**.

Promoting Mutual Recognition of Skills:

- Harmonisation of vocational qualifications would improve labour mobility and industrial cooperation between both countries.

India–Australia Relations:

Historical Background:

- India and Australia share historical links as former parts of the **British Empire**.
- Both countries are members of the **Commonwealth of Nations** and maintain vibrant democratic traditions.

Political Relations:

- Bilateral ties were elevated to a **Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP)** in **2020**.
- Regular **2+2 Ministerial Dialogue**, **Annual Summit**, and sectoral dialogues provide institutional mechanisms for strategic cooperation.

Economic Relations:

- Bilateral trade is valued at approximately **US\$32.6 billion**.
- Australia is a major supplier of **coal**, **liquefied natural gas (LNG)**, **gold**, and **uranium**, while India exports pharmaceuticals, engineering goods, textiles, information technology services and refined petroleum products.

Defence and Security Cooperation:

- Major bilateral military exercises include:
 - **AUSINDEX** (Navy).
 - **AUSTRAHIND** (Army).
- Australia also participates in the **Malabar Naval Exercise** alongside **India**, **Japan**, and the **United States** under the **Quad** framework.

Multilateral Cooperation:

- Both countries cooperate through:
 - **Quad**.
 - **East Asia Summit (EAS)**.
 - **Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA)**.
 - **G20**.
 - **Commonwealth of Nations**.
 - **United Nations (UN)**.

Institutional Mechanism:

- Bilateral engagement is supported by the **Centre for Australia–India Relations**, functioning within Australia's foreign affairs portfolio.

Value Addition for UPSC:

Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (ECTA):

- The **Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (ECTA)** entered into force in **2022** as India's first trade agreement with a developed economy in over a decade.

- It serves as the foundation for negotiating the broader **Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA)**.

Importance of Australia for India's Critical Minerals Strategy:

- Australia possesses some of the world's largest reserves of **lithium, cobalt, nickel, and rare earth elements**, making it a crucial partner in India's energy transition and advanced manufacturing strategy.

Importance of the Indian Ocean Region:

- The **Indian Ocean Region** carries nearly **80%** of global seaborne oil trade and remains central to India's maritime security, energy security and trade connectivity.

Justice Yashwant Varma Case Revives Debate on Judicial Accountability, Resignation and Parliamentary Removal Mechanism in India

Recent Developments:

- **Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla** has decided to table the report of the **Judges Inquiry Committee** investigating allegations against former **Allahabad High Court judge Justice Yashwant Varma**, despite his resignation in **April 2026**.
- The decision has reopened the constitutional debate on whether resignation by a judge automatically terminates impeachment proceedings or whether Parliament may continue the accountability process in the larger public interest.

Background of the Case:

Sequence of Events:

- In **2025**, bundles of burnt and partially destroyed currency notes were reportedly recovered from the official residence of **Justice Yashwant Varma** in **New Delhi**, leading to serious allegations of misconduct.
- The **Supreme Court** initiated an **in-house inquiry**, which reportedly found sufficient grounds warranting further action against the judge.
- More than **146 Members of Parliament** submitted a motion seeking his removal, following which the **Lok Sabha Speaker** constituted a **three-member Judges Inquiry Committee** under the **Judges (Inquiry) Act, 1968**.
- Before completion of the parliamentary inquiry, **Justice Varma** resigned by submitting his resignation to the **President of India**.
- The **Judges Inquiry Committee** nevertheless completed its statutory inquiry and submitted its report to the **Lok Sabha Speaker**, who decided to place it before both Houses of Parliament.

Judicial Accountability in India:

Meaning:

- **Judicial accountability** refers to the constitutional principle that judges remain answerable for proven misconduct while preserving judicial independence from political or executive interference.
- It seeks to maintain **public confidence**, **institutional integrity**, **judicial independence**, and the **Rule of Law** simultaneously.

Need for Judicial Accountability:

- Judicial accountability strengthens public trust in the justice delivery system.
- Judicial accountability ensures that constitutional offices remain subject to constitutional standards of conduct.
- Judicial accountability protects judicial independence by distinguishing legitimate scrutiny from political interference.
- Judicial accountability promotes transparency, ethical conduct and institutional credibility.

Constitutional Framework Governing Removal of Judges:

Relevant Constitutional Provisions:

- **Article 124(4)** provides for the removal of a **Supreme Court Judge** on the grounds of **proved misbehaviour** or **incapacity** through a special parliamentary procedure.
- **Article 124(5)** empowers Parliament to enact a law regulating the investigation and proof of misbehaviour or incapacity.
- **Article 217(1)(b)** provides that a **High Court Judge** may resign by writing under his hand addressed to the **President of India**.
- **Article 218** makes the removal procedure applicable to **High Court Judges** in the same manner as **Supreme Court Judges**.

Judges (Inquiry) Act, 1968:

Purpose:

- The **Judges (Inquiry) Act, 1968** provides the statutory procedure for investigating allegations against judges before Parliament considers their removal.

Initiation of Removal Motion:

- A removal motion may be initiated by:
 - At least **100 Members** of the **Lok Sabha**, or
 - At least **50 Members** of the **Rajya Sabha**.

Admission of Motion:

- The **Speaker** or the **Chairman** may admit or reject the motion after preliminary examination.

Constitution of Inquiry Committee:

- Upon admission, a **three-member Inquiry Committee** is constituted comprising:
 - One **Supreme Court Judge**.
 - One **Chief Justice of a High Court**.
 - One **distinguished jurist**.

Inquiry Process:

- The Committee investigates allegations by following principles of natural justice.
- The concerned judge receives an opportunity to present evidence and defend against the charges.
- The Committee submits its findings regarding whether the charges stand proved.

Parliamentary Removal:

- If misconduct is proved, each House of Parliament must separately pass an **Address** supported by:
 - A majority of the total membership of that House, and
 - A majority of not less than **two-thirds** of members present and voting.
- After parliamentary approval, the **President of India** issues the order removing the judge from office.

Legal Position on Resignation During Inquiry:***Constitutional Position:***

- **Article 217** permits resignation by a unilateral communication addressed to the **President of India**.
- Acceptance of resignation by the President is not constitutionally required.

Supreme Court Interpretation:

- In **Union of India v. Gopal Chandra Misra (1978)**, the **Supreme Court** held that resignation becomes effective from the date specified by the judge and does not require formal acceptance.

Existing Constitutional Gap:

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- Neither the Constitution nor the **Judges (Inquiry) Act, 1968** expressly provides that an ongoing misconduct inquiry automatically lapses after resignation.
- The present controversy therefore concerns interpretation of constitutional practice rather than explicit constitutional text.

Previous Impeachment Precedents:***Justice V. Ramaswami (1993):***

- Justice **V. Ramaswami** became the first judge against whom impeachment proceedings reached Parliament.
- The removal motion failed in the **Lok Sabha** because several Members abstained despite the inquiry committee finding financial irregularities.
- Consequently, no judge has been removed through impeachment in India till date.

Justice P. D. Dinakaran (2011):

- The then **Chief Justice of the Sikkim High Court** resigned while the inquiry committee was still investigating allegations.
- Parliament treated the proceedings as having become infructuous because the objective of removal no longer survived.

Justice Soumitra Sen (2011):

- The **Rajya Sabha** passed the impeachment motion against **Justice Soumitra Sen**.
- Before the **Lok Sabha** could vote, he resigned from office.
- The **Lok Sabha** subsequently discontinued further proceedings.

Competing Constitutional Interpretations:***View Supporting Termination of Proceedings:***

- Once a judge resigns, removal from office becomes impossible.
- Continuing impeachment proceedings may therefore be considered unnecessary.
- This interpretation has shaped previous parliamentary practice.

View Supporting Continuation of Proceedings:

- The inquiry stage and the removal stage are legally distinct under the **Judges (Inquiry) Act, 1968**.
- Establishing whether misconduct occurred serves an important constitutional purpose independent of removal.
- Completion of the inquiry promotes transparency, institutional accountability and public confidence.
- Allowing resignation to terminate inquiries may encourage judges facing serious allegations to avoid constitutional scrutiny.

Significance of Tabling the Report:***Strengthening Public Accountability:***

- Parliamentary tabling places the findings of a statutory inquiry in the public domain.
- Public disclosure strengthens institutional transparency and democratic oversight.

Clarifying Constitutional Practice:

- The present case may establish an important constitutional convention regarding continuation of accountability proceedings after resignation.

Financial Implications:

- Judges resigning before retirement generally remain entitled to retirement-related benefits under applicable service conditions.
- If Parliament ultimately develops a different constitutional practice, questions regarding pensionary consequences may arise.

Future Criminal Proceedings:

- Parliamentary findings themselves do not constitute criminal conviction.
- However, factual findings may facilitate appropriate investigation by competent authorities wherever independent criminal offences are disclosed.

Challenges in India's Judicial Accountability Framework:***High Threshold for Removal:***

- The constitutional requirement of special parliamentary majority makes removal extremely difficult.

Absence of Internal Disciplinary Measures:

- The Constitution primarily provides removal as the ultimate sanction, leaving limited intermediate disciplinary mechanisms.

Balance Between Independence and Accountability:

- Excessive external interference may weaken judicial independence, whereas inadequate accountability may reduce public confidence.

Limited Transparency of In-house Procedures:

- Internal judicial inquiries generally remain confidential, leading to demands for greater transparency while preserving judicial independence.

Way Forward:***Statutory Clarification:***

- Parliament may clarify through legislation whether inquiry proceedings should continue after resignation in cases involving serious misconduct.

Strengthening Institutional Accountability:

- Clear procedures should distinguish fact-finding from removal so that constitutional accountability survives even where removal becomes impossible.

Enhancing Transparency:

- Greater public disclosure of completed statutory inquiries should be considered while protecting due process and judicial independence.

Developing a Judicial Standards Framework:

- A comprehensive judicial ethics and accountability law may provide graded disciplinary mechanisms for misconduct falling short of removal.

Balancing Constitutional Values:

- Any reform should simultaneously preserve **judicial independence**, **separation of powers**, **Rule of Law**, **natural justice**, and **public confidence in the judiciary**.

Related Constitutional Concepts:***In-house Procedure of the Supreme Court:***

- The judiciary follows an **in-house procedure** for examining complaints against judges before initiation of formal constitutional removal proceedings.
- The in-house mechanism is administrative in nature and remains distinct from the parliamentary removal process.

Judicial Independence:

- Judicial independence is protected through security of tenure, fixed service conditions, difficult removal procedures and protection from executive interference.
- Accountability mechanisms should reinforce, rather than undermine, judicial independence.

Doctrine of Separation of Powers:

- Parliament exercises the constitutional power of removal, whereas courts independently discharge judicial functions.
- The removal mechanism reflects constitutional checks and balances among the organs of government.

Value Addition for UPSC:***Important Constitutional Articles:***

- Article 50:** Separation of the judiciary from the executive.
- Article 121:** Parliamentary discussion on the conduct of judges is prohibited except upon a motion for removal.
- Article 124:** Appointment and removal of **Supreme Court Judges**.
- Article 124(4):** Grounds and procedure for removal.
- Article 124(5):** Parliamentary power to regulate inquiry.
- Article 217:** Appointment and resignation of **High Court Judges**.
- Article 218:** Application of removal provisions to **High Court Judges**.

Important Judicial Pronouncement:

- Union of India v. Gopal Chandra Misra (1978):** A judge's resignation is a unilateral constitutional act that becomes effective from the date specified by the judge unless validly withdrawn before taking effect.

Judicial Ethics Framework:

- Restatement of Values of Judicial Life (1997)** lays down ethical standards expected from judges.
- Bangalore Principles of Judicial Conduct (2002)** identify **Independence, Impartiality, Integrity, Propriety, Equality, Competence, and Diligence** as core judicial values.

QUESTIONS

1. Consider the following statements regarding the National Food Security Act, 2013:

- (1) It covers up to 75% of the rural population.
- (2) It covers up to 50% of the urban population.
- (3) It provides legal entitlement to subsidised foodgrains.
- (4) It primarily operates through the Targeted Public Distribution System.

Which of the above statements are correct?

- (A) 1 and 2 only
- (B) 2 and 3 only
- (C) 1, 2 and 4 only
- (D) 1, 2, 3 and 4

2. Match the following:

List-I List-II

- | | |
|------------------------------|--|
| (1) First Geneva Convention | (a) Prisoners of War |
| (2) Second Geneva Convention | (b) Civilians |
| (3) Third Geneva Convention | (c) Wounded and Sick on Land |
| (4) Fourth Geneva Convention | (d) Wounded, Sick and Shipwrecked at Sea |

Options:

- (A) 1-c, 2-d, 3-a, 4-b
- (B) 1-d, 2-c, 3-b, 4-a
- (C) 1-c, 2-a, 3-d, 4-b
- (D) 1-b, 2-c, 3-a, 4-d

3. Consider the following bacteria associated with neonatal sepsis in India:

- (1) *Klebsiella pneumoniae*
- (2) *Escherichia coli*
- (3) *Acinetobacter*
- (4) *Pseudomonas aeruginosa*
- (5) Group B *Streptococcus*

Which of the above are identified as the predominant causes of neonatal sepsis in India according to the given context?

- (A) 1, 2 and 5 only
- (B) 1, 2, 3 and 4 only
- (C) 2, 3, 4 and 5 only
- (D) 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5

4. Consider the following statements regarding India–Australia economic cooperation:

- (1) The ECTA functions as an interim trade arrangement while negotiations on a comprehensive CECA continue.
- (2) The Critical Minerals Partnership primarily seeks to strengthen cooperation in long-term supply chains, refining and value addition.
- (3) The Comprehensive Strategic Partnership was established after the entry into force of the ECTA.
- (4) Australian uranium exports to India will be governed exclusively by bilateral domestic regulations without any international safeguards.
- (5) CECA is intended to replace the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership as the principal framework for bilateral relations.

How many of the above statements are correct?

- (A) One
- (B) Two
- (C) Three
- (D) Four

5. Consider the following statements regarding the constitutional position on resignation of a High Court Judge:

- (1) Under Article 217, a High Court Judge may resign by addressing a letter to the President of India.
- (2) A Judge's resignation requires formal acceptance by the President before becoming effective.
- (3) A 1978 Supreme Court judgment held that resignation is a unilateral act.
- (4) The Constitution expressly provides that all pending impeachment proceedings automatically lapse upon resignation.
- (5) Neither Article 217 nor the 1978 judgment explicitly states that a pending misconduct inquiry must terminate upon resignation.

How many of the above statements are correct?

- (A) 1 and 5 only
- (B) 2, 3, 4 and 5 only
- (C) 2 and 4 only
- (D) 1, 2, 3 and 4 only

ANSWER KEY**1 – Answer (D), 2 – Answer (A), 3 – Answer (B), 4 – Answer (B), 5 – Answer (C)**



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