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Metrics to minds — restoring purpose to universities

Prelims: General Studies Paper - 1

Current events of national and international importance

Mains: General Studies - 2

Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

Why in Focus?

- The article critiques the **current standardized testing and metrics-based evaluation system** in Indian universities.
- It **suggests a shift towards a decentralized, judgment-based approach** to admissions and appointments.

Key Highlights:

- National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (NEET)**, **Joint Entrance Examination (JEE)**, and **University Grants Commission National Eligibility Test (UGC NET)** are national examinations using a **multiple-choice format**.

National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (NEET): A national examination in India for admission to medical courses.

Joint Entrance Examination (JEE): An engineering entrance examination conducted

in India for admission to various engineering colleges.

University Grants Commission National Eligibility Test (UGC NET): A test to determine eligibility for college and university level lectureship and for the award of Junior Research Fellowship (JRF) in India.

- These exams are criticized for **failing to assess critical thinking and reasoning ability, focusing instead on uniformity**.
- Departmental examinations are proposed to give faculty more freedom** in evaluating students and allow students to choose subjects based on their aptitude and interests.
- The **University Grants Commission's 2018 Regulations** replaced the API-based Performance Based Appraisal System (PBAS) with a framework incorporating research scores.

The API-based Performance Based Appraisal System (PBAS) is a systematic, point-based evaluation mechanism introduced by the University Grants Commission (UGC) in India

- Minimum publication requirements** have led to a **market for papers** rather than ideas, with journals often lacking serious peer review.
- The **International Standard Book Number (ISBN)** and **International Standard Serial Number (ISSN)** are not necessarily indicators of scholarly merit.

International Standard Book Number (ISBN): A unique numeric commercial book identifier.

International Standard Serial Number (ISSN):



An eight-digit serial number used to uniquely identify a serial publication.

- The **viva voce** examination has **become a formality**, lacking rigorous assessment.

A **viva voce** is a **verbal, oral examination** where a candidate answers questions spoken by an examiner rather than writing them down

- **Search committees for vice-chancellors** sometimes prioritize **patent counts**, favoring candidates from STEM fields.
- Many university **appointments are influenced by networking** rather than merit.

Implications:

- Standardized testing leads to a decline in classroom discussion quality **due to its emphasis on memorization over critical thinking**.
- **Metrics-based recruitment promotes quantity** over quality, prioritizing publication counts over intellectual merit.
- **Decentralizing examinations and restoring appointments to peer scrutiny** could align with the true purpose of universities.
- The **current system undermines intellectual competence** and academic judgment, which are essential for forming well-rounded graduates.
- **Penalties for examiners and testing agencies do not prevent systemic issues**, highlighting the need for systemic reform.

Way Forward:

- **Decentralize examinations back to faculties** to allow departments to better assess intellectual competence.
- **Restore appointments to peer scrutiny**, emphasizing accountability and intellectual competence over standardized metrics.
- **Encourage a focus on forming minds** rather than calculating scores by trusting the academic judgment of faculty.
- **Implement measures to ensure that academic integrity and judgment** are prioritized over publication counts and research scores.

Mains Question:

Critically examine the impact of standardized testing and metrics-based evaluation on higher education in India. Discuss the merits and challenges of decentralizing examinations and recruitment, and suggest a way forward. (250 Words)

U.S. midterms as Donald Trump's test, stakes for India

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.

Why in Focus?

- The **U.S. midterm elections** are scheduled for **November 3, 2026**, occurring midway through a **President's four-year term**.
- These elections are seen as a referendum on **President Donald Trump**, with **significant implications for India-U.S. relations**.

Key Highlights:

- **All 435 seats** in the **House of Representatives** and **35 of the 100 seats** in the **Senate** are up for election, including special elections in **Ohio and Florida**.
- **Republicans** currently hold a narrow majority in the **House** and **53 seats in the Senate**; **218 seats** are needed for control of the House.
- **39 Governors** will be elected, impacting the 2028 presidential election.
- The **Cook Political Report** forecasts Democrats to gain between **five and 15 seats** in the House, with a closer Senate race.
- **Vivek Ramaswamy** is running for **Ohio Governor**, potentially becoming the first **Indian-American Governor** of the state.
- Key issues include **cost of living, war with Iran, immigration, health care, and crime**.
- **U.S. tariffs** on Indian goods rose to **50% in 2025**, later reduced to **18%** under a framework.
- **Trump's approval rating** stands at about **30%**, and **registered voters** prefer Democrats for



Congress by around **eight points**.

- The **U.S. federal Election Assistance Commission** does not run elections; they are managed by state and local authorities.
- **Federal law** bars armed agents from polling places.

Midterm elections occur midway through a President's four-year term.

House of Representatives is the lower chamber of the U.S. Congress, with all 435 seats up for election every two years.

Senate is the upper chamber of the U.S. Congress, with 100 seats, where members serve six-year terms.

Implications:

- The midterms serve as a referendum on Trump's presidency, with **potential shifts in U.S. domestic and foreign policy**.
- A **Democratic House could improve conditions for Indian students and workers**, as Democrats favor immigration and international cooperation.
- **Rising U.S. tariffs on Indian goods strain India-U.S. relations**, increasing economic pressure on India.
- **Trump's push for proof of citizenship to register raises voter suppression** concerns, potentially affecting voter turnout.
- **Mr. Trump** signed a law allowing tariffs of up to **100%** on the largest buyers of **Russian energy**, including India, exacerbating trade tensions.
- The **\$1,00,000 fee** on new **H-1B visas** adds to the strain on India-U.S. relations, affecting skilled migration.

Way Forward:

- **India should engage in diplomatic efforts to mitigate the impact** of U.S. tariffs and seek favorable trade agreements.
- **Strengthening ties with U.S. lawmakers** who support India could help in easing immigration policies and tariffs.
- **India should diversify its trade partners** to reduce dependency on the U.S. market.
- **Monitoring the political landscape in the U.S.** can help India anticipate and adapt to policy

changes affecting bilateral relations.

Mains Question:

Critically analyse the impact of U.S. midterm elections on India-U.S. relations, with focus on trade, immigration, and geopolitics. Suggest measures for India to safeguard its strategic interests. (250 Words)

Necessary corrective: Re-enrolment and summary revision are necessary, but not sufficient

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.

Why in Focus?

- The **Election Commission of India (ECI)** announced a special summary revision of electoral rolls in 17 States and Union Territories.
- The revision will **resume with January 1, 2027 as the qualifying date for new voters** after the process was delayed due to the Special Intensive Revision (SIR).

Key Highlights:

- The ECI is conducting a "special drive" to re-enrol those "left out" using the original **Form 6** without the ancestry declaration.

Form 6: A form used for the inclusion of names in the electoral roll.

- The Election Commission of India (ECI) has **limited the number of Form 7 objections that can be filed** after reports that large numbers of such objections were being submitted in some States.

Form 7: A form used for raising objections to the inclusion of names in the electoral roll.

- **Searchable electoral rolls in text PDFs will be released** to parties and candidates to enhance



transparency.

- The **special drive removes the need to check old voter lists and verify data inconsistencies**, helping correct errors made during the Special Intensive Revision (SIR).
- States going to polls early next year include **Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, and Uttarakhand**, providing an opportunity to repair truncated rolls.
- In West Bengal, appellate tribunals have disposed of barely **3%** of the **38 lakh** appeals, with **93%** of cases decided in favor of restoring electors.
- In Bihar, the gender ratio fell from **907** in the 2024 Lok Sabha rolls to **892** in the SIR rolls.

Implications:

- The **corrective measures are necessary to address the flaws** in the SIR but are insufficient for full accountability.
- The capped Form 7 objections and searchable electoral rolls aim to **improve transparency and accessibility**.
- The **corrective measures do not resolve issues in States that have already held elections** using SIR voter lists, leaving the validity of pending appeals and tribunal cases uncertain.
- The Supreme Court's involvement indicates **unresolved legal and procedural concerns** regarding the SIR and the Commission's conduct.
- The corrective measures **do not address accountability for the flawed SIR process**.

Way Forward:

- The ECI must **report re-enrolments separately from fresh enrolments** to ensure clarity and accountability.
- **Future intensive revisions should follow the ECI's 2002-03 guidelines**, which do not place the burden of proof on voters.
- The Supreme Court should **ensure that genuine voters are reinstated on the electoral rolls**.
- The appointment process laid down in the **Anoop Baranwal case** must be settled to prevent further procedural ambiguities.

In Anoop Baranwal v. Union of India (2023), the

Supreme Court said that the CEC and ECs should be appointed by a committee of the Prime Minister, Leader of Opposition, and Chief Justice of India to ensure the Election Commission's independence.

Mains Question:

Examine the significance of the Election Commission's corrective measures in electoral roll revisions. Discuss SIR-related challenges and suggest reforms for a transparent and accountable electoral process. (250 Words)



KEYWORDS

National Medical Commission (NMC)

- In the news: The National Medical Commission (NMC) has directed all medical colleges and institutions to establish patient safety committees and designate nodal officers to enhance patient safety practices.
- The National Medical Commission (NMC) is the **regulatory body for medical education and practice in India**.
- It was established under the **National Medical Commission Act, 2019**, replacing the Medical Council of India (MCI).
- The NMC mandates **patient safety committees**, chaired by the institution's director, head, or medical superintendent, with representation from relevant specialties.
- Medical institutions must **report their patient safety committees and nodal officer details to the National Patient Safety Secretariat (NPSS)** under the Directorate-General of Health Services (DGHS).

Bharatiya Vayuyan Adhiniyam, 2024

- In the news: The Centre informed the Supreme Court that new aviation rules under the Bharatiya Vayuyan Adhiniyam, 2024, to regulate volatile airfares and predatory pricing, are set to be published in two weeks.
- The **Bharatiya Vayuyan Adhiniyam, 2024** regulates **India's aviation sector, addressing airfare volatility and predatory pricing**.
- The **new rules are designed to curb arbitrary airfare pricing and ancillary charges** especially during festive holidays and emergencies.
- The **Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) will implement the rules**, as stated by Solicitor General Tushar Mehta in the Supreme Court.
- A **public interest litigation (PIL) was filed by social activist S. Laxminarayan**

highlighted the lack of airfare regulation, affecting poor passengers.

- The **Supreme Court sought the rules by November 16** amid concerns over steep Diwali airfares.

INS Samarthak

- In the news: INS Samarthak, a multi-purpose vessel built by Larsen & Toubro (L&T), was commissioned into the Indian Navy.
- INS Samarthak is the **first of two L&T-built multi-purpose vessels, with over 75% indigenous content**.
- The vessel **supports testing and evaluation of indigenous sensors and weapons**, strengthening the Navy's domestic technology capabilities.
- It **supports maritime surveillance, reconnaissance, offshore patrols, and disaster relief operations**.



National Green Tribunal (NGT)

- In the news: The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has taken suo motu cognisance of a report on hexavalent chromium contamination in Uttar Pradesh.
- The **National Green Tribunal (NGT)** was established in **2010** under the **National Green Tribunal Act** to handle cases related to environmental protection and conservation in India. It is a specialized body with expertise in handling environmental disputes involving multi-disciplinary issues.
- The NGT has issued notices to **14 authorities**, including the Chief Secretary of Uttar Pradesh, the National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG), and the All India Institute of Medical



Sciences (AIIMS), to file their responses regarding the contamination issue.

- The report highlighted contamination of groundwater with **hexavalent chromium** due to decades of industrial waste dumping across parts of three districts in Uttar Pradesh, raising substantial issues of compliance with environmental norms.

Places in News

Gulf of Oman

- In the news: An oil tanker caught fire while attempting to pass through a prohibited area in the Gulf of Oman, as reported by Iran's military.
- The **Gulf of Oman** connects the **Arabian Sea** with the **Strait of Hormuz**, leading into the **Persian Gulf**.
- It borders **Iran** to the north and **Oman** and the **United Arab Emirates** to the south.
- It is a strategic maritime route for oil and gas shipments from the **Middle East** to global markets, **making it a critical chokepoint for international energy trade**.
- In September, Iran's Revolutionary Guards declared a prohibited zone in parts of the **Sea of Oman** and the **Arabian Sea**, warning that non-compliant vessels would face sanctions.

