

FINDER

FORTUNE IAS NEWS DAILY EXPLAINER



Click here
for daily
MCQs

THE HINDU

The urban nightmare — a fire with no escape

Prelims : General Studies Paper I

Indian Polity and Governance-Constitution, Political System, Panchayati Raj, Public Policy, Rights Issues, etc.

Mains: General Studies 2

Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

Why in Focus?

- Recent **fire tragedies** in **Lucknow, Delhi, Rajasthan, and Tamil Nadu** have highlighted serious concerns over **urban governance, fire safety, and regulatory failures** in Indian cities.

Key Highlights

- 15 people** died in the **Lucknow (Aliganj)** fire after being trapped in an **illegal commercial establishment** operating in a residential area.
- The editorial argues that **poor urban governance, corruption, political interference, and weak enforcement** are the main causes of recurring urban disasters.
- Despite advances in **satellite imagery, drones, GIS, AI, and digital property databases**, these technologies remain underutilised for monitoring illegal constructions and safety violations.
- Illegal buildings, lack of **fire safety clearances**, and repeated violations of **building regulations**

continue due to weak accountability.

- Urban functions remain divided among **municipal corporations, development authorities, public works departments, water boards, and transport agencies**, creating an accountability gap.

Implication

- Poor enforcement of **building codes** and **fire safety regulations**.
- Corruption, political patronage, and bureaucratic inaction** allow illegal constructions to continue.
- The **74th Constitutional Amendment** envisaged stronger **Urban Local Bodies (ULBs)**, but fragmented governance has weakened urban administration.
- Repeated urban disasters expose the gap between **existing laws and their implementation**.

Way Forward

- Strengthen **Urban Local Bodies (ULBs)** with greater administrative and financial powers.
- Ensure **strict enforcement** of building regulations and fire safety norms with fixed accountability for violations.
- Technology should strengthen regulatory compliance** rather than merely showcasing urban modernisation.



- Promote **professional urban management**, transparent governance, and action against corruption and political interference.
- **Cities require empowered local institutions**, professional urban management, clear accountability and fearless enforcement
- **Governments must find the political courage** to dismantle entrenched systems of tolerated illegality

Mains Question

“Recurring urban disasters in India are primarily a failure of governance rather than a lack of laws.” Discuss the challenges of urban governance in India and suggest measures to improve accountability and public safety. (250 Words)

Iran's Afghan balancing act amid regional upheaval

Prelims : General Studies Paper I

Indian Polity and Governance-Constitution, Political System, Panchayati Raj, Public Policy, Rights Issues, etc.

Mains: General Studies 2

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

Why in Focus?

- **Iran's engagement with both the Taliban and the Northern Alliance** during the funeral of **Ayatollah Ali Khamenei** has highlighted its evolving strategy towards **Afghanistan** amid changing regional geopolitics.

Northern Alliance: A loose coalition of militias in Afghanistan that opposed the first Taliban regime (1996–2001). It played a key role in overthrowing the Taliban after receiving **U.S. military support** in **October 2001**.

Key Highlights

- Iran hosted delegations from both the **Taliban** and the **Northern Alliance**, reflecting its **balanced and pragmatic approach** towards Afghanistan.
- Although Iran has developed close ties with the **Taliban** since **2021**, it has **not officially**

recognised the Taliban government.

- Iran earlier supported the **Northern Alliance**, along with **India, Russia, and Tajikistan**, against the Taliban during the **1990s**.
- The **U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan (2021)** significantly changed regional geopolitics and increased Iran's influence in Afghanistan.
- Iran views Afghanistan as strategically important for its **border security, regional stability**, and **security interests**.
- The editorial suggests that Iran continues to maintain contacts with **both rival groups** to preserve its long-term strategic leverage in Afghanistan.
- Pakistan has recently emerged as a **mediator** between **Iran and the United States**, though both countries continue to pursue different strategic objectives.

Implication

- Continued **political instability** and uncertainty under Taliban rule.
- **Ideological and tribal divisions** within Afghanistan remain a source of instability.
- Regional competition involving **Iran, Pakistan, the United States, and other powers** complicates Afghanistan's security environment.
- **Lack of international recognition of the Taliban government** continues to affect Afghanistan's diplomatic and economic engagement.

Way Forward

- Promote an **inclusive political process** involving all major Afghan stakeholders.
- Strengthen **regional dialogue and diplomatic engagement** to ensure long-term stability in Afghanistan.
- Prevent Afghanistan from becoming a base for **terrorism and extremist groups**.
- Encourage **humanitarian assistance** and economic engagement while promoting peace, regional connectivity, and stability.



Mains Question

Discuss Iran's evolving Afghanistan policy after the Taliban's return to power in 2021. How do regional geopolitical developments shape Iran's engagement with both the Taliban and the Northern Alliance? (250 Words)

Curbs on panchayat powers in Bengal

Prelims: General Paper 1

Current events of national and international importance.

Mains: General studies 2

Separation of powers between various organs dispute redressal mechanisms and institutions.

Why in Focus?

- In July 2026, the **West Bengal government** curtailed the **administrative and financial powers** of elected panchayat heads, transferring key functions to bureaucrats, raising concerns about **decentralisation** and **grassroots democracy**.

Key Highlights:

- The State government removed **gram panchayat pradhans** and **municipal chairpersons** from their role as registrars of **birth and death certificates**, appointing dedicated government officials instead.
- The decision followed allegations of irregularities during the **SIR (Special Intensive Revision)** of electoral rolls, where discrepancies in certificates were detected.
- The **West Bengal Panchayat (Second Amendment), 2026** shifted **financial powers** such as **cheque signing** and **fund disbursement** from elected heads to officials like **BDOs (Block Development Officers)** and panchayat staff.
- Elected representatives** are now limited to **approval of proposals**, while execution and financial control lie with the **bureaucracy**.
- West Bengal has historical significance as an early adopter of the **three-tier Panchayati Raj system** (Gram Panchayat-Panchayat Samiti-Zilla Parishad), even before the **73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992**.

The **73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992** gave **constitutional status to Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs)**, establishing a **three-tier system** (village, intermediate, district) for rural local governance.

- Panchayat governance in the State has been marked by **corruption ('cut-money' or kickbacks)** and **electoral violence**, especially during the **2023 local body elections**.
- The move also has a **political dimension**, as most panchayat representatives belong to opposition parties, increasing **bureaucratic dominance** in local governance.

Implications:

- The move weakens the spirit of **democratic decentralisation** envisaged under the **73rd Amendment**.
- Increasing bureaucratic control may lead to **centralisation of power** and reduce **accountability** to local communities.
- It creates a **democratic deficit**, as elected representatives lose **meaningful authority**.
- There is a risk of **political misuse of administrative reforms** to consolidate power.
- Public trust in local institutions may decline due to reduced **autonomy** and **participation**.
- While aiming for efficiency, excessive bureaucratic control may cause **delays** and **procedural rigidity**.

Way Forward:

- Strengthen transparency through **social audits**, **RTI (Right to Information Act, 2005)**, and **digital governance tools** instead of removing powers.
- Build capacity of elected representatives in **financial** and **administrative management**.
- Ensure a **balanced distribution of powers** between elected bodies and bureaucracy.
- Empower institutions like the **State Finance Commission (SFC)** and **District Planning Committee (DPC)** for better oversight.
- Align reforms with **constitutional principles of decentralisation** and ensure **legal safeguards**.



Mains Question:

“Curtailing the financial and administrative powers of elected local bodies in the name of efficiency undermines democratic decentralisation.” Critically examine in the context of recent changes in Panchayati Raj institutions. (15 mark, 250 words)

Beyond national interest: role of ethics and emotions in world politics

Prelims: General 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.

Why in Focus?

- Recent global conflicts highlight that **International Relations (IR)** is not only about **power and national interest**, but also shaped by **ethics, emotions, and global public opinion**.

Key Highlights:

- International Relations (IR)** has been largely shaped by **Western intellectual traditions**, with **Realism (theory emphasising power and national interest)** becoming the dominant framework after World War II.
- Realism**, associated with **Hans Morgenthau**, views the world as **anarchic (absence of central authority)** where states act to secure their **national interest and security**.
- Over time, IR discourse has been reduced to **power, deterrence, and strategic autonomy**, often sidelining **moral and ethical considerations**.
- Recent scholarship, especially by **Neta Crawford**, highlights that **emotions such as fear, grief, pride, and anger** actively shape foreign policy decisions.
- The **U.S.-Iran conflict** shows that actions like leadership assassination can generate **national unity, identity-based mobilisation, and emotional responses**, beyond strategic calculations.

- The **Israel-Gaza conflict** illustrates how **global public opinion**, influenced by humanitarian concerns, can diverge from **state-centric security narratives**.
- The **Global South**, through platforms like the **NAM (Non-Aligned Movement)** and ideas like '**Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam**' (**world is one family**), has historically emphasised **ethical and inclusive world order**.

Implications:

- Dominance of **Realism** leads to neglect of **ethics, legitimacy, and humanitarian concerns** in global politics.
- Military power** alone cannot ensure **moral legitimacy** or sustained international support.
- Increasing gap between **state policies** and **public opinion**, especially in democratic societies.
- Globalisation** has widened inequalities between the **Global North and Global South**, raising questions of fairness.

Global North: Refers to **developed, industrialised countries** (mainly in North America, Europe, and parts of East Asia) with **high income, advanced technology, and strong institutions**.

Global South: Refers to **developing or less-developed countries** (mainly in Asia, Africa, and Latin America) with **lower income levels, developmental challenges, and historical experiences of colonialism**.

- Emotional factors** like nationalism, revenge, and identity politics can intensify and prolong conflicts.
- Inconsistent foreign policies may erode a country's **credibility and moral standing** globally.

Way Forward:

- Promote a **balanced approach** combining **power politics (Realism)** with **ethical and normative considerations**.
- Strengthen **multilateral institutions** to uphold **justice, accountability, and rules-based order**.
- Use **soft power** (influencing others through attraction, not force) and **public diplomacy** to align foreign policy with global public sentiment.

- Ensure **inclusive and equitable globalisation** to address structural inequalities.
- Countries like India should reinforce **values-based diplomacy**, rooted in **democracy, pluralism, and global welfare**.

Mains Question:

“International Relations cannot be understood solely through the lens of power politics; ethics, emotions, and moral legitimacy play an equally important role.” Discuss with suitable examples. (15 mark, 250 words)

KEYWORDS

Andromeda Galaxy

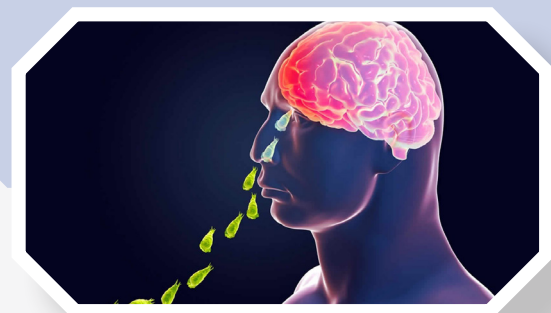


- **Andromeda Galaxy (Messier 31 / M31)** is recently in the news as **Hubble Space Telescope data** revealed its **declining star formation rate**, indicating a transition into a “middle-age” quiescent phase.
- Located about **2.5 million light-years from Earth**, it is the **closest major spiral galaxy to the Milky Way** and is **visible to the naked eye in dark skies**.
- It is **significantly larger than the Milky Way**, spanning nearly **260,000 light-years** and containing **over one trillion stars**.
- Its **central region hosts a supermassive black hole**, surrounded by **old red stars**, while its **spiral arms contain dust and active star-forming regions**.

- Earlier predictions suggested a **certain collision with the Milky Way**, but **2025 data from Hubble and Gaia** now indicate only a **about 50% probability of collision within the next 10 billion years**.

Amoebic meningoencephalitis

- **Amoebic meningoencephalitis** is a **rare but severe infection** of the **brain** and the **meninges** (membranes covering the brain), caused by the amoeba **Naegleria fowleri**.
- **Naegleria fowleri** is commonly found in **warm freshwater bodies, shallow surface waters, and poorly maintained swimming pools, hot tubs, and spas**.
- Infection occurs when contaminated water enters the **nose**, allowing the amoeba to travel to the **brain**.
- The disease is diagnosed by examining the **Cerebrospinal Fluid (CSF)**.
- **Person-to-person transmission does not occur**.
- **Early diagnosis** and treatment with **specific antimicrobial drugs** may improve outcomes, but the disease has a **very high fatality rate**, and **recovery is rare**.



Places in News

Biligiri Rangaswamy Temple (BRT) Wildlife Sanctuary



- **Biligiri Rangaswamy Temple (BRT) Wildlife Sanctuary** is recently in the news as a **model of inclusive conservation**, where the **Soliga tribe coexists with wildlife**, challenging the “**fortress conservation**” approach.
- Located in **Chamarajanagar district of Karnataka**, it acts as a **crucial ecological bridge between the Western Ghats and Eastern Ghats**, enabling **gene flow among wildlife populations**.
- It derives its name from the **Biligiri Ranganatha Swamy Temple**, situated on a **white rocky hill** (“**Biligiri**” means “**white hill**”), which holds **deep cultural significance** for the Soliga tribe.
- Declared a **Wildlife Sanctuary in 1974** and upgraded to a **Tiger Reserve in 2011**, it forms part of the **Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve**.
- It features **diverse ecosystems**-scrub, dry deciduous, and evergreen shola forests-supporting **rich fauna like tigers, leopards, and elephants**, which have **coexisted with indigenous communities for centuries**.

Boma-Badingilo Migratory Landscape

- The landscape covers about **12 million hectares** of **savannah, floodplains, wetlands, and woodlands** in **South Sudan**.
- It includes **Boma National Park, Badingilo National Park**, and a vast network of **wildlife corridors** connecting them.
- It is one of **Africa’s largest intact and ecologically functional landscapes**.
- The landscape forms the core of the **Great Nile Migration ecosystem** and supports the **largest terrestrial mammal migration on Earth**.
- It became **South Sudan’s first UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2026**, recognising its **Outstanding Universal Value (OUV)** and globally significant migratory ecosystem.

