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MCQs

THE HINDU

Indian academia's drift from reason to ritual

Prelims: General Studies Paper 1

Current events of national and international importance

Mains: General Studies 2

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

Why in Focus?

- The **Free to Think report 2026** by Scholars at Risk highlighted concerns over academic freedom and institutional autonomy in India, including alleged government interference and restrictions on dissent in higher education.

Scholars at Risk (SAR) is an international network that monitors threats to academic freedom and members of the higher-education community.

Key Highlights

- Academic freedom** means the freedom of students, teachers and researchers to teach, learn, research, publish and express ideas without undue interference.
- The **Free to Think 2026** report covers the period July 1, 2025 to June 30, 2026.
- According to the report, **India's Academic Freedom Index score declined from 0.38 in 2022 to 0.14 in 2025**, placing it in the report's "severely restricted" category.

- The **report identifies concerns** including **government interference in university governance, restrictions on dissent, and self-censorship** among academics and students.
- Institutional autonomy is essential for universities** to independently determine academic, research and administrative priorities.
- Rabindranath Tagore's "Where the Mind is Without Fear"** advocates a society based on fearless thinking, free inquiry, reason, knowledge and intellectual freedom.

Implications

- Political interference can undermine the autonomy of universities** and academic institutions.
- Restrictions on academic freedom may discourage open debate** and critical research.
- Fear of backlash can lead to self-censorship** among students, teachers and researchers.
- Excessive control over appointments, curricula and administration** can weaken institutional autonomy.
- Political or ideological influence may affect academic discourse** and research priorities.
- Restrictions on protests and dissent can weaken democratic dialogue** on campuses.

Way Forward

- Strengthen institutional autonomy** and transparent university governance.



- **Protect academic freedom** while maintaining legitimate regulatory oversight.
- **Establish transparent and merit-based processes** for academic appointments.
- **Create effective mechanisms to address academic grievances** and restrictions on expression.
- **Promote a culture of critical thinking, evidence-based inquiry** and respectful debate in higher education.

Mains Question

“Academic freedom and institutional autonomy are essential for fostering critical thinking and scientific inquiry.” Discuss the challenges to academic freedom in India and suggest measures to strengthen institutional autonomy in higher education. (15 marks, 250 words)

The United Nations’ long road to restoring trust

Prelims: General Studies Paper 1

Current events of national and international importance

Mains: General Studies 2

Important International institutions, agencies and fora- their structure, mandate

Why in Focus?

- The **81st UN General Assembly** focused on the theme “**Restoring Trust, Managing Transformation: a UN that delivers for all**”, highlighting concerns over declining trust in the UN and the need for institutional reforms.

Key Highlights

- The **UN was established in 1945** to promote international peace, cooperation and a rules-based international order.
- **United Nations Security Council (UNSC) deadlock and repeated vetoes** have weakened confidence in the UN’s ability to address major conflicts.
- **Concerns over transparency, accountability and internal oversight** have affected institutional credibility.
- **Financial dependence on a few powerful**

donor countries can create concerns about unequal influence within the UN system.

- **Developing countries account for 84% of the global population, but hold only 44% of UN civil-service leadership positions**, highlighting concerns over Global South representation.
- The **UN provided humanitarian assistance and protection to around 98 million people** in 2025–26.
- The **central challenge is to make the UN more representative, transparent, accountable and effective**.

Implications

- **Persistent deadlock in the UNSC hampers timely action** on major global conflicts.
- **Unequal representation of the Global South** weakens the UN’s representativeness and legitimacy.
- **Excessive influence of major financial contributors** can affect the neutrality of UN programmes and decision-making.
- **Weak accountability and transparency in some UN processes** undermine institutional credibility.
- **Limited capacity to resolve prolonged conflicts reduces the UN’s effectiveness** in maintaining international peace.
- **Perceived inability to enforce international law** has contributed to declining public trust in the UN.

Way Forward

- **Reform the UNSC** to improve geographical and political representation.
- **Strengthen transparency and independent accountability mechanisms**.
- **Increase representation of developing countries** in UN leadership.
- **Reduce excessive dependence on a small group** of major donors.
- **Give greater decision-making space** to local and Global South actors.
- **Strengthen the UN’s capacity for preventive diplomacy** and conflict resolution.



Mains Question

“The credibility of the United Nations depends on restoring trust through greater transparency, accountability and equitable representation.” Discuss the major challenges facing the UN and suggest reforms to strengthen its effectiveness. (15 marks, 250 words)

What are the provisions of AFSPA?

Prelims: General 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 **Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA)** has extended the **Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958 (AFSPA)** for another six months from **October 1, 2026** in parts of **Manipur, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh**.
- The move has renewed the debate on **national security, civil liberties, accountability and peace-building** in Northeast India.

Key Highlights

- AFSPA** was enacted in **1958** to provide additional powers to the armed forces in areas affected by **insurgency and serious internal security problems**.
- Under **Section 3**, an area can be declared a “**disturbed area**” by either the Central or State Government.
- In a disturbed area, armed forces can, subject to conditions under the Act, **use force including lethal force, arrest without warrant and search premises without warrant**.
- AFSPA also provides legal protection to personnel. **Prior sanction of the Central Government** is required before prosecution or legal proceedings for acts done under the Act.
- In **Manipur**, AFSPA continues throughout the State except areas under **13 police stations in five Valley districts**. The extension comes in

the context of the ethnic conflict that began on **May 3, 2023**.

- In **Nagaland**, AFSPA continues in **nine districts** and areas under **21 police stations in five other districts**. Its continuation is linked to security concerns and the unresolved **Naga political issue**.
- In **Arunachal Pradesh**, AFSPA continues in **Tirap, Changlang and Longding districts** and selected areas of **Namsai district** bordering Assam.
- Manipur had earlier witnessed a gradual withdrawal of AFSPA. Between **April 2022 and April 2023**, it was withdrawn from all police station areas in the Valley due to an improved security situation. The **2023 violence reversed this trend**.

Implications

- AFSPA creates a balance between **national security and civil liberties**, but prolonged use of extraordinary powers can raise concerns about **fundamental rights and due process**.
- The requirement of **prior Central sanction** for prosecution can create concerns about **accountability and access to justice**.
- Differences between the Centre and State governments regarding AFSPA can create challenges for **cooperative federalism**.
- Continued deployment of armed forces may affect **public trust and community relations** if it is not accompanied by dialogue and grievance redressal.
- The continuation of AFSPA in Nagaland shows that **security measures alone cannot resolve political conflicts**. Political dialogue and peace negotiations are also necessary.
- Regular extensions can create a risk of **prolonged exceptional governance** unless accompanied by clear criteria for review and withdrawal.

Way Forward

- Conduct **regular and transparent reviews** of disturbed-area notifications and withdraw AFSPA when security conditions improve.
- Strengthen **civilian oversight, independent investigation and accountability mechanisms** while protecting personnel acting lawfully.



- Give greater importance to **political dialogue, peace negotiations and confidence-building measures**.
- Strengthen **local policing, intelligence, governance and development** to gradually reduce dependence on extraordinary military powers.
- Promote **reconciliation, rehabilitation and grievance redressal** to rebuild trust between communities and the government.

Mains Question

The continuation of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA) in parts of Northeast India reflects the challenge of balancing national security with civil liberties. Discuss its security, constitutional and federal implications and suggest measures for its accountable and time-bound use. (15 marks, 250 words)

Who is the most vulnerable to cyber frauds

Prelims : General Studies Paper I

Current events of national and international importance

Mains: General Studies 3

Challenges to internal security through communication networks, role of media and social networking sites in internal security challenges, basics of cyber security; money-laundering and its prevention.

Why in Focus?

- **Cybercrime cases in India** rose by **17.9%**, from 86,420 in 2023 to 1,01,928 in 2024.
- Growing **digital transactions and internet use** have increased people's exposure to online scams.

Key Highlights

- A Lokniti-CSDS and Common Cause study surveyed **8,306 citizens across 16 States** on digital fraud.
- **33%** frequently received fake delivery calls, while **31%** received investment scam calls.
- **27% frequently received scam calls** from people posing as **bank officials** and asking for **personal details**.

- Among people with high internet use, over **46% reported high or moderate scam exposure**.
- **13%** of respondents said they had been **victims of cybercrime in the last 2-3 years**.
- Among victims, **54% faced financial fraud, 13% reported device hacking** and **11% reported personal data theft**.
- More than **80% of cybercrime victims suffered financial losses**, with 23% losing more than **₹20,000**.
- Fraudsters exploit **trust, fear and digital footprints** through fake bank, police, delivery and investment calls.

Implications

- Rising cybercrime threatens **digital trust and financial security**.
- Greater digital participation can create a larger **digital footprint for fraudsters to exploit**.
- Financial fraud can cause significant **economic losses**, especially for vulnerable users.
- The problem shows the need for stronger **cyber awareness and digital safety**.
- Growing online fraud could undermine public confidence in **India's digital economy**.

Way Forward

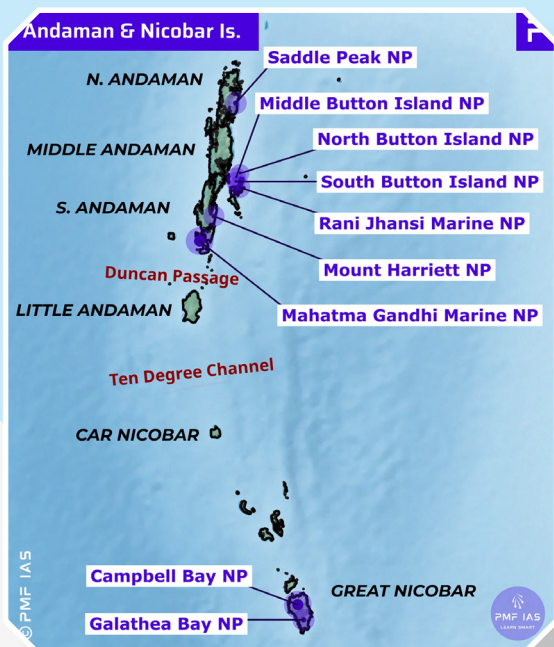
- Strengthen **cybercrime reporting and investigation** mechanisms.
- Improve **digital and financial awareness** among citizens.
- Promote safer digital practices and awareness about **common scam methods**.
- Strengthen protection of **personal and financial data**.
- Improve coordination between **banks, digital platforms, telecom operators and law-enforcement agencies**.

Mains Question

The rapid growth of digitalisation in India has also increased the risks of cybercrime and financial fraud. Discuss the challenges and measures needed to ensure a safe digital ecosystem. (250 words)



- It covers an area of about **110 sq. km** and forms part of the **Great Nicobar Biosphere Reserve**, along with **Campbell Bay National Park**.
- The park has **tropical evergreen forests, mangroves and rich marine ecosystems**.
- Important fauna include the **Nicobar megapode, Nicobar macaque, saltwater crocodile, monitor lizards and giant leatherback turtles**.
- It is an important **nesting site of the leatherback turtle**.



Species In News

Great Indian Bustard

- The **Great Indian Bustard** is currently in the news because the recent **restoration of the Solapur grasslands** has successfully brought back this flagship bird, highlighting the importance of conserving **native ecosystems**.
- It is classified as **“Critically Endangered”** on the **IUCN Red List**, listed in **Appendix I of CITES**, and strictly protected under **Schedule I of the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972**.
- Known as one of the **heaviest flying birds in the world**, it stands at about **one metre tall** and is easily identifiable by its **black cap, pale head and neck, and brownish body dotted with white spots**.
- Recognized as the **State Bird of Rajasthan**, it acts as a **flagship indicator species** for the health of **open natural ecosystems**, meaning its decline reflects the broader **degradation of India’s dry grasslands**.
- While it was historically found across much of the **Indian subcontinent**, its declining population is now mostly restricted to isolated pockets in **Rajasthan**, particularly the **Desert National Park, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Madhya Pradesh**.

