

Contradictions within India's cow protection regime

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.

1. Context

- Discovery of **hundreds of cow carcasses in Jaisalmer** and earlier **starvation deaths in Chhattisgarh** exposed gaps in cattle protection.
- West Bengal (May 2026)** issued a notification under the **1950 Act** mandating a **certificate of fitness** for slaughter; upheld by the **Calcutta High Court**.
- Allowed slaughter of **cows above 14 years**, drawing criticism.
- Over **20 States prohibit cow slaughter**; exceptions include **Kerala, West Bengal, and Northeast States**.
- Raises issues of **law effectiveness, religious validity, and privacy rights**.

2. Politics, Faith and Legal Aspects

- Cow protection is a **major political tool** for both **BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party)** and **historically Congress**.
- BJP states tightened laws: stricter punishments, beef criminalisation, transport restrictions.
- Gujarat (2017 law)** provides **life imprisonment**; applied in 2025.
- Religious debate:
 - ⊖ Scholars like **D.N. Jha** argues cow sanctity is **not ancient or uniform**.
 - ⊖ Texts sometimes treated cow slaughter as a **minor sin**; **Yajnavalkya** allowed beef.

- ⊖ Even **Savarkar** held differing views → weak basis for **essential religious practice**.
- Legal-historical balance:
 - ⊖ **SC (1958)**: cow slaughter not essential to Islam.
 - ⊖ Mughal rulers and **Deoband fatwas** discouraged slaughter.
 - ⊖ Constituent Assembly Muslims supported prohibition.

3. Cattle Data and Economic Trends

- Under **Article 48**, cow protection is non-justiciable.
- **Census trends:**
 - ⊖ Since 1951:
 - ↳ Cows: **+49.63%**
 - ↳ Buffaloes: **+153.8%**
 - ⊖ Indicates **relative decline of cows**.
- **State comparison:**
 - ⊖ Strict-law states: sharp fall in male cattle
 - ↳ UP: **-58.27%**, Gujarat: **-38.3%**, Maharashtra: **-31.4%**
 - ⊖ West Bengal: lower decline (**-22.8%**) and better cow growth
- **Structural shift:**
 - ⊖ Farmers shifting to **buffalo rearing**
 - ⊖ Ratios worsened (e.g., UP: **105:100 → 56:100**)
- **Economic constraint:**
 - ⊖ Without culling, cattle population could **grow 2.5-3× in 5 years** → unsustainable

4. Farmers, Rights and Policy Debate

- Sale of unproductive cattle provides income
- West Bengal farmers earned **₹35,000 crore (2012–19)**
- In prohibition states: illegal sales → **lower income, corruption**

- **Laws effectively burden farmers, not consumers**
- **Puttaswamy (2017):** food choice is part of **privacy (Article 21)**
- **Social harmony & debate:**
 - ➔ Bengal Muslims refrained from slaughter during Eid
 - ➔ **Arshad Madani**(president of the **Jamiat Ulama-e-Hind**) suggested cow as national animal
- Sustainable cow protection requires a **balanced framework combining economic incentives, scientific livestock management, farmer welfare, and respect for constitutional rights**, rather than purely punitive or emotive measures.

Brinkmanship in the age of growing conflict

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Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora.

1. Meaning of Brinkmanship

- **Brinkmanship** is a strategy in which a country or actor deliberately pushes a conflict to the **edge of escalation** to **force the opponent to back down, negotiate, or make concessions.**
- The concept emerged during the **Cold War**, especially during events such as:
 - ➔ **Berlin Blockade**
 - ➔ **Cuban Missile Crisis**
- It carries the risk of **uncontrolled escalation**, particularly in a **nuclear environment.**

2. Forms of Modern Brinkmanship

A. Terrorist Brinkmanship

- Non-state actors use **terrorism** to **provoke strong state responses and gain international attention.**
- Most groups such as **Al-Qaeda and Islamic State** **failed to achieve their objectives.**
- Some groups like the **Irish Republican Army and National Liberation Front(Algeria)** **extracted concessions from stronger states.**

B. Proxy Brinkmanship

- States use **proxy groups** to challenge stronger powers indirectly.
- Examples include **Pakistan, Iran,** and groups like **Hamas.**
- Such strategies aim to weaken opponents over time and challenge issues of **sovereignty** and **statehood.**

3. Major Examples of Brinkmanship Today

United States - Iran

- The **U.S. blockade on Iran** and **Iran's threat to close the Strait of Hormuz** represent mutual brinkmanship.
- Both sides use **economic and strategic pressure to force negotiations.**

Russia - Ukraine

- Russia's actions **stem from opposition to NATO expansion.**
- Use of **nuclear threats, hypersonic missiles,** and attacks on civilian areas increases escalation risks.

China in East and South China Seas

- China practices **controlled brinkmanship** to assert maritime dominance.
- Most **regional states** **have avoided strong confrontation,** while:
 - ➔ **Japan** has resisted over the **Senkaku Islands.**
 - ➔ **Taiwan** continues to resist **Chinese pressure.**

North Korea

- Possesses **nuclear and missile capabilities.**
- Uses brinkmanship to **deter stronger powers and maintain regime security.**

4. Implications and India's Approach

Growing Global Concern

- **Diplomacy is increasingly being replaced** by:
 - ➔ **Coercion**
 - ➔ **Brinkmanship**
 - ➔ **Use of force**
- International institutions such as the **United Nations** **are becoming less effective in conflict resolution.**

India's Position

- India follows a strategy of **restraint, responsibility, and calibrated use of force.**
- It generally **avoids brinkmanship, even under serious provocation.**

A revival of sedition tied to consent

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

- On **May 21, 2026**, a Bench led by **Chief Justice of India Surya Kant** allowed courts to **proceed with Section 124A (sedition) cases if the accused consent.**
- This partially revived the provision despite its earlier suspension.
- The order came in **Kamran vs State of Madhya Pradesh** (2017 conviction under UAPA, Arms Act, IPC).
- Earlier, **SC (May 11, 2022)** had kept all sedition cases **in abeyance** pending constitutional review.
- Justified on grounds of **speedy trial and reducing backlog**

2. Constitutional and Legal Issues

- The constitutionality of Section 124A is under challenge in **S.G. Vombatkere vs Union of India(2022).**
- Allowing trials under a **legally doubtful provision** creates inconsistency.
- The May 21 order was passed **without hearing petitioners in the Vombatkere case.**
- Raises concerns whether **lower courts can decide guilt under a provision whose validity is pending.**
- Practical issue: **co-accused may differ in consent**, complicating trials.
- The solution lies in **final adjudication**, not interim arrangements.

3. Equality, Rights and Historical Context

- 2022 SC order had:
 - Stopped new FIR(First Information Report)s and coercive action
 - Allowed relief to accused
- 2026 clarification creates **unequal treatment** → possible **Article 14 violation.**
- **Background:**
 - Sedition originates from the Statute of **Westminster, 1275.**
 - Criticised by **Nehru (1951).**
 - **Kedar Nath vs State of Bihar (1962)** limited it to **incitement to violence.**
 - Misuse examples noted-e.g., **Hanuman Chalisa case(2022)**

4. Implications and Way Forward Debate

- Accused face dilemma:
 - If Consent given → trial under **law punishable with life imprisonment**
 - If Refused → **prolonged uncertainty**
- Leads to **unequal outcomes and legal ambiguity.**
- **Section 152 BNS** also challenged for vagueness.
- **Key point:**
 - Sedition impacts **free speech (Art 19) and liberty (Art 21).**
 - **Burden is on the State** to justify sedition; not on citizens to consent due to delay.
- The May 21 clarification is a **stopgap measure that creates legal inconsistency and inequality**, highlighting the urgent need for the Supreme Court to **decisively rule on the constitutionality of sedition laws.**

What did the court rule on Bihar's SIR of electoral rolls?

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Current events of national and international importance

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Salient features of the Representation of People's Act

1. Context

- The **Supreme Court upheld the Election Commission's (EC) power to conduct a Special Intensive Revision (SIR)** of electoral rolls in Bihar.
- It **also upheld the procedure adopted by the EC** for carrying out the revision.
- The **EC ordered the SIR in June 2025, citing large-scale additions and deletions in electoral rolls over the last 20 years.**
- Rapid urbanisation and migration increased the risk of duplicate voter entries.

2. What is SIR?

- **Article 324 of the Constitution vests the superintendence, direction, and control of electoral roll preparation and elections** in the Election Commission.
- **Section 21 of the Representation of the People Act, 1950** governs the **preparation and revision of electoral rolls.**
- **Section 21(3) authorises the EC to undertake a special revision of electoral rolls at any time** for recorded reasons.
- The **purpose of SIR is to update electoral rolls, remove duplicate or ineligible entries,** and improve the accuracy of voter lists.

3. Issues Raised

- **Whether the EC can conduct SIR for an entire State** under Section 21(3) of the RP Act.
- **Whether the SIR exercise satisfies the principle of proportionality,** i.e., whether the measures adopted are proportionate to the objective sought to be achieved.
- **Whether requiring all voters to submit fresh enumeration forms and deleting names for non-submission** violates the Representation of the People Act, 1950 and the Registration of Electors Rules, 1960.
- Whether enrollment in the electoral roll creates a presumption of citizenship and eligibility.
- Whether the EC can scrutinise citizenship for inclusion or continuation in electoral rolls.

4. What Did the Court Rule?

- The **EC is empowered under Article 324 and Section 21(3) of the RP Act to conduct SIR for many or all constituencies in a State;** the term "any" should not be interpreted narrowly.
- The SIR exercise is reasonable and necessary to maintain accurate voter lists.
- The **documentation requirements prescribed by the EC, including Aadhaar** were held to be based on reasonable and intelligible criteria.
- The **EC can make a limited check of citizenship for electoral purposes, but final decisions on citizenship must be made by the competent authority** under the Citizenship Act, 1955.

KEYWORDS

Dual Frequency Synthetic Aperture Radar (DFSAR)

- The Dual Frequency Synthetic Aperture Radar (DFSAR) is a key payload aboard India's Chandrayaan-2 orbiter.
- It is **the first fully polarimetric radar used in lunar exploration and operates in both L-band and S-band frequencies.**
- A polarimetric radar is a **radar system that transmits and receives electromagnetic waves in different polarizations,** typically horizontal (H) and vertical (V).
- DFSAR **helps map lunar surface roughness, estimate thickness, and investigate subsurface features.**
- Its dual-frequency capability enables scientists to **distinguish between different surface materials and detect water ice deposits hidden beneath the surface.**
- Recent analysis of DFSAR data by scientists from the Physical Research Laboratory indicates the possible **presence of subsurface water ice in the Moon's south polar region, particularly within permanently shadowed areas.**

PRAGATI (Pro-Active Governance and Timely Implementation)

- PRAGATI (Pro-Active Governance and Timely Implementation) is a **multi-purpose, multi-modal platform launched on 25 March 2015 to monitor government projects, programmes, and public grievances.**
- It was **designed by the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) with technical support from the National Informatics Centre (NIC).**
- The platform **integrates digital data management, video conferencing, and geospatial technology to ensure real-time monitoring and decision-making.**
- PRAGATI **promotes cooperative federalism by bringing together Union Secretaries and State Chief Secretaries on a single platform.**
- Through **monthly reviews chaired by the Prime Minister, it enhances e-transparency, e-accountability, and timely implementation of key government initiatives.**

National Highways Authority of India (NHAI)

- The **National Highways Authority of India (NHAI)** was established under the **National Highways Authority of India Act, 1988**, enacted by Parliament.
- NHAI is responsible for the **development, maintenance, and management of National Highways**, including the implementation of the **National Highways Development Project (NHDP)**, one of India's largest highway infrastructure programmes.
- It also advises the **Central Government** on matters related to **highway development and management.**
- NHAI assists **State Governments** in the formulation and implementation of **highway development projects** on mutually agreed terms and conditions.