

The Hindu Important News Articles & Editorial For UPSC CSE

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—It's about quality—

The Su-57 (Russia) and F-35 (U.S.) were showcased at the Aero India airshow in Bengaluru.

Will U.S.'s F-35 stealth fighter jets fit into IAF's future plans?

NEWS ANALYSIS

Dinakar Peri
NEW DELHI

Early last week, the fifth-generation fighter aircraft (FGFA) of both Russia and the U.S. – the Su-57 and the F-35, respectively – were on display at the Aero India airshow in Bengaluru. Later that week, U.S. President Donald Trump, standing next to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who was on a visit to Washington DC, announced that the U.S. would be increasing military sales to India “by many billions of dollars” and was also paving the way to “ultimately” provide India with the F-35 stealth fighters.

The announcement has created a flutter in India about the possible procurement of the jet for the Indian Air Force (IAF), and it comes at a time when the country faces a huge gap in fighter induction and modernisation. However, res-

ponding to questions, Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri was quick to point out that there is a process to be followed for military procurement and that the formal process in this regard has not started “as yet”.

The biggest question is how will it impact India's own fighter development programmes, which, though behind schedule, are crucial for achieving self-reliance.

The F-35 is a tri-service, multinational, single-seat, single-engine strike fighter aircraft expected to be in service well into the 2080s. It has three variants – the F-35A conventional take-off and landing for the Air Force, the F-35B short take-off/vertical landing for the Marine Corps, and the F-35C aircraft carrier variant for the Navy and the Marine Corps.

“It is too early to say anything very definitively, but whatever the decision may be, it must be ensured that the indigenous pro-



Mean machine: The U.S. F-35 stealth fighter during Aero India in Bengaluru last week. MURALI KUMAR K.

grammes are shielded and their timely realisation prioritised,” one official said on the condition of anonymity. A similar view was expressed by many.

Key challenges

While the offer of F-35 means the U.S. is no longer concerned with the Russian S-400 air defence system that India operates, the jet will present significant challenges in integration in India's military architecture, which is a mix of Indian, Russian, French,

Israeli, and other systems.

To date, the F-35 programme has delivered over 990 aircraft to the U.S. services, international partners, and foreign military sales customers, according to a 2024 report of the U.S. Governmental Accountability Office. “The programme is also more than a decade delayed and has cost \$209 billion more than originally planned,” the report said, highlighting that none of the F-35 variants are meeting availability targets.

A key point is that the F-35 is a single-seater aircraft, contrary to the IAF's preference for twin-seater jets. One of the reasons the earlier attempt at co-development of the FGFA with Russia was dropped was that the jet had been developed in a single-seat configuration and the Russian proposal for the development of a twin-seater variant came with a hefty price tag. So how will the F-35 proposal, if and when that takes shape, fit the IAF's operational profile?

Currently, the indigenous Light Combat Aircraft (LCA)-Mk1A project – 83 jets have been ordered and order for 97 more are in the pipeline – has been delayed partly due to developmental issues and engine delays.

The jet, like the LCA-Mk1, is powered by the GE F404 engine and deliveries have been delayed by two years. At Aero India, officials said that GE has resolved its supply chain issue and deliveries are

expected from March.

Further, there is the LCA-Mk2, a much larger and more capable aircraft, the first prototype of which is expected to roll out by 2025-end and make first flight in the first quarter of 2026, according to Jitendra J. Jadhav, Director-General, Aeronautical Development Agency.

Then there is India's own FGFA in the pipeline, the Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft, which is envisaged to be ready for induction by 2034-35.

Apart from the indigenous programmes, there is the Multi-Role Fighter Aircraft (MRFA) tender for the acquisition of 114 foreign jet to be manufactured in India under licence.

Given this long line-up, it remains to be seen how the F-35 will fit into the IAF's future plans. India has never operated a U.S. fighter and the F-35, being the apex of U.S. technology threshold, will also bring with it stringent U.S. regulations and oversight.

Impact on India's Fighter Programmes

- This announcement has raised questions about the possible procurement of the F-35 for the Indian Air Force (IAF). While there is a gap in ghter induction and modernization, the formal process for procurement has not started yet.
- The decision may impact India's own ghter development programmes, which are essential for achieving self-reliance.

Challenges with F-35

- The F-35 is a multi-role, single-seat aircraft, but the IAF prefers twin-seater jets.
- The F-35 programme has been delayed by over a decade and is \$209 billion over budget.
- The aircraft might face integration challenges in India's military, which uses a variety of systems from different countries.

India's Indigenous Fighter Projects

- ▶ India is working on the Light Combat Aircraft (LCA)-Mk1A, which has been delayed due to engine issues.
- ▶ The LCA-Mk2, a larger version, will roll out by the end of 2025.
- ▶ India is also developing its own Fifth-Generation Fighter Aircraft (FGFA), expected by 2034-35.
- ▶ A Multi-Role Fighter Aircraft (MRFA) tender for acquiring 114 foreign jets is also in progress.
- ▶ The F-35's integration into IAF plans remains uncertain due to these ongoing projects.

Conclusion

- ▶ Overall, the F-35 offer from the U.S. raises questions about its integration into India's fighter fleet, potentially affecting indigenous programmes while balancing modernization and self-reliance goals.

F-35 stealth fighter jets:

- ▶ The F-35 is a fifth-generation, single-engine, multi-role stealth fighter jet developed by the U.S.
- ▶ It comes in three variants: F-35A (conventional takeoff and landing for the Air Force), F-35B (short takeoff/vertical landing for the Marine Corps), and F-35C (carrier-based for Navy and Marine Corps).
- ▶ The jet is designed for a variety of missions, including air superiority, strike, reconnaissance, and close-air support.
- ▶ F-35 features advanced stealth technology, making it difficult to detect by radar.
- ▶ It is equipped with integrated avionics, sensors, and weapons systems for superior combat performance.
- ▶ Over 990 aircraft have been delivered globally, with the U.S. and international partners as primary users.

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques : Discuss the implications of the U.S. offer to provide F-35 stealth fighters to India on its indigenous fighter development programmes and military modernization plans. **(150 Words /10 marks)**

- ➔ Poaching in the Similipal Tiger Reserve has been a serious problem, with poachers frequently armed with guns.

AI-enabled cameras in Similipal Tiger Reserve send poaching plummeting

The devices are tucked away in the reserve's thick vegetation. When they sense movement, they capture an image, and then use a built-in chip to sort between object classes such as 'animals', 'humans', and 'vehicles' in the image. If the chip deems it necessary, a camera can transmit the image to an end-user in 40 seconds

Nikhil Sreekandan

Last year, we lost two of our men to poachers," Samrat Gowda, deputy director of the Similipal Tiger Reserve in Odisha, said. "Every time we come across them, the poachers are armed with a loaded gun."

But such encounters have become much less common of late. As part of an early alert system called TrailGuard AI, the Similipal Tiger Reserve was fitted with 100-150 cameras loaded with an artificial intelligence (AI) model. The cameras relay images of people and wildlife entering the forest to the model, which looks for poachers among them.

"Earlier, we didn't know when poachers entered. Now we have clear information about the area the poachers are in, so our people are prepared," Gowda said.

In the last 10 months, TrailGuard AI has helped wildlife officials at Similipal arrest 96 poachers and seize more than 86 country-made guns. In December alone, the team arrested over 40 poachers.

"House raids based on photo identification have given very good results," according to Gowda. "If this trend continues, I'm hopeful poaching can be reduced by at least 80%. Once that happens, naturally, our people will be safer, along with the forest and wildlife."

Proactive enforcement

The AI-enabled cameras are tucked away in the reserve's thick vegetation. They operate on a low-power mode by default but switch to a high-power mode when they sense movement, and capture an image. The camera then performs AI inference on the edge, meaning it uses the chip inside to sort between various object classes such as 'animals', 'humans', and 'vehicles' in the image. If the AI deems it necessary, it autonomously transmits an image using the cellular system attached to the camera to an end-user in 30-40 seconds.

"We have set up a control room in our headquarters, with a big screen, where we are alerted whenever there is a photo update," Gowda said. "We then immediately transmit the information on our WhatsApp groups and VHF radio."

Catching poachers in the forest still isn't straightforward. Wildlife officials use intelligence sources to identify the poachers caught on camera. These sources include their regular staff, who go undercover with poachers to collect information about who they are, the villages they hail from, and other details.

"Once we get 100% confirmation that these are the people that entered the



A TrailGuard AI camera unit seen at Similipal Tiger Reserve. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

forest, we will raid their house or village and arrest the person and forward them to the court with proper documentation," according to Gowda.

He also stressed the importance of proactive enforcement mechanisms backing up the inputs provided by TrailGuard. "Getting photos is the easy part, but after that what you do is most important. We are actively going and raiding [houses] and bringing people in. So both the technology and our on-ground efforts complement each other to give us good results," he added.

According to the latest department report, the arrests in 2024 led to one conviction, obtained within six months – fast, according to Gowda. His colleagues are hoping for two or three more convictions soon.

Smaller, cheaper, durable

TrailGuard AI was conceived and made by Nightjar Technologies, a social impact enterprise in Gurgaon that develops remote surveillance devices for conservation settings.

Its founder Piyush Yadav singled the TrailGuard camera systems out for praise. "There are two units," he explained. "One is the camera unit, the size of a pen, and the other is the battery/communication unit, the size of a notepad. They are attached using a two-metre-long cable. So it's not bulky but is rather a spread out design."

But according to Gowda, TrailGuard's best feature is its battery life. He said it

Catching poachers still isn't straightforward. Officials use intelligence sources to identify the poachers. Sources include their staff, who go undercover with poachers to collect information about who they are and the villages they hail from

lasts for "six months to one year based on the number of photos it sends," meaning officials don't have to make regular trips to replace batteries – a blessing in the challenging terrain of Similipal.

According to Yadav, TrailGuard AI cameras cost roughly ₹ 50,000-53,000 per unit.

Access to tribal communities

The villages in and around Similipal are occupied by tribal communities. Hunting is part of their culture, even if many of them have moved away to other forms of sustenance. They need to be able to access the forest, too.

"The tiger reserve has traditionally had a lot of incursions from neighbouring communities around Similipal," said Aditya Panda, a naturalist, wildlife conservationist, and the honorary wildlife warden of Satkosia Tiger Reserve in the same State. "People come in large numbers to engage in bushmeat poaching."

Apart from TrailGuard cameras, the

forest department uses regular camera traps in areas with no network, rendering it almost impossible for anyone in the forest to not be caught on camera.

But one result of this surveillance is that many villagers have stopped going into the forest for fear of being mistaken for poachers and arrested. Their ability to collect firewood and other non-timber forest products has concomitantly declined.

"We are discussing with the [local] people and are facilitating safer ways to access the forest, because it shouldn't be that because of one poacher everyone is restricted," Gowda said.

Wider use-case, adoption

The TrailGuard system has been an effective anti-poaching tool and Panda believes it can do more. "I think this sort of technology can be a gamechanger when it comes to patrolling and monitoring our protected areas, not only to intercept illegal entry and incursions but also in monitoring wildlife," he said.

"We have deployment ongoing in five States right now, at more than 14 sites," Yadav said of TrailGuard. It has also been implemented in the Kanha Tiger Reserve in Madhya Pradesh and Dudhwa National Park in Uttar Pradesh with 20 and 10 cameras respectively, as part of efforts to mitigate human-wildlife conflict.

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THE GIST

Over the last 10 months, TrailGuard AI has helped wildlife officials arrest 96 poachers and seize more than 86 country-made guns. In December alone, over 40 poachers were arrested. Officials say, "House raids based on photos have provided very good results"

The TrailGuard system comprises two units: a camera unit, the size of a pen, and a battery/communication unit the size of a notepad. They are attached using a two-metre-long cable. The battery has a life of six months to one year based on the number of photos it sends

The technology is being deployed in five States at more than 14 sites. It has been implemented in the Kanha Tiger Reserve in Madhya Pradesh and Dudhwa National Park in Uttar Pradesh with 20 and 10 cameras, respectively, as of efforts to mitigate human-wildlife conflict

Introduction of an AI-based surveillance system

- ➔ The introduction of an AI-based surveillance system, TrailGuard AI, has helped reduce such incidents significantly.

- This system consists of 100-150 cameras equipped with AI technology to detect human presence in the forest.

How TrailGuard AI Works

- The AI-enabled cameras operate in low-power mode but switch to high-power when they sense movement.
- The cameras classify objects such as animals, humans, and vehicles.
- If poaching activity is suspected, the system transmits an image to officials within 30-40 seconds.
- A control room monitors the alerts and informs the forest department for immediate action.

Impact of TrailGuard AI on Poaching Reduction

- In the last 10 months, 96 poachers have been arrested, and 86 country-made guns seized.

Concerns of Local Communities

- Tribal communities living around Similipal traditionally rely on the forest for resources.
- Increased surveillance has made villagers hesitant to enter the forest for rewood and other essentials.
- Authorities are working on safer ways for locals to access the forest without facing unnecessary restrictions.

Future Applications of AI in Wildlife Conservation

- The TrailGuard system has been deployed in five States at over 14 sites.
- It is also being used in Kanha Tiger Reserve in Madhya Pradesh and Dudhwa National Park in Uttar Pradesh to monitor human-wildlife conflict.
- Experts believe this technology can revolutionize wildlife monitoring and anti-poaching efforts across India's protected areas.

Similipal Tiger Reserve

- **Location:** Similipal Tiger Reserve is situated in the Mayurbhanj district of Odisha, India.
- **Area:** It covers 2,750 sq km, making it one of India's largest tiger reserves.
- **Establishment:** Declared a tiger reserve in 1973 under Project Tiger, it was later designated a biosphere reserve in 1994.

- **Flora and Fauna:** Home to Bengal tigers, elephants, gaurs, and rare melanistic tigers, it has diverse vegetation, including tropical moist deciduous forests.
- **Rivers and Waterfalls:** It has perennial rivers like Budhabalanga and stunning waterfalls such as Barehipani and Joranda.



Carbon capture reduces CO₂ emissions by capturing, storing, or utilizing carbon from industrial and atmospheric sources.

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WHAT IS IT?

Carbon capture: a pricey fix?

Vasudevan Mukunth

Global warming is the result of certain greenhouse gases — but especially carbon dioxide (CO₂) — building up in the air and preventing the planet from cooling as quickly as it would without them. Although some natural processes emit these gases, their build-up to dangerous levels is entirely due to emissions from human industrial activity, including the combustion of fossil fuels like coal and petrol.

The human response to climate change has two prongs: adaptation and mitigation. Adaptation deals with how the world, its people, and their activities can adjust to an increasingly warming world. Mitigation is concerned with reducing CO₂ emissions.

An important type of technology that straddles both these efforts is carbon capture and sequestration (CCS). Here, a device sucks carbon or CO₂ out of an emission source, like the chimneys of a power plant, or the atmosphere itself, converts it to a different form, and stores it in a sealed container.



Representative image of a refinery. BRO TAKES PHOTOS

CCS has been controversial: among others, researchers have said it could create more 'room' to pollute by removing CO₂ from the air.

A study published on February 9 in the journal *Environmental Science & Technology* has now reported that deploying CCS technologies will also be more expensive than switching to renewable energy. According to the paper, policies that promote CCS "to reduce or offset CO₂ emissions" in 149 countries will incur 9-12-times the social cost of those countries switching entirely to wind, water, and solar power.

For feedback and suggestions

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What is carbon capture?

Daily News Analysis

- **Denition:** Carbon capture is a technology that captures carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions from industrial sources or directly from the atmosphere to reduce greenhouse gas levels.
- **Purpose:** It aims to mitigate climate change by preventing CO₂ from reaching the atmosphere.
- **Process:**
 - Capturing CO₂ from power plants, factories, or the air.
 - Storing it underground in geological formations or converting it into useful products.
- **Types:**
 - **Pre-combustion capture:** Removes CO₂ before fuel is burned.
 - **Post-combustion capture:** Extracts CO₂ from exhaust gases.
 - **Direct air capture (DAC):** Captures CO₂ from the atmosphere.
- **Challenges:** High costs, energy requirements, and concerns over long-term storage safety.
- **Alternatives:** Renewable energy sources like solar and wind are often seen as more cost-effective

President's Rule has been established in Manipur due to ongoing violence and political instability.

➔ The State government's inability to function led to this decision.

How does a President's rule function?

Why did the President of India issue a proclamation in Manipur after Chief Minister Biren Singh resigned? What are the different kinds of emergencies? Is a national emergency and President's rule the same? Has this power been misused by the Union?

EXPLAINER

Kartik Singh

The story so far: In February 13, four days after Manipur Chief Minister A. Biren Singh's resignation, the Union government announced that President's rule has been implemented in the violence-hit State. A notification from the Ministry of Home Affairs stated that President Droupadi Murmu was satisfied that "a situation has arisen in which the government of that State cannot be carried on in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution."

Why has it been imposed?

The violence between the Meitei and Kuki-Zo communities, ongoing since May 2023, has claimed above 250 lives and displaced over 60,000 people. The conflict originated from the Meitei demand for Scheduled Tribe (ST) status, which the Kukis opposed, fearing loss of job opportunities and other affirmative actions meant for STs. A political crisis erupted in the State after Mr. Singh resigned on February 9, and the State BJP leadership struggled to reach a consensus on his successor.

What does the Constitution say?

Emergency provisions, inspired by the German Constitution and outlined in Part XVIII of the Indian Constitution, protect India's sovereignty, unity and security. They empower the Central government to address extraordinary crises by temporarily assuming control to ensure stability and safeguard the democratic framework. The Constitution provides for three types of emergencies – national (Article 352), State (Article 356) and financial (Article 360).

In Manipur, the President has proclaimed a "state emergency" – popularly known as "President's Rule" or "Constitutional Emergency" – by exercising powers under Article 356. This fulfils the Union's obligation under Article 355 to protect States against "external aggression" and "internal disturbance" (such as separatist or sectarian violence or calamities beyond a State's control) and to ensure that State governments operate as per the Constitution. When a State's "constitutional machinery" fails due to non-performance or malperformance, Article 356(i) empowers the President to issue a proclamation – upon receiving a report from the Governor or otherwise – if she is satisfied that the State government cannot function constitutionally. This effectively transfers all executive functions of the State to the Centre and legislative functions to Parliament while leaving the High Court's (HC) powers unaffected. Additionally, Article 365 provides that if a State fails to comply with any Union directions under constitutional provisions, the President may declare a "Constitutional Emergency".

As per Clause 3 of Article 356, the proclamation must be laid before each House of Parliament, and unless approved by a 'simple majority' in both Houses, it ceases after two months. Once approved, it remains effective for six months from the proclamation date, with further six-month extensions requiring additional Parliamentary approval. Renewal beyond one year is allowed only if two conditions are met – an Emergency has been declared in the country or any part of the State, and if the Election Commission certifies that President's rule is necessary due to difficulties in



At a standstill: Personnel keep vigil after security measures were increased after the imposition of President's rule in Manipur, in Imphal, on February 14. PTI

conducting State elections. However, in no case can the proclamation remain effective for more than three years, and the President may revoke or vary it at any time by a subsequent proclamation.

How is a 'constitutional emergency' different from a 'national emergency'?

Article 352 governs the proclamation of a "national emergency," which has been invoked thrice – during the 1962 India-China war, the 1971 armed conflict with Pakistan, and in 1975 on grounds of "internal disturbance." In 1975, then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi declared the emergency after the Allahabad High Court, in *The State of Uttar Pradesh versus Raj Narain* (1975), found her guilty of "electoral malpractices" and debarred her from holding any elected post.

Unlike a "State emergency," proclaiming a "national emergency" requires that the President be satisfied that India's security – or any part of its territory – is threatened by war, external aggression, or armed rebellion. The 44th Constitutional amendment (1978) introduced multiple safeguards to prevent misuse. It replaced "internal disturbance" with "armed rebellion", mandated a written recommendation from the Cabinet (rather than just the Prime Minister), and shortened the parliamentary approval window from two months to one month. It also clarified that Articles 20 and 21 cannot be suspended, and that the President must revoke the proclamation if the Lok Sabha passes a resolution disapproving it. Crucially, the amendment restored judicial review of the President's satisfaction in proclaiming an emergency, a safeguard removed by the 38th Constitutional amendment (1975).

Unlike a "constitutional emergency" (which can last up to three years), a "national emergency" has no time limit. Additionally, while the President's rule (Article 356) requires a 'simple majority'

for parliamentary approval, a national emergency needs a 'special majority'. In a national emergency, the State executive and legislature continue to function, whereas under President's Rule, the State executive is dismissed, and the legislature is suspended or dissolved. However, the Manipur Assembly, which has a tenure till 2027, has not been dissolved but is placed under "suspended animation". This means that the Assembly is temporarily "paused", allowing its revival if "political stability" is restored.

Does it affect fundamental rights?

President's rule does not affect citizens' fundamental rights, unlike a national emergency, where under Article 358, freedoms under Article 19 become inoperative, and the President may suspend other fundamental rights, except Articles 20 and 21. Under President's Rule, the President acquires extraordinary powers, with the Governor, on her behalf, administering the State with assistance from the Chief Secretary or advisers appointed by the President. Additionally, Article 357 allows Parliament to confer legislative power on the President and authorise delegation to another authority while also giving the President power to sanction expenditure from the State's Consolidated Fund.

How often has it been imposed?

Though Dr. B.R. Ambedkar hoped it would remain a "dead letter," President's rule has been imposed nearly 134 times across 29 States and UTs since the Constitution took effect in 1950, reflecting its dual role as both a crisis-management tool and a politically contentious measure. The very first application of Article 356 occurred in June 1951 in Punjab. Manipur is tied with Uttar Pradesh for the most frequent imposition of President's Rule, at 10 each – driven by chronic political instability – with Manipur's latest imposition bringing its total to 11. The longest President's Rule in

Manipur lasted two years and 157 days (1969-1972). Jammu & Kashmir held the record for the longest cumulative duration, over 12 years (4,668 days), due to militancy and separatist movements, followed by Punjab (over 10 years, 3,878 days) and Puducherry (over seven years, 2,739 days).

What has the SC said about the use and misuse of President's rule?

For a long time, courts upheld the Centre's frequent unusual imposition of President's rule. However, the landmark *S.R. Bommai versus Union of India* (1994) judgment redefined these powers. Referencing the Sarkaria Commission's recommendation that Article 356 be used only as a last resort, the SC observed, "The Constitution of India has created a federation but with a bias in favour of the Centre. ...But that does not mean that States are mere appendages of the Centre".... It also highlighted the Commission's points that "constitutional machinery" could fail due to political crises, internal subversion or political breakdown, among other factors.

Further, the SC held that the President's power under Article 356 is conditional, not absolute, and that any proclamation is subject to judicial review. Both the SC and HCs can strike it down if found *malafide* or based on irrelevant or extraneous grounds. The top court further clarified that the President cannot dissolve the assembly without Parliament's approval and that the Centre must first issue a warning notice to the erring State, seeking an explanation. Once proclaimed, the State government has to go, as two governments in one sphere is impermissible. Moreover, the SC clarified that President's rule must be invoked only for breakdowns of "constitutional machinery" (distinct from ordinary law-and-order failures) and never for political gains.

Kartik Singh is a final year student at RGNUL, Patiala, Punjab.

THE GIST

Emergency provisions, inspired by the German Constitution and outlined in Part XVIII of the Indian Constitution, protect India's sovereignty, unity and security.

Though Dr. B.R. Ambedkar hoped it would remain a "dead letter," President's rule has been imposed nearly 134 times across 29 States and UTs since the Constitution took effect in 1950, reflecting its dual role as both a crisis-management tool and a politically contentious measure.

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Constitutional Basis for President's Rule

- Emergency provisions in the Indian Constitution protect the country's sovereignty, unity, and security.
- The Constitution provides for three types of emergencies:
 1. **National Emergency (Article 352)** – Declared during war, external aggression, or armed rebellion.
 2. **State Emergency (Article 356)** – Commonly known as President's Rule, imposed when a State government cannot function according to the Constitution.
 3. **Financial Emergency (Article 360)** – Declared during a financial crisis.
- In Manipur, a "State Emergency" under Article 356 has been declared.
- Article 355 obligates the Union to protect States from external aggression and internal disturbances.

Process of Imposing President's Rule

- Article 356 allows the President to take over the State's executive functions if the government fails constitutionally.
- The President acts based on a report from the Governor or other sources.
- Once imposed, the State government loses executive power, and the legislature is suspended.
- Parliament assumes the power to legislate for the State.

Approval and Duration of President's Rule

- The proclamation must be approved by both Houses of Parliament within two months.
- If approved, it lasts six months but can be extended in six-month intervals.
- Extensions beyond one year require:
 - A National Emergency in the country or part of the State.
 - The Election Commission's certification that elections cannot be held.
 - President's Rule cannot last more than three years.

Impact on Fundamental Rights

- President's Rule does not suspend fundamental rights.
- During a National Emergency, Article 19 (freedom of speech and expression) is suspended.
- Under President's Rule, the President controls the State through the Governor and advisers.
- The President can authorize State expenditure under Article 357.

Frequency of President's Rule in India

- President's Rule has been imposed 134 times in different States and Union Territories since 1950.
- The first instance was in Punjab in June 1951.
- Manipur has experienced it 11 times, making it one of the most affected States.
- The longest President's Rule in Manipur lasted over two years and 157 days (1969–1972).
- Jammu & Kashmir has had the longest cumulative President's Rule, lasting over 12 years (4,668 days) due to security concerns.

Judicial Review and Limitations on President's Rule

- Initially, courts upheld frequent use of President's Rule.
- In 1994, the Supreme Court redefined its scope in a landmark case.
- The Court ruled that:
 - Article 356 should be used only as a last resort.
 - The Centre must issue a warning before dismissing a State government.
 - President's Rule is subject to judicial review and can be struck down if misused.
 - Parliament's approval is needed before dissolving a State Assembly.
 - It must be invoked only for a breakdown of constitutional machinery, not for political reasons.

Conclusion

- President's Rule is a constitutional provision meant for crises but has been frequently used.
- Judicial rulings now ensure stricter checks to prevent misuse.
- Manipur's case highlights ongoing instability and the need for political resolution.

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques : Discuss the differences between National Emergency and President's Rule in India, with reference to their imposition, duration, and impact on state governance. (250 Words /15 marks)

In News : GS 3 : Indian Economy : A success story like Amul

- India's fruits and vegetables (F&V) sector is growing rapidly but remains fragmented, leading to high post-harvest losses and low farmer earnings, highlighting the need for structured value chains and Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs) to replicate the success of India's dairy sector.



Analysis of the news:

Growth of India's Fruits and Vegetables Sector

- India's fruits and vegetables (F&V) sector is expanding at a faster pace than cereals, contributing nearly 30% to the value of crop agriculture.
- Besides being more nutritious, it has the potential to enhance farmers' incomes significantly.
- However, the sector lacks the necessary policy attention and institutional support compared to cereals.
- The absence of organized value chains, inadequate storage facilities, and limited processing infrastructure make F&V highly vulnerable to seasonal price fluctuations, market gluts, and post-harvest losses.
- According to NABCONS (2022), post-harvest losses amount to 8.1% for fruits and 7.3% for vegetables, contributing to an annual economic loss of ₹1.53 trillion.
- Additionally, due to fragmented supply chains, farmers receive only about 30% of the consumer price, highlighting the need for structural reforms.

Learning from India's Milk Revolution

- The transformation of India's dairy sector under Verghese Kurien's leadership is a model of success that the F&V sector could potentially replicate.
- Through a well-structured cooperative model, India transitioned from a milk-decent nation to the world's largest milk producer, with 239 million tonnes in 2023-24.

- Milk cooperatives like AMUL ensured that dairy farmers received between 75-80% of the consumer price.
- Unlike milk, however, the F&V sector involves multiple commodities, each requiring specialized infrastructure.
- Seasonal fluctuations, regional production concentration, and high perishability make price stabilization difficult.
- A structured approach involving aggregation, grading, processing, and direct market linkages is essential to ensure stability and better earnings for farmers.

The Role of Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs)

- Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs) are key to addressing structural inefficiencies in the F&V sector.
- A case in point is Sahyadri Farmer Producer Company Ltd (SFPCL) in Maharashtra's Nashik district.
- Founded in 2004 by Vilas Shinde, SFPCL has grown from a small group of 10 farmers to a vast network covering 31,000 acres and 26,500 registered farmers by 2023-24.
- Its turnover surged from ₹13 crore in 2011-12 to ₹1,549 crore in 2023-24, showcasing the power of organized farming.
- About 64.6% of SFPCL's revenue comes from domestic sales, while 35.4% comes from exports, with grapes and tomatoes being the dominant contributors.
- SFPCL's success lies in its ability to integrate small farmers into structured value chains, ensuring quality, traceability, and access to global markets.

Strengthening Value Chains and Processing Infrastructure

- SFPCL's ability to connect farmers to international markets has made it India's largest grape exporter, with 90% of its grapes reaching the EU and UAE.
- Farmers under SFPCL receive around 55% of the Free on Board (FOB) price, significantly higher than traditional markets.
- The company has also invested heavily in processing infrastructure, particularly for tomatoes, which contribute 35% of its domestic revenue.
- By processing tomatoes into ketchup, puree, and sauce, SFPCL has mitigated price volatility and ensured stable farmer incomes.
- The company's expansion has also created over 6,000 jobs, with women comprising 32% of the workforce.

- These interventions highlight how organized FPOs can revolutionize the F&V sector through aggregation, processing, and direct market access.

Scaling Up: Policy Interventions and Future Roadmap

- The success of Sahyadri Farms provides a scalable model for the entire F&V sector. The Indian government has targeted the formation of 10,000 FPOs, with 8,875 already registered as of August 2024.
- Scaling up FPOs like SFPCCL could replicate the milk revolution in the F&V sector.
- However, three key interventions are needed:

1. Strengthening FPOs – Providing institutional support, working capital, infrastructure, and digital integration through platforms like the Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC). Blockchain technology could improve transparency and farmer earnings.

2. Revamping Operation Greens and the National Horticulture Mission – The government's 2018 initiative to stabilize perishable prices lacked a strong leader like Kurien and had limited financial backing (₹500 crore). A more robust implementation strategy is required.

3. Developing Commodity-Specific Value Chains – At least 10-20% of F&V produce should be processed to prevent distress sales and stabilize prices.

Towards a National Fruits and Vegetables Board

- To transform the F&V sector, India needs a National Fruit and Vegetable Board, akin to the National Dairy Development Board (NDDB).
- Such an institution would streamline market linkages, promote efficient value chains, and integrate retailers like SAFAL to ensure better price realization for farmers.

The key question remains: Can Vilas Shinde become the Verghese Kurien of India's F&V sector?

- The Sahyadri model has already demonstrated a successful approach. With the right scale, policy support, and leadership, India could ensure that F&V farmers receive at least 55-60% of the consumer price, leading to a major transformation in the agricultural landscape.

Conclusion

- ▶ India's F&V sector has immense potential but remains unorganized, leading to high post-harvest losses and low farmer earnings. With the right leadership and reforms, India can replicate its milk success in the F&V sector, driving agricultural prosperity.

What is a Farmers Producer Organisation (FPO)?

- ▶ **Denition:** An FPO is a type of Producer Organisation (PO) formed by farmers. It operates as an organisation of the producers, by the producers, and for the producers.
- ▶ **Supporting institution:** The Small Farmers' Agribusiness Consortium (SFAC) plays a vital role in promoting FPOs across.
- ▶ **Purpose:** A PO represents producers of various goods, including agricultural products, non-farm items, and artisan goods.
 - It can adopt legal forms such as producer companies, cooperative societies, or other entities that allow members to share profits and benefits.
- ▶ **Ownership:** The ownership of an FPO lies entirely with its member farmers. It operates on the principle of shared decisionmaking and benefits.
 - Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs) are key to addressing structural inefficiencies in the F&V sector.

UPSC Mains Practice Question

Ques : India's fruits and vegetables (F&V) sector is growing faster than cereals but suffers from fragmentation, post-harvest losses, and price volatility. Discuss the role of Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs) in transforming the F&V sector, drawing lessons from India's dairy revolution. **(250 Words /15 marks)**

The panchayati raj movement is in distress



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The special discussion in Parliament on the 75th anniversary of the Indian Constitution has long passed. While several salient aspects of the Constitution and policy directions adopted by previous governments were highlighted, one heard very little on a vital aspect of governance in India.

The 73rd amendment to the Constitution, passed in 1992, is one of the landmarks of India's journey as a constitutional republic, establishing the panchayati raj system. However, the momentum towards deepening local governance in India has stalled. Big shifts in both technology and society are threatening to make panchayats irrelevant, unless we are prepared to rethink their role. The 73rd amendment initiated the process of institutionalising decentralisation in rural India. The three-tier system, at the village, block, and district levels, with a regular cycle of local elections and 50% reservation for women, Scheduled Castes, and Scheduled Tribes, kicked off a movement that took democracy to the grassroots, thus emphasising the importance of local representation and inclusion in political leadership.

There is one bright spot

Panchayati raj elections are now keenly contested in many parts of the country. There have been many success stories – possibly the most notable of them being the scale of women's participation in leadership (nearly 14 lakh elected women representatives). The Constitution also mandated State Finance Commissions to recommend the quantum of funds that should flow to local governments as well as the administrative mechanisms by which it should take place. Various social sector programmes are now implemented through local governments, particularly gram panchayats (village-level local government).

Why then is the panchayati raj movement in distress? There are several reasons such as a decline in public participation, overdependence on centrally sponsored schemes, and politicisation through the engagement of political parties, which are equally important factors behind the steady decline of panchayats even in pioneer States such as Kerala.

But one must look at the longer-term systemic factors that have affected the evolution of the

panchayati raj movement in India. Panchayats now operate in a very different development paradigm from when they were originally introduced, and there is now a real risk that the spirit of the panchayati raj movement will die.

A decline, the big shifts

Let us look at four such big shifts.

First, administrative decentralisation has plateaued. In order to function effectively, State governments need to devolve staff to local governments and cede administrative control. Similarly, the flow of untied grants that flow to local governments needs to increase to enhance autonomy in local decision-making. Having made an initial set of reforms, the sense one gets is that there is no momentum. A report in 2022 by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj showed that less than 20% of States have devolved all 29 subjects listed in the Eleventh Schedule of the Constitution.

Second, in practical terms, panchayats have been forced to cede fiscal autonomy over recent years. Direct transfers to panchayats increased from ₹1.45 lakh crore under the Thirteenth Finance Commission (2010-15) to ₹2.36 lakh crore under the Fifteenth Finance Commission (2021-26). At the same time, there has been a significant reduction in untied grants, from 85% in the Thirteenth Finance Commission to 60% in the Fifteenth Finance Commission. Further, these direct transfers are being used by the central government to marginalise State governments in the name of efficiency, while the tied grants give them more control through central government functionaries and central scheme guidelines.

Third, the larger reason is a reimagining of the welfare state in India that has taken root over the last few years, an overt reliance by political parties on cash transfers of various hues to woo the electorate. And since these were delivered primarily using the Jan Dhan-Aadhaar-Mobile (JAM) platform, the role of gram panchayats as intermediaries for beneficiary selection or grievance redress has reduced significantly. For example, the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN) scheme, which disburses ₹6,000 annually to farmers, operates through direct transfers without the active involvement of panchayati raj institutions. While efficient, this model reduces the local accountability that panchayats traditionally provided.

Fourth, is the rapid urbanisation that India has

seen in recent decades. In 1990, nearly three-quarters of India lived in rural areas. This has now decreased to around 60%, and is going down steadily. The consistent trend of urbanisation has meant that the policy focus of development has shifted to India's cities and towns. Municipal reforms, both of governance and financing, is the main priority of today.

Ways to revive the system

As highlighted, it is evident that over the last decade, the view from the top is increasingly one that treats panchayats merely as last-mile delivery instruments for social sector schemes in rural India. This view of local governance is not conducive to a revival of panchayats in the country.

Of course, electoral politics at the panchayat level and the representation and the power that comes from winning will not allow panchayats to wither away very soon. But local governance in rural India needs to be revived in substantive terms as 94 crore Indians still live in villages. Over 45% of the population is still engaged in agriculture. Rural India – call it Bharat if you will – cannot be overlooked.

With advancements in technology, citizen engagement in local planning, decision-making and accountability processes will deepen. A networked panchayati raj system could play a vital role in bridging the rural-urban divide, for instance, by supporting safe and dignified internal migration, and also supporting both migrants and their families that stay behind.

Another area towards which the role of panchayats could be focused is to play a role in enabling water conservation and renewable energy generation at scale. Panchayats can reclaim their role in the management of common property resources, bringing to bear a mix of scientific practices, traditional knowledge and public finances. Panchayats can also play a key role in implementing community-based disaster risk management programmes, integrating early warning systems, disaster-resilient infrastructure, and capacity-building for residents.

We need to look further out and talk more to people. In order to reestablish the momentum behind local governance reforms and to support what is still a significant proportion of India's population that lives in its villages, we need to adopt a new vision for panchayati raj in India.

Panchayats now operate in a very different development paradigm

GS Paper 02 : Indian Polity

PYQ: (UPSC CSE (M) GS-2 2018): Assess the importance of the Panchayati system in India as a part of local government. Apart from government grants, what sources the Panchayats can look out for financing developmental projects. (250 words/15m)

UPSC Mains Practice Question: Practice Question: Critically examine the challenges faced by the Panchayati Raj system in India. Suggest measures to strengthen local governance and enhance rural development. (250 Words /15 marks)

Context :

- The Panchayati Raj system, established through the 73rd Amendment (1992), aimed to decentralize governance in rural India.
- However, administrative, nancial, and policy shifts have weakened its effectiveness, requiring urgent reforms.

Introduction

- The 73rd Amendment, passed in 1992, established the Panchayati Raj system to bring democracy to the grassroots level.
- It introduced a three-tier system of governance at the village, block, and district levels, with 50% reservation for women, Scheduled Castes, and Scheduled Tribes.
- Despite initial success, the momentum for decentralization has slowed, and major shifts in society and technology are challenging the relevance of panchayats.

Achievements of the Panchayati Raj System

- Panchayati Raj elections are keenly contested across India. Women's leadership has significantly increased, with nearly 14 lakh elected women representatives.
- State Finance Commissions recommend funds for local governments, enabling the implementation of social sector programs through gram panchayats.

Challenges Affecting the Panchayati Raj System

1. Administrative Decentralization Has Stalled

- State governments need to transfer staff and administrative control to local governments for effective functioning.
- Untied grants that allow local decision-making must increase to enhance autonomy.
- A 2022 report by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj showed that less than 20% of States have fully devolved all 29 subjects listed in the Eleventh Schedule of the Constitution.

2. Declining Fiscal Autonomy

- Direct transfers to panchayats increased from ₹1.45 lakh crore (2010-15) to ₹2.36 lakh crore (2021-26).
- However, untied grants fell from 85% to 60%, reducing the autonomy of local governments.
- The central government's tied grants have increased, giving it more control over panchayat functions.

3. Shift in Welfare Distribution Mechanisms

- Political parties now rely on direct cash transfers instead of local governance structures.
- The Jan Dhan-Aadhaar-Mobile (JAM) platform delivers benefits directly, bypassing gram panchayats in beneficiary selection and grievance redressal.
- Example: PM-KISAN scheme, which provides ₹6,000 annually to farmers, does not involve panchayats in fund distribution.

4. Impact of Rapid Urbanization

- In 1990, nearly 75% of India's population lived in rural areas, but this has now declined to around 60%. With growing urbanization, policy focus has shifted towards cities and municipal reforms rather than rural governance.

Reviving the Panchayati Raj System

1. Strengthening Local Governance

- Panchayats should not be reduced to mere implementation agencies for centrally sponsored schemes.
- 94 crore people still live in villages, and 45% of the population depends on agriculture, making rural governance crucial.

2. Leveraging Technology for Better Engagement

- Advancements in digital technology can increase citizen participation in local planning and accountability.
- A networked Panchayati Raj system can bridge the rural-urban divide by supporting internal migration and migrant families.

3. Focus on Sustainable Development

- Panchayats can play a major role in water conservation and renewable energy generation at the local level.
- They can reclaim common property resources by combining scientific knowledge, traditional wisdom, and public funding.

4. Disaster Risk Management

- Panchayats can lead community-based disaster preparedness, integrating early warning systems and disaster-resilient infrastructure.

Conclusion

- To revive local governance, a new vision for Panchayati Raj is needed.
 - Rural India remains vital to the nation's development, and strengthening panchayats is essential for inclusive growth.
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