

The Hindu Important News Articles & Editorial For UPSC CSE

Saturday, 14 Dec , 2024

Edition: International Table of Contents

Page 10 Syllabus : GS 2 : Indian Polity	The knotty promise of Section 69
Page 13 Syllabus : Prelims Fact	Georgia's political crisis deepens as govt. set to name far-right President
Page 13 Syllabus : Prelims Fact	White House unveils national strategy to counter Islamophobia
In News	No Indian city meets WHO air quality standards
In News	Launch of FAME-III
Page 06 : Editorial Analysis: Syllabus : GS 2: International Relations	Trump's return and the South Asia outlook

It's about quality

The Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) introduces Section 69, criminalizing sexual intercourse through "deceitful means," including false promises of marriage.

- This law addresses gaps in earlier provisions but raises concerns about gender bias, evidence collection, and its impact on consensual relationships.
- Legal experts and courts offer differing views, igniting debates on privacy and autonomy.



Parliament House Courts in New Delhi, India, November 18, 2023

The knotty promise of SECTION 69

As India enforces the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, the new set of criminal laws that replace the Indian Penal Code, Section 69 faces questioning from legal eyes for its gender bias, potential misuse, and implications on modern relationships, finds **Soham Rocky Singh**.

In July 21, a 25-year-old woman from Ranchi, Jharkhand, filed an FIR accusing a man of engaging in a sexual relationship with her under the pretence of marriage. The woman claimed in her FIR that the man, 26, who she had known from college, had come home on multiple occasions and expressed the wish to marry her. In one instance, he allegedly told her mother explicitly not to consider any marriage proposals for her, as he intended to marry her himself.

The woman stated in her first information report (FIR) that she was introduced to this man, who allegedly supported their union. She claimed that the man and his mother "backtracked on their commitment". She was there fore filing a case under Section 69 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), the new set of criminal laws that replaces the colonial-era Indian Penal Code (IPC). While the trial is still pending, the man was granted bail by a local court in October.

Section 69 of the BNS criminalises "sexual intercourse by employing deceitful means" and cites the "promise to marry" a woman without any intention of fulfilling the same, as grounds for imprisonment up to 10 years and the possibility of a fine. While it is not treated as rape, it is considered "indecent" and also applies to "false promise of employment or promotion, or marrying by suppressing identity".

There are several cases in court that use Section 69 in their FIRs, opening the doors to public and legal discourse around it. Before the BNS came into being, up to 40% of all rape case allegations pertained to "friend", live-in partners on pretence of marriage, and "separated husband", going by National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data between 2016 and 2022.

On December 5, the Gauhati High Court granted bail to a man after he was arrested when a woman claimed that he and the man had been in a relationship for nine years, during which period, they engaged in physical relationship regularly. The man also allegedly promised her to marry. However, the court found out that he had become engaged to another woman. When she asked for an explanation, the man allegedly cited parental pressure to marry the woman.

"It is a settled position of law that a simple promise to marry without anything more does not alter the nature of the concept of intercourse of fact. Therefore, under the given circumstances, the petitioner does not deserve to be detained in custody," the High Court said.

Based on the past. Prior to the enactment of the BNS, such cases were registered under Section 376(2)(a) (commits rape repeatedly on the same woman) along with Section 50 (coercion known to be given under fear or misconception), says Advocate K.S. Nanda, who represented the accused man in Jharkhand. Effectively, the two IPC Sections now form the base of Section 69.

Ravi Kant, advocate and country head of the Access to Justice Project, an international non-profit offering pro bono services, explains the difference between the previous law under IPC and the new provision in the BNS. "This is a new offence because they have used words such as 'deceitful means', 'inducement', 'false promise'. This is not rape," he clarifies.

Section 69 comes within Chapter 5 of the BNS: 'Offences Against Women and Child', under "sexual offences". The need for this section, says Kant, was "because such cases were reported a lot in the courts during the IPC time".

Another difference is that earlier, if a relationship lasted several years, and the woman claimed she was cheated on the pretence of marriage, the court typically dismissed such cases, he says. "It was reasoned that a long-term relationship implied mutual consent and understanding, making fraud difficult to substantiate". Now, even if the relationship is consensual, it is treated as an offence because it is taken as a false promise or a deception.

Gender biased
Dimple Narayan Bhambhani, a journalist, film-maker, and activist, calls the new law "intrinsically gender biased and discriminatory" with the law suggesting that women do not have agency in decisions around sexual matters. On January 19 this year, she had started an online petition on Change.org to repeal Section 69 of the BNS, which has since garnered over 60,000 signatures.

Her contention in the petition is that "a consensual sexual relationship made on promise of marriage will be a crime only if it is a man repressing from it and not a woman".

The petition also talks about the power equation, where "the law presumes a woman cannot be in position of power to induce a man into sex by false promise of job or promotion". She called the law "extremely regressive" and also said it "completely discards the concept of will and consent" around sexual matters.

Since Section 69 is a recent addition, Bhambhani uses past data recorded under Section 294 (force for consent and compulsion). Until 2015, the NCRB had compiled a yearly compendium of crimes across India in 'Offenders Relation to Victims

of Rape' category under the 'Crime Against Women' chapter, the relationship between the accused and the survivor in rape cases was broadly categorised as a 'family member', 'neighbour', or 'stranger'. However, the growing number of cases involving false promises of marriage led the NCRB to refine its classifications. In 2016, specific sub-categories were introduced under the 'Offenders Relation to Victims of Rape' category. This makes it challenging to determine conviction trends specific to cases involving false promises of marriage or similar allegations.

Parliamentary report
The report no. 246 of the Rajya Sabha on the BNS, released by the Department-related Parliamentary Standing Committee on Home Affairs on November 12 last year, six months before the BNS came into force, had cautioned against reinforcing gender stereotypes.

According to the report, it was difficult to prove whether a promise to marry had actually been made. It also said "intentions can change over time", adding to the very nature of relationships.

The report said that "criminalising a promise to marry" can intrude into an individual's right to privacy and autonomy. It said that "defining what constitutes a legally binding promise to marry can be vague and open to interpretation in enforcement and judgments". Also, a verbal intention to marry could be a challenge when it came to evidence collection.

Differing court views
On November 26, the Supreme Court flagged a "worrying trend" of criminalising long-term consensual relationships after they turn sour. "If criminality is to be attached to such prolonged physical relationship at a very belated stage, it can lead to serious consequences," the bench of Justices R.J. Narasimha and N. Kulkarni Singh said, while quashing an FIR against a man accused of rape by a woman who was in a relationship with him for over nine years, by the trial court.

In another judgment, the Gujarat High Court on September 19 commented: "In every case where a man fails to marry a woman despite a promise made to her, that cannot be held guilty for committing the offence of rape."

The High Court's ruling came while quashing a February 2019 FIR for rape filed against a man, who had entered into a physical relationship with

a woman on the pretence of marriage. Cases registered before the BNS came into force are being tried in the old IPC. The woman in her FIR complaint alleged that she got pregnant and when she informed the man, he reneged on his promise.

During the pendency of the trial, a baby boy was born. However, when the DNA samples of the accused and the child were tested, it was proven that the accused was not the biological father. Meanwhile, the woman got married to another person and didn't show up for the court proceedings again.

"He can only be held guilty if it is proved that the promise to marry was given with no intention to honour it and also that was the only reason due to which the woman agreed to have a sexual relationship," the High Court said, adding that "cases of consensual sexual relationship being later converted into allegations of rape are rapidly increasing".

On the other hand, in a separate case, the Kerala High Court in October declined to quash the criminal proceedings against a priest accused of raping a woman after promising to marry her. Dismissing the plea of the priest, the High Court observed that prima facie, the allegations warranted a trial, and that there was no reason to close the proceedings earlier.

Supporting the new law, advocate Gautam Duda, Partner at law firm Phoenix Legal, in Delhi, says, "Section 69 of the BNS addresses the gaps and ambiguities in the previous law concerning sexual intercourse obtained under false promises such as promises of marriage or other deceitful means".

"The definition of rape revolves around the 'consent' of the woman, and courts have consistently held that sexual intercourse based on a false promise of marriage, where there was no genuine intent from the outset, falls within the scope of rape. By introducing Section 69, the BNS explicitly criminalises such acts and provides clear punishment for them," he explains.

"The law is protective to women who operate in a male-dominated, patriarchal society, where marriage for women is often seen as a way of attaining personhood. Many women are consistently told in their childhood years that they belong in another home – that of their husband's and not their own."

Duda says the law broadens the legal framework by introducing the concept of sexual intercourse through deceitful means. "However, it acknowledges that coercion is not limited to physical force, but can also be psychological or emotional – an aspect not explicitly addressed under the earlier law," he says.

PIL in Kerala HC
In September, a public interest litigation (PIL) was filed before the Kerala High Court challenging the constitutional validity of Section 69 of the BNS. The plea by a lawyer practising in the courts of Kerala contended that "the Section is derogatory and inimical to the extent that it views women as naive, glibble and incapable of making decisions pertaining to their life". The plea also contends that the Section would lead to "serious issues for people who are in live-in relationships and people in relationships in the nature of marriage".

"By contending to include the LGBTQ+ community, it is a violation of the equal protection clause. Further, it penalises a very basic human emotion, the right to have sexual union, a right protected under Article 21 of the Constitution," the plea stated. The High Court sought a response from the Central government on the issue.

Background and Allegations

Daily News Analysis

- A case was filed under Section 69 of the BNS by a 25-year-old woman from Jharkhand against a man for engaging in a sexual relationship under the pretense of marriage.
- Section 69 criminalizes sexual intercourse based on deceitful means, such as false promises of marriage, with penalties including imprisonment of up to 10 years and a fine.

Historical Context and Evolution of the Law

- Before the enactment of the BNS, similar cases were registered under Sections 376(2)(n) and 90 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC).
- These sections addressed rape through repeated sexual acts and consent obtained under false pretenses.
- The new law explicitly includes terms like "deceitful means" and "inducement" to address ambiguities in the IPC.

Legal Challenges and Differing Judicial Opinions

- Courts have taken varying stands on cases under Section 69: Some courts quashed cases where long-term relationships implied mutual consent and understanding.
- Others ruled that promises made without intent to fulfill them at the outset constitute criminal acts.
- Concerns have been raised about the criminalization of consensual relationships that turn sour.
- Gender Bias and Criticism Critics argue that Section 69 reinforces gender stereotypes by presuming women lack agency in sexual matters.
- The law is seen as inherently biased, penalizing men for false promises of marriage while excluding other genders and scenarios.
- A public petition has called for its repeal, citing concerns about its discriminatory nature and disregard for mutual consent.

Statistical Insights

- National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data from 2016 to 2022 shows that up to 40% of rape allegations pertained to false promises of marriage or similar accusations.
- The average conviction rate for all rape cases during this period was 29.71%.

Parliamentary Report and Constitutional Concerns

- A parliamentary report on the BNS highlighted challenges in proving promises to marry, as intentions can change over time.
- The report cautioned against vague definitions that could lead to inconsistencies in enforcement.
- It also raised concerns about intrusions into individual privacy and autonomy.

Support for Section 69

Daily News Analysis

- Proponents argue that Section 69 closes legal loopholes by explicitly addressing coercion through psychological or emotional manipulation.
- The law aims to protect women in patriarchal societies where marriage often defines their personhood.

Constitutional Challenge

- A public interest litigation has been filed, questioning the constitutional validity of Section 69.
- Concerns include its exclusion of the LGBTQ community, potential misuse in live-in relationships, and violation of individual rights under Article 21 of the Constitution.
- The High Court has sought a response from the government on this issue.

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques : Discuss the implications of Section 69 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) on personal autonomy and gender equity. Analyze its potential impact on the legal framework addressing sexual offences and its compatibility with constitutional rights. **(150 Words /10 marks)**



Georgia faces a political crisis with protests over EU membership delays, alleged election rigging, and democratic backsliding.

- The ruling party's actions have sparked constitutional tensions and international condemnation, including U.S. sanctions.

Georgia's political crisis deepens as govt. set to name far-right President

The nation has been in turmoil since the governing Georgian Dream party claimed victory in the October elections; pro-Western incumbent, President Salome Zurbishvili, refuses to step down, demands new parliamentary elections, paving the way for a constitutional showdown

Agence France-Presse
TBILISI

Georgia's political crisis deepened on Friday after new pro-Europe protests were announced ahead of the controversial nomination of a far-right government loyalist as President.

The Black Sea nation has been in turmoil since the governing Georgian Dream party claimed victory in contested October parliamentary elections, with its decision last month to delay European Union (EU) accession talks igniting a fresh wave of mass rallies.

More unrest is expected on Saturday when Georgian Dream will appoint far-right former footballer Mikheil Kavelashvili as President in a controversial election process.

The pro-Western incumbent, President Salome Zurbishvili, has refused to step down and is demanding new parliamentary elections, paving the way for a constitutional showdown.

Opposition groups accuse Georgian Dream of rigging the parliamentary vote, democratic backsliding in office and moving Tbilisi closer to Russia – all at the expense of the Caucasus nation's bid for EU membership.

A forceful police crack-



On the boil: A firework explodes near police officers during a rally of Opposition parties' supporters in Tbilisi, Georgia, on November 30. REUTERS

down on the protestors has also triggered outrage at home and condemnation abroad.

U.S. imposes sanctions

Washington imposed fresh sanctions on Georgian officials overnight, barring visas for around 20 people accused of "undermining democracy in Georgia", including sitting Ministers and parliamentarians, the State Department said.

Police have used tear gas and water cannons to disperse the rallies, arresting more than 400 demonstrators, and the country's rights ombudsman has accused security forces of

"torturing" those detained.

Pro-EU demonstrators have staged daily rallies across Georgia for the last two weeks, with more to take place across Tbilisi on Friday.

On Saturday, an electoral college controlled by Georgian Dream is expected to elect Mr. Kavelashvili as the country's new figurehead president, in an indirect vote boycotted by the opposition.

Mr. Kavelashvili, 53, is known for his vehement anti-West diatribes and opposition of LGBTQ rights.

Georgian Dream scrapped direct presiden-

tial elections in 2017.

With Ms. Zurbishvili refusing to leave office, Opposition lawmakers boycotting Parliament and protests showing no signs of abating, critics are questioning Mr. Kavelashvili's legitimacy before he even takes up the role.

One author of Georgia's constitution, Vakhtang Khmaladze, has argued that all decisions by the new Parliament are void because the body started work before awaiting the outcome of the lawsuit brought by Ms. Zurbishvili.

"Georgia is facing an unprecedented constitutional

crisis," Mr. Khmaladze said.

It remains unclear how the government will react to Ms. Zurbishvili's refusal to step down after her successor is inaugurated on December 29.

A former French diplomat, Ms. Zurbishvili is a hugely popular figure among protesters who view her as a beacon of Georgia's European aspirations.

"Let them try to kick Salome out of the presidential palace – we will all stand up to defend her," Otar Turnava, a 23-year-old protester, said at a rally outside Parliament on Thursday.

"She is the only legitimate leader we have had since Georgian Dream stole the election, and she will lead us into the EU."

'Brutal violence'

In power for more than a decade, Georgian Dream has pushed increasingly conservative policies in recent years, including measures targeting civil society, independent media, opposition parties and the LGBTQ community.

Critics say the moves mirror repressive Russian-style legislation and Brussels has called them "incompatible" with EU membership.

Amid the latest crisis, police have raided the of-

fices of Opposition parties and the Prime Minister has repeatedly pledged to "eradicate liberal fascism".

Announcing the latest visa bans on top Georgian figures, U.S. State Department spokesman Matthew Miller said: "The United States strongly condemns the Georgian Dream party's ongoing, brutal, and unjustified violence against Georgian citizens, including protesters, members of the media, human rights activists, and opposition figures."

Georgia's Parliament speaker Shalva Papuashvili called the move "incomprehensible and meaningless", accusing the outgoing U.S. administration of "deliberately worsening relations with Georgia".

He struck back at critics of Mr. Kavelashvili, saying "it is vital to have a president who does not fall under the influence of a foreign power, as is the case with Ms. Salome Zurbishvili".

French President Emmanuel Macron also condemned the ongoing repressions in a phone call to Georgian Dream's honorary chairman and founder, Bidzina Ivanishvili.

The secretive billionaire, widely assumed to be Georgia's real power broker, raged against the West on the campaign trail earlier this year.

Analysis of the news:

Daily News Analysis

- Georgia is experiencing a deepening political crisis with new pro-European protests ahead of a controversial presidential nomination by the ruling party.
- The country has been in turmoil since the governing party won a contested parliamentary election, delaying EU accession talks and sparking mass demonstrations.
- Protests are centered around alleged election rigging, democratic backsliding, and shifting policies closer to Russia, undermining EU membership aspirations.
- Opposition lawmakers have boycotted Parliament, and the pro-Western incumbent president refuses to step down, escalating constitutional tensions.
- The ruling party abolished direct presidential elections in 2017, fueling legitimacy concerns over the electoral process.
- Police crackdowns on protests have triggered domestic outrage and international condemnation, with reports of excessive force and human rights violations.
- The U.S. imposed sanctions on Georgian officials for undermining democracy.

About Georgia



- Georgia is a country located at the crossroads of Eastern Europe and Western Asia, bordered by Russia, Turkey, Armenia, and Azerbaijan.
- It has a coastline along the Black Sea to the west and a total area of approximately 69,700 square kilometers.
- Tbilisi is its capital and largest city, serving as a cultural and political hub.
- The population is around 3.7 million, with ethnic Georgians forming the majority.
- Georgia declared independence from the Soviet Union in 1991 and has pursued integration with the European Union and NATO.
- The country has faced challenges, including territorial disputes with Russia over Abkhazia and South Ossetia.
- Its economy is driven by agriculture, tourism, and energy transit routes.
- Georgian is the official language, and the currency is the Georgian Lari.

UPSC Mains PYQ : 2019

Ques : "Discuss the impact of Brexit on India-EU relations and the future trajectory of these relations."



The White House unveiled a national strategy to combat Islamophobia, addressing rising discrimination and violence against Muslims and Arab Americans.

- The plan outlines over 100 actions focused on safety, awareness, and solidarity.

Analysis of the news:

- The bulk of the actions in the plan have already been carried out.
- The White House announced the first-ever national strategy to counter Islamophobia, addressing hate, violence, bias, and discrimination against Muslims and Arab Americans.
- The plan follows a similar national strategy for combating antisemitism introduced by President Biden in May 2023.
- The anti-Islamophobia strategy has been in development for months and is expected to be fully implemented before President Biden leaves office.
- **The strategy identifies four priorities:** raising awareness of hate against Muslims and Arabs, improving their safety, accommodating religious practices, and promoting cross-community solidarity.
- The Biden administration stated that threats against American Muslim and Arab communities have increased in recent years, making the strategy more urgent.



The anti-Islamophobia plan release comes five weeks before U.S. President Joe Biden leaves office. AP

White House unveils national strategy to counter Islamophobia

Associated Press
WASHINGTON

The White House on Thursday announced what it called the first-ever national strategy to counter Islamophobia, detailing more than 100 steps Federal Officials are taking to curb hate, violence, bias and discrimination against Muslims and Arab Americans.

The proposal follows a similar national plan to battle antisemitism that President Joe Biden unveiled in May 2023, as fears about increasing hatred and discrimination were rising among United States Jews.

Officials worked on the anti-Islamophobia plan for months, and its release came five weeks before Mr. Biden leaves office. The White House said the bulk of its actions had been implemented, with the goal to roll out the rest before Inauguration Day on January 20, when President-elect Donald Trump takes office.

In a statement announcing the strategy, Mr. Biden administration wrote, "Over the past year, this initiative has become even more important as threats against American Muslim and Arab communities have spiked."

The strategy has four basic priorities: increasing awareness of hatred against Muslims and Arabs while more widely recognising these communities' heritages; broadly improving their safety and security; appropriately accommodating Muslim and Arab religious practices by working to curb discrimination against them; and encouraging cross-community solidarity to further counter hate.

In News : No Indian city meets WHO air quality standards

According to a study recently published in Lancet Planet Health, no one in India lives in areas where the yearly average pollution levels are below the levels recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO).

New WHO Global Air Quality Guidelines				
Pollutant		Time	2005 levels	New 2021 levels
PM_{2.5} Particulate matter < 2.5 microns		Annual	10	5
		24-hour	25	15
PM₁₀ Particulate matter < 10 microns		Annual	20	15
		24-hour	50	45
O₃ Ozone		Peak season	-	60
		8-hour	100	100
NO₂ Nitrogen dioxide		Annual	40	10
		24-hour	-	25
SO₂ Sulfur dioxide		24-hour	20	40
CO Carbon monoxide		24-hour	-	4

WHO's revised air quality guidelines 2021

➡ About

- In September 2021, WHO updated its air quality guidelines (AQGs) to reflect the serious health impacts of air pollution:
- **PM_{2.5}**: The annual mean concentration should not exceed 5 µg/m³. This is half of the 2005 guideline of 10 µg/m³.
- **NO₂**: The annual mean concentration should not exceed 10 µg/m³.
- **Ozone**: The peak season mean 8-hour concentration should not exceed 60 µg/m³.
- **PM₁₀**: The annual mean concentration should not exceed 15 µg/m³, and the 24-hour mean should not exceed 45 µg/m³.
- **SO₂**: The 24-hour mean concentration should not exceed 40 µg/m³.
- **CO**: The 24-hour mean concentration should not exceed 7 µg/m³.

➡ Non-binding in nature

- The WHO AQGs are not legally binding, but they are often used by countries and legislative bodies to set air quality policies.
- The guidelines are based on scientific evidence from multiple countries and are intended to help reduce the health impacts of air pollution.

➡ India's National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS)

Daily News Analysis

- Ambient air quality refers to the condition or quality of air surrounding us in the outdoors.
- Under the authority of the Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act of 1981, India's Central Pollution Control Board sets national ambient air quality standards.

The current Standards include following 12 pollutants:

Pollutant	Time Weighted Average	Concentration in Ambient Air	
		Industrial, Residential, Rural, and Other Areas	Ecologically Sensitive Area (notified by Central Government)
Sulphur dioxide (SO ₂), µg/m ³	Annual 24 hours	50 80	20 80
Nitrogen dioxide (NO ₂), µg/m ³	Annual 24 hours	40 80	30 80
Particulate matter (< 10 µm) or PM ₁₀ , µg/m ³	Annual 24 hours	60 100	60 100
Particulate matter (< 2.5 µm) or PM _{2.5} , µg/m ³	Annual 24 hours	40 60	40 60
Ozone (O ₃), µg/m ³	8 hours 1 hour	100 180	100 180
Lead (Pb), µg/m ³	Annual 24 hours	0.50 1.0	0.50 1.0
Carbon monoxide (CO), mg/m ³	8 hours 1 hour	02 04	02 04
Ammonia (NH ₃), µg/m ³	Annual 24 hours	100 400	100 400
Benzene (C ₆ H ₆), µg/m ³	Annual	05	05
Benzo(a)Pyrene (BaP) – particulate phase only, ng/m ³	Annual	01	01
Arsenic (As), ng/m ³	Annual	06	06
Nickel (Ni), ng/m ³	Annual	20	20

Key highlights of the study

Widespread Air Pollution in India

- ➡ No area in India meets the WHO's recommended PM_{2.5} pollution level of 5 µg/m³.
- ➡ 81.9% of the population lives in areas exceeding India's National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) of 40 µg/m³.

Health Impact of Air Pollution

- ➡ High levels of PM_{2.5} are linked to 1.5 million deaths annually in India.
- ➡ Long-term exposure to air pollution increases risks of respiratory diseases, heart attacks, strokes, high blood pressure, and developmental delays in children.
- ➡ Every 10 µg/m³ increase in PM_{2.5} levels raises the risk of death by 8.6%.

Regional Pollution Levels

- ➡ Pollution levels ranged from 11.2 µg/m³ in Arunachal Pradesh's Lower Subansiri district (2019) to 119 µg/m³ in Ghaziabad and Delhi (2016).

Potential for Improvement

- Meeting NAAQS could prevent 0.3 million deaths annually; achieving WHO levels would save even more lives.
- Identifying and addressing pollution sources, such as construction, vehicular emissions, and crop burning, is critical.

UPSC Mains PYQ : 2019

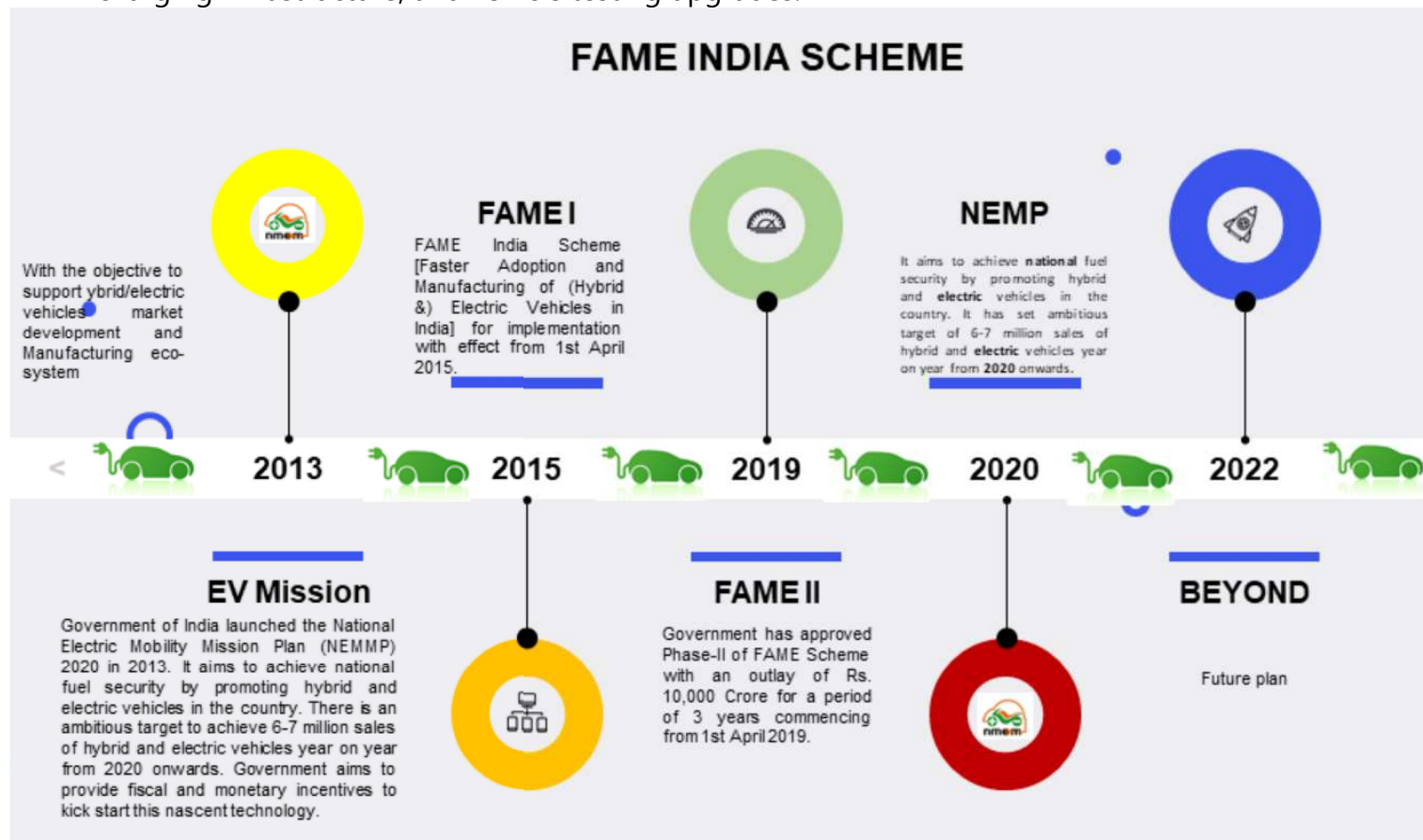
Ques : "What are the major sources of air pollution in India? Discuss the measures being taken to combat it." (150 words/10m)



In News : Launch of FAME-III

The Ministry of Heavy Industries has launched the PM Electric Drive Revolution in Innovative Vehicle Enhancement (PM E-DRIVE) Scheme to promote electric mobility and reduce fossil fuel dependence.

- With an outlay of Rs. 10,900 crore, the scheme runs from 2024 to 2026. It covers electric vehicles, charging infrastructure, and vehicle testing upgrades.



PM E-DRIVE Scheme:

- **Objective:** Promote electric mobility in India, reduce reliance on fossil fuels, and improve air quality.
- **Focus:** Faster adoption of electric vehicles (EVs) through demand incentives, setting up charging infrastructure, and developing a robust EV manufacturing ecosystem.
- **Outlay:** ₹10,900 crore
- **Duration:** 1st October 2024 to 31st March 2026
- **Incentives:**
 - Financial support for purchasing electric 2-wheelers (e-2W), 3-wheelers (e-3W), and buses.
 - Subsidies for setting up public EV charging stations.
- **Targets:**
 - Support around 25 lakh e-2Ws, 3 lakh e-3Ws, and 14,000 e-buses.
 - **Replaces:** The earlier FAME II scheme.

Trump's return and the South Asia outlook

In January 2025, Donald Trump will be sworn-in as the 47th President of the United States of America. Mr. Trump's re-election, and subsequent return to office, have triggered curiosity and "nervousness" in many countries. However, in South Asia, he is likely to offer a distinct continuity. His ideology and foreign policy goals will continue to push for increased cooperation, collaboration, and consultation with India in South Asia even as his leadership style, decision-making nature, and management of great power politics will provide new opportunities and challenges.

Factors in U.S.-India ties

India and the United States have enjoyed an upward trajectory in their relationship since the beginning of the millennium. Acknowledging its leadership in the region, the U.S. even labelled India as a net-security provider in 2009. The Biden administration (2021-24) has emulated a similar outlook. With China's increasing aggressiveness and assertiveness, India and the U.S. have strengthened their engagements and cooperation in South Asia. Through its Indo-Pacific strategy, the U.S. wants to supplement India's regional leadership to counter China and maintain the values-based order. Its cooperation with India on the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) projects in Nepal and helping Sri Lanka out of its economic crisis, indicate this growing cooperation. Besides, Mr. Biden's passive relations with Pakistan after withdrawing from Afghanistan helped India and the U.S. foster a mutual vision for the region.

The relationship has not been free of dissonance and divergences. New Delhi's primary objective of cooperating with the U.S. is to push back against China and offer alternative development partnerships. However, the Biden administration has selectively scrutinised some



Harsh V. Pant

Vice-President for Studies and Foreign Policy at the Observer Research Foundation (ORF)



Aditya Gowdara Shivamurthy

an Associate Fellow, Neighbourhood Studies, Observer Research Foundation

How South Asian countries will cope with the Trump administration, even as they balance China and India, is yet to be seen

countries on democracy and human rights under the pretext of upholding a values-based order and pushing back China. While India supported the Sheikh Hasina government in Bangladesh and pragmatically engaged with Myanmar's junta, the U.S. pressured both regimes, including imposing targeted sanctions. This pressure nudged them closer to China. Similarly, sanctioning Indian firms for collaborating with Russia and accusations of corruption against the Adani Group has faltered two Indian projects in Sri Lanka, leaving India to face the brunt and consequences of the decisions.

There could be less irritants

However, Mr. Trump's return is likely to assuage these irritants. As in his first term, Mr. Trump has continued to hint at burden sharing, reciprocity, nationalism, and competing against China in his foreign policy. If Mr. Trump walks the talk, he will prioritise pushing back against China while giving less importance to human rights, democracy, and nation-building. He would also want India to take the lead in the region while the U.S. would supplement the same. This would leave less space for divergences and enhance collaborative policies between both countries. Another potential irritant between both countries was concerning their policies on Afghanistan and Pakistan. During his first term, Mr. Trump punished and cooperated with Pakistan and urged India to take an active role in finding a sustainable solution in Afghanistan. With the U.S.'s withdrawal from Afghanistan and Pakistan's little strategic importance, this issue is of little dissonance now.

During his first term, Mr. Trump promoted capacity building, development assistance, defence agreements, and cooperation with the South Asian countries. This nature of assistance would continue, given his ambitions to counter

China and supplement India. Mr. Trump's little focus on democracy, nation-building, and human rights (like in his first term) would also benefit Sri Lanka, where a new government is still looking for economic assistance and exploring a lasting solution to the Tamil issue.

This approach could benefit Myanmar and the Taliban too, although it is unclear to what extent Washington would like to engage them. However, Bangladesh, which is undergoing a political transition under the new regime, will face challenges and a potential reduction in assistance.

China and the region

Mr. Trump's confrontational approach to China will also put South Asian countries under more pressure. Given his erratic decisions, Washington will likely be less tolerant of South Asian countries' agency and consistent playing of one great power against the other. Besides, the region's consistent politicisation and ambiguity over investments, defence cooperation, and agreements will likely invite more pressure from the U.S. to seek reciprocity. However, his promise of bringing peace between Russia and Ukraine and resolving the crisis in West Asia (if successful) will help weakened South Asian economies to overcome their food and fuel inflationary pressures.

As the world braces for Trump 2.0, South Asia will not be immune to the broader structural shifts. Yet, the region is likely to see more continuity. With India and the U.S. likely to increase their cooperation in South Asia and bridge their divergences, Mr. Trump's ideology, leadership style, and management of great power politics will have opportunities and challenges for the region. How South Asian countries will cope with the new administration, even as they balance China and India, is yet to be seen.

GS Paper 02 : International Relations

UPSC Mains Practice Question: How can a shift in U.S. foreign policy priorities toward countering China influence South Asia's geopolitics? Discuss the opportunities and challenges for India. (150 Words /10 marks)

Context :

- ➔ Donald Trump's anticipated return to the U.S. presidency in 2025 may bring continuity in U.S.-South Asia relations, particularly enhancing cooperation with India.

- His focus on countering China, while deprioritizing democracy and human rights, could create opportunities and challenges for regional stability.
- South Asian nations must navigate these dynamics amid global power shifts.

Donald Trump's Return and Its Implications for South Asia

- In January 2025, Donald Trump will be sworn in as the 47th President of the United States.
- His re-election has sparked curiosity and "nervousness" globally but is expected to provide continuity in South Asia.
- Trump's leadership style and focus on great power politics may bring new opportunities and challenges for the region.

Factors Shaping U.S.-India Relations

- India and the U.S. have enjoyed a steadily improving relationship since the early 2000s, with India recognized as a net-security provider in 2009.
- Under the Biden administration, the U.S. worked to strengthen India's role in countering China in South Asia through its Indo-Pacific strategy.
- Collaborative efforts included the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) projects in Nepal and aiding Sri Lanka during its economic crisis.
- A shared vision for the region was furthered as the U.S. reduced engagement with Pakistan after its Afghanistan withdrawal.

Divergences in the Relationship

- India's collaboration with the U.S. aims to counter China and offer alternative development models.
- The Biden administration's focus on human rights and democracy caused friction.
- U.S. sanctions on Bangladesh and Myanmar nudged them closer to China.
- U.S. scrutiny of Indian firms collaborating with Russia hindered Indian projects in Sri Lanka.

Trump's Likely Policy Directions

- Trump's ideology emphasizes burden-sharing, reciprocity, and competing with China.
- His return is expected to reduce irritants in the U.S.-India relationship, with less focus on democracy and human rights.
- The U.S. may support India's regional leadership with supplementary assistance, minimizing divergences.

South Asia Under Trump 2.0

- Trump's foreign policy is expected to prioritize capacity-building, development assistance, and defence cooperation.
- This approach would benefit nations like Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and even the Taliban, though the extent of U.S. engagement remains uncertain.
- Bangladesh may face challenges due to reduced U.S. assistance during its political transition.

Implications of Trump's China Policy

- Trump's confrontational stance towards China could exert more pressure on South Asian countries, limiting their ability to balance great powers.
- South Asia's politicization and ambiguity on investments and agreements could lead to increased U.S. demands for reciprocity.
- Trump's potential success in resolving global crises like the Russia-Ukraine war and West Asia tensions may ease food and fuel inflation in the region.

Conclusion: Opportunities and Challenges

- Trump's second term is likely to enhance U.S.-India cooperation in South Asia while introducing challenges from his leadership style.
- The broader structural shifts under Trump's presidency will test South Asian countries' ability to navigate relations with the U.S., India, and China.