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Current Affairs & Editorial

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PRELIMS · MAINS · EDITORIALS · PRACTICE MCQs

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1

Nilekani to Lead High-Powered Task Force on Exam Reforms

GS 2 · GOVERNANCE

EDUCATION

WHY IN NEWS

Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced the constitution of a **high-powered task force**, headed by former UIDAI Chairman **Nandan Nilekani**, to recommend steps to make the country's examination system **leak-proof and technology-driven**.

- The announcement came a day after former Union Education Minister **Dharmendra Pradhan** resigned following widespread protests over the **NEET paper leak** and subsequent re-examination.
- Union Minister **Pralhad Joshi** took charge of the Ministry of Education; he also holds Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution, and New & Renewable Energy.
- The multidisciplinary panel will help **revamp the National Testing Agency (NTA)** examination system, especially from a technology perspective.
- PM Modi: the aim is to ensure the exam system can be **trusted, is transparent and tech-driven**, and that those who play with students' future are punished, including through **fast-track courts** and a stringent law.

★ TASK FORCE — KEY MEMBERS

- **Nandan Nilekani** (Chair) – co-founder of Infosys; architect of **Aadhaar** & **UPI**; Chairperson, governing body of **NCAER**.
- **S. Somanath** – former ISRO Chairman.
- **Tapan Deka** – former IB Director.
- **V. Kamakoti** – Director, IIT-Madras.
- **Anita Karwal** – former Education Secretary.
- **Amrit Lal Meena** – logistics expert.

Nilekani to lead high-powered task force on exam reforms: PM

It will recommend steps to make exam system leak-proof and technology-driven; former ISRO Chairman Somanath, IIT-M Director Kamakoti among members; Pralhad Joshi takes charge as Union Education Minister, chairs review meeting

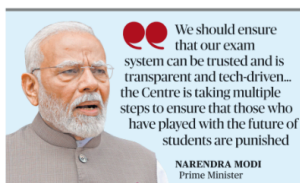
Nistula Hebbar
Maitri Porecha
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday announced the constitution of a high-powered task force, to be headed by former UIDAI Chairman Nandan Nilekani, to recommend steps to make the country's examination system leak-proof and technology-driven.

The announcement came a day after former Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan resigned following widespread protests over the NEET paper leak and subsequent re-examination.

Meanwhile, Union Minister Pralhad Joshi on Sunday officially took charge of the Ministry of Education at Kartavya Bhavan. Mr. Joshi, who also holds the portfolios of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution, and New and Renewable Energy, chaired a meeting of the Ministry to review the implementation of various schemes and other initiatives.

"We should ensure that our exam system can be trusted, and is transparent and tech-driven. Under the



We should ensure that our exam system can be trusted and is transparent and tech-driven... the Centre is taking multiple steps to ensure that those who have played with the future of students are punished

NARENDRA MODI
Prime Minister

leadership of renowned technology expert Nandan Nilekani, a high-powered task force will be formed, which will focus on exam reforms," Mr. Modi said in a video posted on Instagram. "The Centre is taking multiple steps to ensure that those who have played with the future of students are punished. We have already announced the formation of fast-track courts. We are bringing a stringent law in Parliament on Monday," he said.

'Compromised image' Responding to the announcement, Congress general secretary (communications) Jairam Ramesh said the Centre was yet to implement the K. Radhakrishnan Committee's 101 recommendations after the 2024 examination

leaks. "This is ultimately only a high-powered attempt to fix the *Pradhan Mantri*'s irretrievably compromised image," he said in a post on X.

The multidisciplinary panel of domain experts will help revamp the National Testing Agency's examination system, especially from a technology perspective, sources said, adding the committee under Mr. Nilekani will consist of former ISRO Chairman S. Somanath, former IB Director Tapan Deka, IIT-Madras Director V. Kamakoti, former Education Secretary Anita Karwal, and logistics expert Amrit Lal Meena.

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» PAGE 10
RELATED REPORTS ON
» PAGES 10 & 11

Rahul questions Shah over 'barbaric assault' in Delhi

Sandeep Phukan
NEW DELHI

Seeking accountability for the "barbaric assault" on students during the march in Delhi on July 20, Rahul Gandhi, the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, has asked Union Home Minister Amit Shah whether he had authorised the use of "lethal force". In a letter

written to the Minister, the Congress leader noted that the students were demanding a fair education system. But, instead of being heard, security forces assaulted them with indiscriminate force and lethal weapons, he said, also noting the alleged use of pellet guns.

FULL REPORT ON
» PAGE 11

Tejashwi demands release of protesters held in Bihar

Amit Bhelari
PATNA

Lashing out at the Bihar Police for the arrest of hundreds during a State-wide bandh on Saturday, the State's Leader of the Opposition, Tejashwi Yadav, on Sunday called for the immediate release of students, Opposition MLAs, and

other protesters, including his elder brother Tej Pratap Yadav.

He warned the State government that more people would hit the streets once again in protest, if those held are not released within 24 hours.

FULL REPORT ON
» PAGE 10

2

The Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024

POLITY · LAW

GOVERNANCE

WHY IN NEWS

Following public outrage over paper leaks in tests like **NEET-UG**, the Union Cabinet approved amendments to the Act — central legislation to curb **paper leaks, cheating and organised malpractice** in national recruitment and entrance exams.

- ◆ **Applies to** public exams by scheduled central bodies — UPSC, SSC, RRBs, NTA, IBPS and central departments.
- ◆ **Aim:** deter organised syndicates, cheating networks and rogue service providers; protect a **merit-based selection** process.
- ◆ **Unfair means defined:** leak of papers/answer keys, assisting candidates, tampering with computer networks, falsifying merit lists, and fake portal / admit-card scams.



Aspirants protest paper leaks

★ PENALTY STRUCTURE (WITH PROPOSED AMENDMENTS)

- ◆ **Individuals / accomplices:** 3–5 yrs jail + fine up to ₹10 lakh — **proposed to rise to 5–10 yrs and ₹50 lakh.**
- ◆ **Service providers:** fine up to **₹1 crore**, cost recovery, and a **4-year ban** from conducting public exams.
- ◆ **Management liability:** directors/managers who connive face **3–10 yrs** jail + ₹1 crore fine.
- ◆ **Organised syndicates:** treated as **organised crime** — 5–10 yrs jail, minimum ₹1 crore fine; property attachment & forfeiture for guilty coaching centres.
- ◆ **Investigation:** by an officer not below **DSP / ACP**; cases transferable to the **CBI**.

3

Project Kusha — India's Long-Range Air Defence Missile

GS 3 · DEFENCE

SCI & TECH

WHY IN NEWS

The **DRDO** successfully conducted the **maiden flight test** of the **Kusha Long-Range Surface-to-Air Missile (LRSAM)** from Dr APJ Abdul Kalam Island off the coast of Odisha.

- ◆ Kusha is India's **indigenous, long-range air-defence** missile system — often called India's answer to the Russian **S-400 Triumph**.
- ◆ A **fully automated, scalable** SAM ecosystem to detect, track and destroy aerial threats at **standoff distances**.
- ◆ Developed by DRDO with public and private defence-industry partners.
- ◆ **Wide envelope**: neutralises fast-moving targets from low-flying cruise missiles to high-altitude reconnaissance aircraft.
- ◆ **Hit-to-kill & proximity-detonation** interceptions against complex electronic profiles and saturation attacks.



Kusha LRSAM maiden test, Odisha coast

Variant	Engagement Range	Role
M1	Up to 150 km	Short-medium tier interception
M2	Up to 250 km	Medium-long tier interception
M3	Up to 350 km	Extended long-range interception

★ INDIGENOUS SUBSYSTEMS

- Locally developed **AESA radars** (active electronically scanned array).
- Command & control centres and **automated battle-management software**.
- High-precision indigenous **missile seekers**.

4

Do Not Surrender to China, Do Not Depend on the U.S.

GS 2 · IR

EDITORIAL

WHY IN NEWS

An editorial (Shashi Tharoor) argues that realising Washington is an **unreliable partner** does not mean India must run into the arms of an **actively hostile neighbour** — India must build the strength to “walk straight”.

- ◆ The **Trump administration's** erratic shifts — tariffs on steel/aluminium, loss of preferential trade status, renewed ties with Islamabad, tighter H-1B rules — have triggered calls for a China-policy reset.
- ◆ India stays reliant on Chinese **technology, supply chains, inputs and capital**; a dogmatic anti-China stance can stymie domestic growth while barely denting Beijing.
- ◆ From **Depsang (2013)** and **Chumar (2014)** to **Doklam (2017)** and **Galwan (2020)**, China has used **salami-slicing** to alter the LAC.

[illegible]

- ◆ China weaponises manufacturing dominance — withholding machinery and its monopoly over **rare earths** and **tunnel-boring machines** — knowing India has little leverage in return.
- ◆ It has used its **UNSC veto** to shield Pakistan-based terror outfits and blocked India's bids for **UNSC permanent membership** and the **NSG**.

★ THE PATH INDIA MUST TREAD

- **Strategic patience** and internal fortifying, not reflexive tilts either way.
- Build **supply-chain resilience**; diversify trade across Europe, East Asia and the Global South.
- Aggressively scale **domestic manufacturing** even at short-term inflationary cost.

5

Iran Slams Ukrainian Attack on Its Vessel in the Caspian Sea

GS 2 • IR

MAPPING

WHY IN NEWS

Iran's Foreign Minister **Abbas Araghchi** warned Tehran would respond to a deadly **Ukrainian strike** on an Iranian ship in the **Caspian Sea**, underscoring the widening international dimensions of Russia's war in Ukraine.

- Ukraine's President said Kyiv carried out **long-range strikes** on vessels transporting **military cargo** involving Iran.
- Iran said the attack made the ship "explode", **killing a sailor** and injuring several; it summoned the Ukrainian chargé d'affaires.
- Iran maintains it "has never intervened" in the Russia-Ukraine conflict; Ukraine cited cargo "under international sanctions" moved between Iran and Russia.

Iran slams Ukrainian attack on its vessel in Caspian Sea

Agence France-Presse
TEHRAN

Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi on Sunday warned that his country would respond to a deadly attack by Ukraine on an Iranian ship in the Caspian Sea.

It came after Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Kyiv had carried out long-range strikes in the Caspian Sea against vessels transporting military cargo involving Iran, underscoring the increasingly international dimensions of Russia's war in Ukraine.

Sailor killed

"Mr. Zelenskyy has attacked an Iranian commercial vessel, killing a sailor," Mr. Araghchi said on social media platform X, describing it as "a blatant UN Char-



Abbas Araghchi

ter violation done at Israel's behest to drag Europe into its war".

He added that, during calls with the European Union's Kaja Kallas and Russian top diplomat Sergei Lavrov, he "made clear that what the freeloader in Kyiv did CANNOT GO UNANSWERED".

Iran's Foreign Ministry said the attack caused the ship "to explode, killing one sailor and injuring sev-

eral others". The Islamic republic "has never intervened in the conflict between Russia and Ukraine", the Ministry said in a statement.

On Saturday, the Ukrainian President said on social media that armed forces had achieved "very strong results with long-range strikes in the Caspian Sea".

Ukraine's intelligence services reported on Telegram that drone attacks had been carried out against "cargo vessels under international sanctions that were used to transport military cargo between Iran and Russia".

According to Iranian state television, the Foreign Ministry summoned the Ukrainian charge d'affaires in Tehran on Saturday to protest this "hostile and criminal act".

Abbas Araghchi - Iranian FM

★ CASPIAN SEA — PRELIMS SNAPSHOT

- World's **largest inland water body** (endorheic); a "sea" by name, debated as sea/lake for legal-resource sharing.
- Five littoral states:** Russia, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Iran and Azerbaijan.
- Rich in **oil and natural gas**; connected to the Black Sea via the **Volga-Don Canal**.



The Caspian Sea and its five littoral states

Regional Mapping Reference — Caspian & Black Sea

Both water bodies are recurring in prelims mapping. The Black Sea theatre is central to the Russia–Ukraine war; the Caspian is now drawn into it through strikes on cargo vessels.



The Black Sea — bordering states and key straits

★ BLACK SEA — KEY FACTS

- **Bordering countries:** Ukraine, Russia, Georgia, Turkey, Bulgaria and Romania.
- Linked to the **Sea of Marmara** via the **Bosporus Strait**, then to the Aegean/Mediterranean via the **Dardanelles**.
- The **Sea of Azov** connects via the **Kerch Strait**; the **Crimean Peninsula** lies to its north.
- Governed by the **Montreux Convention (1936)**, which regulates warship passage through the Turkish Straits.

★ CASPIAN — CONTRAST POINTS

- Landlocked; bordered by **Russia, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Iran, Azerbaijan**.
- The **2018 Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea (Aktau)** gave it a special legal status — neither fully sea nor lake.

6

International Criminal Court (ICC)

GS 2 · IR

INTL. INSTITUTIONS

WHY IN NEWS

PM **Benjamin Netanyahu** dismissed the ICC's war-crimes charges against him as "bogus," hitting back at New York Mayor **Zohran Mamdani** over the Gaza war — putting the ICC back in focus.

- ◆ The ICC is the world's first **permanent international court** to prosecute individuals for the gravest crimes; seated at **The Hague, Netherlands**.
- ◆ Governed by the **Rome Statute** (adopted 17 July 1998; in force **1 July 2002**).
- ◆ **Four core crimes:** Genocide, Crimes against Humanity, War Crimes, Crime of Aggression.
- ◆ Prosecutes **individuals, not states**; acts only when national courts are **unwilling or unable** (complementarity).

Netanyahu fires back at Mamdani and calls ICC charge 'bogus'

Associated Press

WASHINGTON

Benjamin Netanyahu said on Sunday that New York Mayor Zohran Mamdani is "fomenting hate" by calling the Israeli Prime Minister a war criminal who should be arrested over the war in Gaza if he visits the city for the United Nations General Assembly.

Mr. Netanyahu said he intends to be in New York in September to address the annual U.N. gathering of world leaders.

"He's supposed to be the Mayor of all New Yorkers — Jews, Christians, Muslims, everyone," Mr. Net-

anyahu told Fox News. "But he's trying to turn one group against the other."

Mr. Netanyahu also dismissed the International Criminal Court's war crimes charges against him as "bogus." He pointed to sexual misconduct allegations against Karim Khan, the ICC's top prosecutor, who was removed from that post on Friday, and said the warrant was an attempt to divert attention.

Mr. Mamdani had acknowledged last week that his city did not have the legal authority to arrest Mr. Netanyahu and called on federal authorities to step in.

The Hindu · Page 14 · GS 2

★ MEMBERSHIP & INDIA'S STAND

- ◆ Ratified by **125 countries**; 30+ have signed but not ratified.
- ◆ **Not parties:** India, the U.S., Israel and China.
- ◆ India's objections: concerns over **sovereignty** and the **UNSC's referral powers** within the Court's framework.
- ◆ **Enforcement:** the ICC has no police of its own — it relies on voluntary state cooperation for arrests, asset freezes and sentences.

Reference — ICJ vs ICC (Frequently Confused)

A staple prelims trap: both sit at The Hague, but they are entirely different bodies. The ICJ settles disputes between states; the ICC prosecutes individuals.

Differences between the ICJ and the ICC

The International Court of Justice (ICJ) and the International Criminal Court (ICC) are two courts with different functions within the international legal system.

	 ICJ International Court of Justice	 ICC International Criminal Court
Established	1945	2002
UN-relationship	Highest court of the UN	Not part of the UN
Location	The Hague, the Netherlands	The Hague, the Netherlands
Jurisdiction	UN member-states	Individuals
Types of cases	Legal disputes between states and requests for advisory opinions on legal questions	Prosecutes individuals for the most serious crimes as per the Rome Statute
Appeals	No	Yes
Enforcement power	None - relies on the UN Security Council to uphold judgements, with permanent members having veto power	None - relies on cooperation from member states to enforce its decisions

Differences between the ICJ and the ICC

Feature	ICJ	ICC
Established	1945	2002
UN relationship	Principal judicial organ of the UN	Independent; not part of the UN
Location	The Hague	The Hague
Jurisdiction over	States	Individuals
Type of cases	Inter-state disputes; advisory opinions	Gravest crimes under the Rome Statute
Appeals	No	Yes
Enforcement	Relies on UNSC (with veto)	Relies on member-state cooperation

★ STRUCTURE OF THE ICC

- Four organs: the **Presidency**, **Judicial Divisions**, **Office of the Prosecutor** and the **Registry**.
- The **Assembly of States Parties (ASP)** provides legislative oversight and governance.

Mains Practice Question

GS PAPER 2 · INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

India's relations with the United States and China are increasingly shaped by geopolitical competition, economic interdependence and regional security concerns. Analyse the key challenges and suggest a balanced strategy for India.

भारत के अमेरिका और चीन के साथ संबंध भू-राजनीतिक प्रतिस्पर्धा, आर्थिक परस्पर निर्भरता तथा क्षेत्रीय सुरक्षा चिंताओं से प्रभावित हो रहे हैं। प्रमुख चुनौतियों का विश्लेषण कीजिए तथा भारत के लिए संतुलित रणनीति सुझाइए।

15 Marks · 250 Words

◆ ANSWER FRAMEWORK — QUICK POINTERS

- ◆ **Intro:** Frame India's position amid U.S.–China rivalry — “strategic autonomy” over binary alignment.
- ◆ **Challenges with the U.S.:** transactional & erratic policy, tariffs on steel/aluminium, loss of preferential trade status, tighter H-1B norms, renewed U.S.–Pakistan ties.
- ◆ **Challenges with China:** LAC transgressions (Depsang, Doklam, Galwan), economic coercion via rare earths & supply chains, UNSC veto shielding terror outfits, blocking NSG/UNSC bids.
- ◆ **Interdependence:** deep reliance on Chinese inputs/capital; U.S. as key market, tech and defence partner.
- ◆ **Balanced strategy:** strategic patience, supply-chain resilience, trade diversification (EU, East Asia, Global South), scaling domestic manufacturing (PLI), issue-based coalitions (QUAD, BRICS, SCO).
- ◆ **Conclusion:** Build comprehensive national power to “walk straight” — neither surrender nor over-dependence.

PRELIMS PRACTICE

10 MCQs · with explanations

Q1. Consider the high-powered task force on examination reforms recently announced. Which is correct?

- (a) It is headed by S. Somanath, former ISRO Chairman
- (b) It is headed by Nandan Nilekani, former UIDAI Chairman
- (c) It will be chaired by the Union Education Minister
- (d) It is a statutory body under the NTA Act

Ans: b. The task force to make exams leak-proof and tech-driven is headed by Nandan Nilekani; Somanath, Tapan Deka, V. Kamakoti, Anita Karwal and Amrit Lal Meena are members.

Q2. The Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024 applies to exams conducted by which bodies?

- (a) Only the NTA
- (b) State Public Service Commissions
- (c) UPSC, SSC, RRBs, NTA and IBPS
- (d) Private universities and deemed universities

Ans: c. It applies to public exams by scheduled central bodies — UPSC, SSC, RRBs, NTA, IBPS and central departments.

Q3. With reference to Project Kusha, consider the following: 1. It is an indigenous long-range surface-to-air missile system. 2. Its M3 variant has an engagement range up to 350 km. 3. It is developed by ISRO. Which are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Ans: a. Kusha is a DRDO-developed (not ISRO) LRSAM; M1/M2/M3 reach 150/250/350 km respectively. So 1 and 2 are correct.

Q4. Project Kusha is often described as India's indigenous answer to which system?

- (a) U.S. Patriot PAC-3
- (b) Israeli Iron Dome
- (c) Russian S-400 Triumf
- (d) French SAMP/T

Ans: c. Kusha is frequently dubbed India's indigenous answer to the Russian S-400 Triumf.

Q5. The Rome Statute, the founding treaty of the ICC, entered into force in:

- (a) 1998
- (b) 2000
- (c) 2002
- (d) 2005

Ans: c. The Rome Statute was adopted on 17 July 1998 and entered into force on 1 July 2002.

PRELIMS PRACTICE

continued

Q6. Which of the following countries is NOT a party to the ICC?

- (a) United Kingdom
- (b) Afghanistan
- (c) France
- (d) India

Ans: d. India, along with the U.S., Israel and China, is not a party to the ICC. Afghanistan has been a member since 2003.

Q7. Consider the ICJ and ICC: 1. Both are located at The Hague. 2. The ICJ prosecutes individuals while the ICC settles inter-state disputes. 3. The ICJ is the principal judicial organ of the UN. Which are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 1 and 3 only
- (c) 2 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Ans: b. Both sit at The Hague and the ICJ is the UN's principal judicial organ. Statement 2 is reversed: the ICJ handles states, the ICC handles individuals.

Q8. The Caspian Sea is bordered by all of the following EXCEPT:

- (a) Kazakhstan
- (b) Turkmenistan
- (c) Georgia
- (d) Azerbaijan

Ans: c. The five littoral states are Russia, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Iran and Azerbaijan. Georgia borders the Black Sea, not the Caspian.

Q9. The Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits are associated with which sea?

- (a) Caspian Sea
- (b) Black Sea
- (c) Aral Sea
- (d) Red Sea

Ans: b. The Black Sea connects to the Marmara via the Bosphorus and onward via the Dardanelles; passage is governed by the Montreux Convention.

Q10. Nandan Nilekani is associated with which of the following? 1. Aadhaar ecosystem 2. Unified Payments Interface (UPI) 3. NCAER governing body

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 1 and 2 only
- (c) 1, 2 and 3
- (d) 2 and 3 only

Ans: c. Nilekani helped set up Aadhaar and UPI, co-founded Infosys, and chairs the NCAER governing body — all three are correct.



Answer Key & Revision

Q	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Ans	b	c	a	c	c	d	b	c	b	c

◆ ONE-LINE REVISION NUGGETS

- ◆ **Exam reforms:** Nilekani task force → leak-proof, tech-driven NTA; Public Exams Act, 2024 amendments → up to 10 yrs & ₹50 lakh proposed.
- ◆ **Defence:** Kusha LRSAM (DRDO) → M1/M2/M3 = 150/250/350 km; India's answer to S-400.
- ◆ **IR:** "Neither surrender to China nor depend on the U.S." → strategic autonomy + supply-chain resilience.
- ◆ **Institutions:** ICC (individuals, Rome Statute, 2002) ≠ ICJ (states, UN organ, 1945); India not a party to the ICC.
- ◆ **Mapping:** Caspian (5 states, largest inland sea) & Black Sea (Bosporus–Dardanelles, Montreux Convention).

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

"An examination system worth trusting is not one that catches the cheat, but one the honest never fear."