

Delimitation, women's reservation, political dynamics

Prelims: General Studies Paper - 1
Indian Polity and Governance-Constitution, Political System, Panchayati Raj, Public Policy, Rights Issues, etc.

Mains: General Studies - 2
Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

1. Context

- The **Constitution (106th Amendment) Act, 2023 (Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam)** provides **one-third reservation for women** in Lok Sabha and State Assemblies, including SC/ST reserved seats.
- Implementation is **deferred until after the next Census and delimitation exercise**, delaying immediate impact.
- Opposition parties demanded **implementation by the 2024 general election**, while women's groups criticised the delay.
- The government justified the delay citing **fairness and feasibility concerns without updated Census data**.

2. Emerging Policy Shift

- The government is now reportedly planning to **use the 2011 Census for delimitation**, instead of waiting for the new Census.
- There is a proposal to **expand Lok Sabha seats by ~50% (543 → 816)** and proportionally increase State Assembly seats.
- This indicates a **decoupling of women's reservation from the upcoming Census**, suggesting a deliberate political strategy.
- Politically, this move may help:
 - ➔ **Mobilise women voters in upcoming State elections**

- ➔ Strengthen positioning for **2027 State elections and 2029 general elections**
- ➔ Allow the ruling party to claim credit for implementing a long-pending reform

3. Key Concerns: Federal Balance, Data, Representation

Delimitation controversy:

- A population-based approach may **increase northern States' representation** (higher fertility rates).
- It may **reduce relative influence of southern States**, which have stabilised the population and contribute significantly to the economy.
- This could deepen the **north-south divide** and strain the **federal structure**.

Seat expansion implications:

- Even with proportional increase, **absolute gains favour populous States**.
- Example:
 - ➔ **Uttar Pradesh + Bihar ≈ 180 seats**
 - ➔ **5 southern States combined ≈ 195 seats**
- In a **first-past-the-post system**, numerical strength may create **structural political advantage**.

Outdated data issue:

- Using the **2011 Census** ignores:
 - ➔ Migration
 - ➔ Urbanisation
 - ➔ COVID-19 demographic shifts
- Risks **misrepresentation of current population realities**.

Caste and sub-quota demands:

- Upcoming Census likely to include **caste data**.
- May trigger demands for **OBC sub-quotas within women's reservation**, including Muslim OBCs.

3. Implementation Challenges and Way Forward

Unclear rotation mechanism:

- Reservation rotation affects **continuity, accountability, and constituency development.**
- Smaller States/UTs may see **less frequent rotation**, while larger States may have **repeatedly reserved seats.**
- Law provides only **post-delimitation rotation**, without detailed design.

Structural transformation:

- Women’s reservation + delimitation + seat expansion together will:
 - ➔ **Redraw constituencies**
 - ➔ **Rebalance regional power**
 - ➔ **Alter social composition of legislatures**

Way Forward:

- Ensure implementation is based on **latest Census data,**
- Address **federal concerns and regional balance,**
- Clarify **rotation and sub-quota mechanisms,**
- Undertake **broad political and institutional deliberation** to prevent distortions in representation while advancing gender justice

A closer look at Asim Munir’s West Asia diplomacy

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.

1. Context

- Field Marshal Asim Munir, Pakistan’s Chief of Defence Forces, has adopted an **active diplomatic role amid emerging West Asian conflicts.**
- His engagements include:
 - ➔ Outreach to Donald Trump (“Trump 2.0”)
 - ➔ Signing of **Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement (SDMA)** with Saudi Arabia
 - ➔ Selling weapons to Libya and Sudan

- He has projected Pakistan as a **mediator in the Iran–US/Israel conflict**, including ambitions linked to the Strait of Hormuz.

2. Strategic Objectives and Diplomatic Activism

- Pakistan is attempting to **repair ties with the U.S. after the 2011 killing of Osama bin Laden**, reversing a decade of strained relations.
- Munir has emerged as a **key interlocutor between Washington and Iran**, replacing mediators like Oman and Qatar.
- Key goals include:
 - ➔ Acting as a **bridge between the U.S. and China** ahead of a possible summit
 - ➔ Resetting relations with post-war Iran
 - ➔ Hosting a **March 30 meeting with Foreign Ministers of Saudi Arabia, Türkiye, and Egypt**, potentially leading to an **“Islamic NATO”**
 - ➔ Repairing ties with Abu Dhabi amid Saudi proximity
- Broader aim: elevate Pakistan into the **“senior league” of the Islamic world** and secure **economic gains (“cash rewards”).**

3. Challenges and Structural Constraints

- Critics highlight **overreach due to Pakistan’s internal weaknesses** like fragile economy & political instability
- Key external constraints:
 - ➔ Iran has reportedly **halted engagement in peace talks**, weakening Pakistan’s mediator role
 - ➔ Iran may be **strategically manipulating diplomacy** to pressure the U.S.
 - ➔ **Deep ethnic, geopolitical, and ideological differences** between Iran and Pakistan
- Conflict trajectory:
 - ➔ Likely **war of attrition** or unilateral U.S. disengagement by Trump
 - ➔ Reduces space for Pakistan’s diplomatic relevance

A **war of attrition** is a prolonged conflict strategy in which each side aims to gradually weaken the opponent by continuous losses of resources, manpower, and morale until one side is exhausted and forced to surrender.

3. Implications

- Iran may leverage **selective closure of the Strait of Hormuz** for **revenue**, pressure Gulf states and force U.S. sanctions thereby limiting Pakistan's role.
- Domestic compulsions:
 - ➔ **Restive Iran border**
 - ➔ Presence of a **significant Shia population**
 - ➔ Pressure to align with Saudi-led security frameworks
- If U.S. priorities shift away from the Gulf, **Trump–Munir ties may decline**, limiting Pakistan's gains.
- Pakistan should adopt a **calibrated, balanced diplomacy** focusing on internal stability and credible regional engagement rather than overambitious mediation dependent on external powers.

On India's updated climate pledges

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

Mains: General Studies - 3
Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.

1. Context

- India **announced revised Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) under the Paris Agreement.**
- NDCs refer to **voluntary targets for climate mitigation and other actions by countries.**
- The **revision comes amid challenges in energy** and development sectors.
- **India follows a continuity-based, gradual approach**, aligning with climate justice and its role as a developing nation.

2. India's Updated Climate Goals

- India **aims to reduce emissions intensity of GDP to 47% below 2005 levels by 2035** (earlier 45% by 2030).
- **Target to ensure 60% of installed power capacity** comes from non-fossil fuel sources.
- **Increase forest and tree cover to create 3.5-4 billion tonnes of CO₂ equivalent carbon sink** above 2005 levels.

- Under the Paris Agreement, countries must update targets every five years, and recent global challenges have influenced India's NDC formulation.

3. India's Climate Action: Enthusiasm vs Structural Constraints

- India is promoting low-carbon growth through EVs, energy efficiency, renewables, green hydrogen, and carbon capture.
- Climate action involves strong government and private sector participation.
- **Developmental constraints limit** stricter climate commitments.
- **NDCs require strict reporting** to the UNFCCC.
- There is debate on whether India's NDCs are enough to meet the Paris Agreement goal of limiting warming to 1.5°C.

4. Cost of Going Green

- India **relies heavily on coal, making transition to clean energy costly.**
- Renewable energy **requires reducing cheaper coal power, increasing overall costs.**
- **Battery storage for renewable stability** needs massive funding.
- Pumped hydro and other storage solutions **face environmental and practical limits.**
- Weak transmission and grid balancing **lead to unused renewable power and higher costs.**
- EV adoption, efficiency measures, and climate policies **strain resources, with limited climate finance support.**

5. Way Forward: India's Development & Climate

- **Balance economic growth** with climate action.
- Keep climate plans flexible for future needs
- **India's per capita emissions are about one-third of the global average**, so its ability to influence global temperature targets like 1.5°C is inherently limited.
- India must **frame its Paris Agreement commitments based on its "national circumstances,"** ensuring development is not compromised while contributing to global climate action.

Talking peace: why mediation still matters in a world at war

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

Mains: General Studies - 2
Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

1. Context

- Conflict resolution is a key part of international relations.
- The West Asia war has increased focus on mediation.
- Many countries want a peaceful solution to the conflict.
- There are **discussions about Pakistan acting as a mediator**.

2. Understanding Mediation

- Mediation is a voluntary conflict resolution process involving a neutral third party facilitating dialogue between conflicting sides to help them reach a mutually acceptable solution, without imposing a decision.
- It is an old way to solve fights, used even thousands of years ago.
- **Jacob Bercovitch (mediation scholar) said mediation works depending on the people involved**, the problem, and the mediator.
- A good mediator should be trustworthy, patient, and good at talking.
- I. William Zartman (conflict resolution scholar) said **mediation works best when both sides are tired of the conflict and want a solution**.
- Mediators don't always have to be neutral; sometimes using influence or pressure helps reach an agreement.

3. Legal Position on Mediation

- The **Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907 encouraged peaceful ways like mediation and arbitration** to solve disputes.
- They also created the **Permanent Court of Arbitration to help countries settle disputes legally**.

- The **United Nations supports mediation through its Charter**, especially for peaceful dispute resolution.
- **Article 33 of the UN Charter says countries should use peaceful methods** like negotiation, mediation, and arbitration.
- **UN resolutions and guidelines (like Resolution 65/283 and 2012 Guidance) strengthen mediation** by promoting fairness, consent, and effective agreements.

4. Instances of Mediation

- **Kofi Annan (former UN Secretary-General) mediated in Kenya (2008)** during post-election violence, leading to a power-sharing deal.
- **Norway facilitated Oslo talks (1993)**, opening communication between Israel and Palestine.
- **The Camp David Accords (1978)** enabled peace talks despite hostility between Egypt and Israel.
- **The Dayton Agreement (1995) ended the Bosnia war** through managed negotiations.
- The **Good Friday Agreement (1998) built trust and resolved conflict** in Northern Ireland (UK).

5. West Asian Crisis and Mediation Dynamics

- According to Jacob Bercovitch and I. William Zartman, **mediation usually involves many countries, not just one**.
- **While Islamabad may host talks**, countries like **Turkey and Egypt are also facilitating dialogue**.
- **Pakistan's close ties with the United States reduce its credibility** as a neutral mediator for Iran.
- **China is a preferred mediator due to its oil trade, economic investments in Iran**.
- **Resolution depends on the strategic willingness of the United States and Iran** to engage in meaningful dialogue.

KEYWORDS

Biennial Transparency Report (BTR)

- The Biennial Transparency Report (BTR) is a **mandatory report submitted every two years by parties to the Paris Agreement to track climate action progress.**
- It includes **national greenhouse gas inventories, progress on Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), policies, adaptation efforts,** and support provided or received.
- The **BTR is part of the Enhanced Transparency Framework (ETF) under the UNFCCC.**
- The first BTR submission deadline was 31 December 2024, and reports underwent a technical expert review process.
- **Developing countries are given flexibility and support,** especially Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and Least Developed Countries (LDCs).

Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA)

- The Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) is an **intergovernmental organization located at the Hague in the Netherlands.**
- It was **established by the First International Peace Conference held at the Hague, Netherlands,** in 1899.
- The objective is “to facilitate the arbitration of international disputes”.
- It **consists of an Administrative Council and an International Bureau.**
- The **Court is not ‘permanent’ in nature;** rather it is a Court selected from among a permanent panel of arbitrators.
- It **handles disputes involving states, international organizations, and even private parties,** covering issues like territorial boundaries, trade, and investment.
- The **members of the PCA are automatically parties to the Pacific Dispute Settlement Conventions of 1899.**
- It is **not a UN body but has observer status** and plays an important role in maintaining international peace.

Doctrine of Essential Religious Practices (ERP)

- The doctrine was evolved by the Supreme Court in the Shirur Mutt Case (1954), where it held that **only those practices “integral” to a religion are protected** under Articles 25–26 of the Constitution.
- A practice is “essential” if its absence would **alter the religion itself,** not merely because it is customary.
- Courts examine **religious texts, beliefs, and community practices** to decide essentiality.
- Key Applications
 - ➡ **Bijoe Emmanuel v. State of Kerala (1986)** – The Court protected Jehovah’s Witness students, holding that their refusal to sing the National Anthem was an essential part of their religious belief.
 - ➡ **Shayara Bano v. Union of India (2017)** – Instant triple talaq was declared **unconstitutional.**
 - ➡ **Indian Young Lawyers Association v. State of Kerala (2018)** – The Court held that exclusion of women from the Sabarimala temple as non essential.
- The doctrine **balances religious freedom with equality and reform,** but is criticised for **judicial overreach** as courts interpret religious matters.