

A textbook, criticism, the Court and contempt

Prelims: General Studies Paper - 1
Current events of national and international importance

Mains: General Studies - 2
Structure, organization and functioning of the Executive and the Judiciary—Ministries and Departments of the Government; pressure groups and formal/informal associations and their role in the Polity.

1. Context: NCERT Textbook Controversy and Supreme Court Response

- The controversy arose after the Supreme Court of India objected to the portrayal of the judiciary in a Class 8 textbook by NCERT.
- The Court has **shelved the textbook and its authors**.
- A **new committee of legal experts** has been constituted to decide appropriate content.
- The issue raises concerns about **balancing judicial respect with academic freedom and free speech**.

2. Contempt of Court and its Democratic Basis

- Contempt of court is of two types: **civil contempt** (disobedience of orders) and **criminal contempt** (obstructing justice or lowering court authority).
- Criminal contempt includes acts that **scandalise the judiciary** or spread **misleading narratives eroding public confidence**.
- It is **not meant to protect judges' ego**, but to safeguard **institutional credibility**.
- The judiciary lacks control over the **purse and sword**; its real strength lies in **public trust and legitimacy**.
- Public confidence is built through **justice delivery, rights protection, and constitutional values**.
- **Reckless or motivated criticism** can weaken this trust and democratic functioning

3. Judicial Approach to Criticism and Free Speech

- Courts have accepted that they are **not immune to criticism**.
- Sabyasachi Mukherjee emphasised **introspection** and acknowledged **delays in justice delivery**.
- P. B. Gajendragadkar warned that contempt powers must be used **cautiously and with restraint**.
- S. P. Bharucha adopted the **"broad shoulders" approach**, dropping action against critics like Medha Patkar and Arundhati Roy.
- He also flagged **judicial corruption concerns**, noting even **isolated cases damage credibility**.
- Lord Denning strongly defended **freedom of speech**, stating courts must rely on **conduct, not suppression**.
- In the **Spycatcher case (1987)**, despite media criticism calling judges **"Old Fools"**, no contempt action was taken, reflecting **tolerance for criticism**.

4. Limits of Criticism, Due Process, and Way Forward

- Criticism must be **fact-based, non-reckless, and not ill-motivated**.
- Weakening judicial image undermines **judicial review**, which ensures **accountability and good governance**.
- Courts must act cautiously in **academic matters**, upholding **free speech and academic freedom**.
- The issue could have been resolved through **due process** (notice, clarification, rectification).
- **Judicial restraint** could have prevented escalation.
- Students must understand the judiciary's role in protecting **fundamental rights (equality, free speech, religion)** and its challenges.
- Addressing corruption remains difficult: **impeachment is lengthy, transfers limited, and in-house mechanisms constrained**.
- The constitutional framework requires **stronger accountability mechanisms**.

- Strengthening internal accountability will **enhance public trust and institutional integrity**.

A West Asia security rethink amid America's role

Prelims: General Studies Paper - 1
Current events of national and international importance

Mains: General Studies - 2
Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora.

1. Changing Regional Security Dynamics

- The **U.S.-Israel war against Iran** is reshaping **West Asian security architecture**.
- Iran's threats, including **closure of the Strait of Hormuz** and **attacks on U.S.-linked targets**, have escalated tensions.
- Regional countries are now demanding a **"strategic reset"** in security arrangements.
- The conflict risks becoming a **wider regional war**, as Iran had previously warned.

2. Pakistan's Strategic Repositioning

- Pakistan is attempting to act as a **mediator between Iran and the U.S.**
- It is leveraging its identity as a **Muslim-majority nuclear power**.
- Engagements with countries like **Türkiye, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt** show efforts to build **regional influence**.
- Aim: Shift towards **Islamic geopolitical alignment** and gain **strategic relevance**.

3. Gulf Countries and Emerging Cooperation

- Gulf states (e.g., **Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait**) are increasing **security cooperation**.
- Earlier **intra-Gulf conflicts** (like Saudi-Qatar tensions) are being sidelined.
- Criticism of institutions like the **Arab League** for being ineffective.
- However, challenges remain due to:
 - ☹ **Iran's aggression**
 - ☹ **Israel's military dominance**
 - ☹ **Internal divisions within Gulf states**

4. Declining U.S. Role & Future Uncertainties

- The **U.S. security umbrella** is seen as **inadequate** (e.g., 2019 Saudi oil attack).
- The U.S. may demand **financial contributions** from Gulf states for security.
- Rising **U.S. energy self-sufficiency** reduces its dependence on the region.
- Key future questions:
 - ☹ Can a **regional security system work without Iran?**
 - ☹ Will **Asian powers (like India)** play a bigger role?
 - ☹ Can Gulf states achieve **unity despite differences?**

Why is India pushing piped gas now?

Prelims: General Studies Paper - 1
Current events of national and international importance

Mains: General Studies - 3
Infrastructure: Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways etc.

1. Context: Push Towards Natural Gas (PNG) in India

- India has about **33 crore LPG connections**, making it the dominant cooking fuel.
- Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board Secretary Anjan Kumar Mishra stated that **domestic natural gas can cater to 30 crore connections** if shifted to PNG.
- India imports **about 60% of LPG demand**, with **90% passing through the Strait of Hormuz**, making it vulnerable to geopolitical disruptions.
- LNG** imports (about 27 million tonnes annually) come from **diversified global sources**, unlike LPG which depends mainly on **Saudi Arabia and Qatar**.
- Government aims to expand PNG connections to **12 crore households by 2034**.

2. Difference Between LPG, LNG, PNG, and CNG

- LPG:** **Co-product of crude oil refining and natural gas processing**; mainly **propane** and **butane**; stored as liquid under pressure; widely used for cooking and MSMEs.
- LNG:** Natural gas cooled to **-160°C**; volume reduced by **1000 times**; used for transport and international trade.

- **PNG:** Natural gas supplied through pipelines directly to households and industries; continuous supply without cylinders.
- **CNG:** Natural gas compressed to **200-250 kg/cm²**; mainly used as vehicular fuel.

3. Transportation, Infrastructure, and Government Push

- LPG is liquefied, pressurised, cooled (<40°C), **transported via ships**, and **distributed through cylinders** using trucks and local delivery systems.
- LNG is transported via **specialised carriers, regasified at destination**, and **supplied through pipelines as PNG**.
- Government plans to add **15 lakh PNG connections** in the short term.
- Policy measures include **time-bound approvals for pipeline expansion** and restriction on holding both LPG and PNG connections.
- PNG connections: **1.5 crore currently**, expected to reach **2 crore soon**.
- Required growth rate: **24% CAGR** (current around 18%) to meet 2034 target.
- Pipeline network: **about 25,000 km operational + 10,500 km under construction**.
- **300+ CGD areas identified**, but many still lack connectivity.

4. Challenges and Limitations

- Pipeline network is concentrated in **western and northern India**, with gaps in central, southern, and northeastern regions.
- Around **90 CGD(City Gas Distribution)** areas are not yet connected to trunk pipelines; last-mile connectivity remains a key issue.
- Even with 12 crore PNG connections, **LPG users will exceed 20 crore**, sustaining import dependence.
- Natural gas usage distribution: **30% fertilizers, 13% power, 20% city gas, 35% refineries and industries**.
- Shifting gas to households may require **diversion from power and industry sectors**.
- To **support 13 crore PNG connections**, **domestic production** must increase by **33%**.

- Oil and Natural Gas Corporation KG-DWN 98/2 block can raise production by **10-15%**.
- India has **some 9 LNG import terminals**, but LNG operates on a **just-in-time system** with limited storage.
- Any disruption in LNG imports can cause **immediate supply shortages**.

Qdenga: a step forward against dengue, but not a silver bullet

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Mains: General Studies - 2
Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

1. Context

- Qdenga (TAK-003) is a **tetravalent (protects against all four dengue virus serotypes) vaccine** approved in India for individuals aged 4–60 years.
- It has been **cleared by the Subject Expert Committee (SEC) under the Drugs Controller General of India**, marking a major step in dengue control.
- The **vaccine has undergone large global trials** and is already approved in over 40 countries.
- **Benefits**
 - ➔ No pre-vaccination screening needed, enabling easy deployment.
 - ➔ Safe and effective against severe dengue, reducing hospital burden.

Dengue is a **mosquito-borne viral infection commonly found in tropical and subtropical regions**, especially in urban areas. It spreads to **humans through the bite of infected Aedes mosquitoes** carrying DENV (Dengue Virus)

2. Challenges and limitations

- Dengue has 4 types (DENV – Dengue Virus types 1–4); **immunity to one type does not protect against the others**.
- **Qdenga (TAK-003) works best for some types**, and weaker for others (especially DENV-3, DENV-4).

- Rising DENV-3 cases in India **may reduce vaccine effectiveness.**
- **Vaccine reduces severity**, but may not fully prevent infection.
- **Dengue outbreaks can still happen**; mosquito control is still needed.
- **High cost and two doses** make access difficult for many people.

3. India's Dengue Vaccine Pipeline

- **Indigenous vaccine 'DengiAll'** by Panacea Biotec with Indian Council of Medical Research is in Phase III trials.
- A **similar vaccine approved in Brazil shows strong protection against severe dengue.**
- If successful, the **Indian vaccine may be available by around 2027** and may require only a single dose.
- New vaccines aim to provide better protection across all DENV (Dengue Virus) serotypes.
- **Qdenga (TAK-003) is an initial step**; long-term success depends on vaccines, vector control and surveillance together.

KEYWORDS

Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS)

- The Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) is **headed by the Prime Minister and deals with defence and national security matters.**
- It was **first formed in 1947 under Jawaharlal Nehru** and evolved into its present structure after the 1999 Kargil War.
- Its members include **the Home, Defence, Finance, and External Affairs Ministers.**
- The **National Security Advisor (NSA) coordinates its work**, and the **Cabinet Secretariat maintains records.**
- The CCS is the apex decision-making body for defence, intelligence, nuclear policy, and key national security appointments.

League of Arab States (LAS)

- The **League of Arab States (LAS)** is an **intergovernmental organisation** representing all **Arab countries** across the **Middle East and North Africa.**
- It was **established in Cairo on March 22, 1945**, following the **Alexandria Protocol (1944)**, and is **headquartered in Cairo, Egypt.**
- At present, it comprises **22 member states.**
- The League's primary mandate is to **strengthen relations among member countries**, ensure **coordination of policies**, and promote **cooperation** in various domains, while **preserving the independence and sovereignty** of each state.
- Over time, the Arab League has developed **institutional frameworks** to enhance **pan-Arab cooperation** in **political, security, economic, and legal spheres.**

Species in News

Rice's Whale

- It is a **recently identified baleen whale species (recognized in 2021)**, earlier thought to be a subpopulation of Bryde's whale.
- It is **endemic to the Gulf of Mexico** and is the **only baleen whale species that lives there year-round without migration**.
- It is classified as **"Critically Endangered (CR)" on the IUCN Red List**, indicating an **extremely high risk of extinction**.
- Extremely small population of **around 50 individuals** (some estimates even lower).
- Major threats include **vessel strikes, noise pollution, oil spills, and climate change**, all of which may increase with **expanded offshore drilling**.
- Expansion of oil and gas drilling (associated with policies under Donald Trump) could **significantly raise extinction risks** for the species.

