

Discipline will take you
places motivation can't.

Important Issues of the Day

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- **Flight overreach – Page No.10 , GS 2**
- **Iran – Page No.10 , GS 2**
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SC slams unchecked freebies, questions 'appeasement'

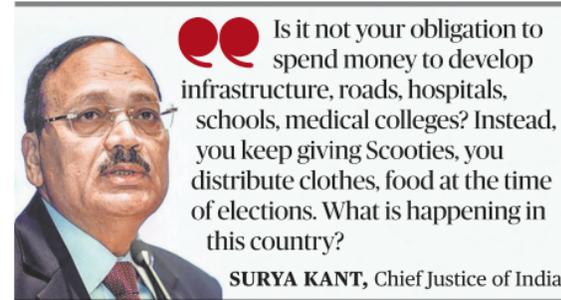
Top court says States must prioritise welfare and development over largesse; asks if they have a tested mechanism to distribute welfare effectively to those who actually need a 'helping hand'

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Thursday chastised State governments for distributing freebies indiscriminately without even distinguishing between the haves and the have-nots, questioning whether they are following an "appeasement" policy without a thought for the public exchequer ahead of elections.

Chief Justice of India Surya Kant, heading a three-judge Bench, said States, even those that are revenue-surplus, must prioritise welfare and development over irrational largesse. Despite running on deficit, the Chief Justice said, States seemed to still have money to randomly splurge on largesse. The court asked whether States had a tested mechanism to distribute welfare effectively, to those who actually need a "helping hand".

"Is it not your obligation to spend money to develop



infrastructure, roads, hospitals, schools, medical colleges? Instead, you keep giving Scooties, you distribute clothes, food at the time of elections. What is happening in this country," the Chief Justice asked.

The court said largesse was distributed in such a way that the most affluent get them first.

"It is understandable that some people cannot afford, the State has to provide. There are children who cannot afford education. You must provide. It is their fundamental right. There are many bright children who cannot afford higher education. It is the

state's duty to extend a helping hand to them. That is welcome. But for people who do not deserve, those who are affluent, why give them freebies? Why do freebies come to their pockets first? Is it not high time for the States to revisit these policies," Chief Justice Kant asked.

The Bench, including Justices Joymalya Bagchi and Vipul M. Pancholi, was hearing a writ petition filed by Tamil Nadu Power Distribution Corporation Limited (TNPDC), represented by senior advocates Gopal Subramaniam and P. Wilson, challenging the constitutional validity of

Rule 23 of the Electricity (Amendment) Act, 2024.

Mr. Subramaniam said the gap in revenue from electricity and expenditure has expanded over the years. In Tamil Nadu, the gap has touched ₹50,000-odd crore annually, which the government was absorbing.

The senior counsel said Rule 23 would financially stretch the State government to such an extent that it would have to pass on the tariff burden to the consumers.

"The Rule, if implemented, would result in an exponential tariff shock, adversely affecting electricity consumers and placing an unsustainable burden on the public exchequer," the TNPDC petition submitted.

The Chief Justice asked why the State's policy did not allow the government to generate profits from the power sector by making the affluent sections pay for the electricity they consume.

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- **Hello – Page No. , GS 1**

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Under the Indian Constitution, concentration of wealth violates

(a) the Right to Equality

(b) the Directive Principles of State Policy

(c) the Right to Freedom

(d) the Concept of Welfare

Which part of the Constitution of India declares the ideal of Welfare State?

(a) Directive Principles of State Policy

(b) Fundamental Rights

(c) Preamble

(d) Seventh Schedule

Mains Question

“Competitive populism in the form of electoral freebies poses challenges to fiscal prudence and democratic accountability.” Discuss in the context of recent debates on welfare versus freebies.

“चुनावी ‘फ्रीबीज़’ के रूप में प्रतिस्पर्धी लोकलुभावनवाद वित्तीय अनुशासन तथा लोकतांत्रिक जवाबदेही के लिए चुनौती प्रस्तुत करता है।” हालिया बहसों के संदर्भ में ‘कल्याणकारी योजनाओं’ और ‘फ्रीबीज़’ के बीच अंतर स्पष्ट करते हुए चर्चा कीजिए।

The Privileges Committee



- **Privileges Committee and the Ethics Committee, have not been constituted in the Lok Sabha (the lower house of India's Parliament) nearly two years.**
- **The Privileges Committee is a specialized standing committee of the legislature (Parliament or State Assemblies) that acts as a quasi-judicial body.**
- **It is tasked with safeguarding the privileges—special rights and immunities—of the House and its members to ensure they can function without outside interference or fear.**
- **Article 105: Defines the powers, privileges, and immunities of the Parliament (Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha) and its members.**
- **Article 194: Defines the same for State Legislatures (Assemblies and Councils) and their members.**

- **Aim: To investigate any action that casts reflections, insults, or obstructs the House, its committees, or its members, thereby protecting the dignity and authority of the legislative institution.**
- **Members:**
- **Lok Sabha: 15 members nominated by the Speaker.**
- **Rajya Sabha: 10 members nominated by the Chairman.**
- **State Legislatures: Typically consists of 9 to 15 members (e.g., the Maharashtra Legislative Council committee currently has 9 members).**

Which one of the following is the largest Committee of the Parliament?

- (a) The Committee on Public Accounts**
- (b) The Committee on Estimates**
- (c) The Committee on Public Undertakings**
- (d) The Committee on Petitions**

Strait of Hormuz



Tehran reenters the global geopolitical spotlight

In late 2013, the White House in Washington DC – then under President Barack Obama – embarked on a multi-national, complicated, and ambitious journey to negotiate with Iran to curtail its nuclear programme. The United States, along with some of its allies, particularly Israel, was at a level convinced that Tehran had set out to develop a nuclear weapons programme. The negotiations, which involved a consortium of United Nations Security Council Members along with Germany, collectively known as the P5+1, managed to reach an agreement in 2015 called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). The aim was to install guardrails around the Shia power's nuclear activities, which its then President Hassan Rouhani and the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamanej maintained, was only for civil use.

The Trump years

In 2018, as the first presidency of Donald Trump began, the U.S. exited the agreement leaving not just Iran but also its allies in Europe in the lurch. Russia and China, technically allies for Iran, but not wanting a nuclearised West Asia, were also left stumped. Mr. Trump had long advocated that the JCPOA was farcical and negotiated in a way which did not secure American interests. Fast forward to 2025. Now, in Mr. Trump's second run as President, the U.S., with Israel, bombed Iran's nuclear and air defence sites followed by a narrative that the country's capacities to pursue such weapons lied in tatters.

However, a few months following the attacks, Mr. Trump is now chasing a deal through diplomacy, in a very similar manner as Mr. Obama did and succeeded, albeit not a perfect one. Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who, in a speech at the United Nations in 2012, had shown a drawing depicting the various stages



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Iran returns to haunt the United States and West Asia alike

at which Iran's nuclear programme had progressed, kept stopping Tehran as a non-negotiable security aim. With Mr. Obama, and even President Joe Biden later, Mr. Netanyahu had limited success. But with Mr. Trump, it was an opportunity as the Israeli leader managed to market his state's celebrated intelligence apparatus's assessment that Iran was racing towards nuclear weapons. While the U.S.'s assessments differed, Mr. Netanyahu's whisperings in Mr. Trump's ear won the battle.

Now, in 2026, even as the U.S. moves notable military capacity in the region while simultaneously holding talks with Iran, hosted by long-time mediator Oman, Mr. Trump seemingly wants his own JCPOA. The language from the White House today resembles that of the pre-Obama era. "... I insisted that negotiations with Iran continue to see whether or not a deal can be consummated," he said. "If it can, I let the Prime Minister know that will be a preference. If it cannot, we will just have to see what the outcome will be," Mr. Trump said while meeting Mr. Netanyahu, who, once again, had to rush to the White House as U.S. interlocutors met their Iranian counterparts in Muscat.

No escalation is what the Arab powers want

Arab powers of the Gulf, who over the past year or two have committed hundreds of billions of dollars of investment towards Mr. Trump, despite their own troubles with Tehran, do not want to see military escalation. And it is not just them. Others across the world would rather see talks succeed than fail, avoiding pushing the region into another conflict which could run for years should it spread. Iran has made no bones that it retains the kinetic capacity to strike back – a claim that is increasingly being taken seriously by analysts and officials alike. Further threats from

Tehran that any strikes this time will be met by retaliation targeting U.S. military facilities in the region, largely situated in the Gulf states, have led to anxieties peaking. The stress is not coming from Iran's intentions, but more from an inability to predict or influence Mr. Trump's thinking.

The stakes for India

The Iran file coming back as a point of geopolitical friction, at a moment when the world identifies more as a disordered than an ordered one, poses renewed challenges for many. India, for example, was a supporter of the erstwhile JCPOA process. In fact, New Delhi had highlighted to its peers in Tehran the perks of such an agreement, such as ease of sanctions and a return of oil trade. Iran was at a point one of the top two oil suppliers for India, only to lose out as U.S. pressure peaked. JCPOA was seen as the way out. But even as focus usually comes down to oil, or the Chabahar Port, a long-standing Indian connectivity investment, Tehran remains an important political player – for its fractious relationship with Pakistan, its practicality with the Taliban in Afghanistan, and its posturing in Central Asia *vis-à-vis* Turkish and Pakistani influences. Iran offers much for India than just its West Asia policies.

Finally, Iran also stands at a crossroads. Internal protests have been consistent, gnawing into the state's political stability. The 'moderates', once powerful, have had to align with their conservative peers to build a nationalists narrative following the U.S. bombings. Domestic power plays, much like before, will heavily impact external outcomes. Any success of these talks will be a better option moving forward than the alternatives being presented by the largest American military build-up in the region since 2003.

- **The negotiations, which involved a consortium of United Nations Security Council Members along with Germany, collectively known as the P5+1, managed to reach an agreement in 2015 called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).**
- **The aim was to install guardrails around the Shia power's nuclear activities, which its then President Hassan Rouhani and the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamanei maintained, was only for civil use.**
- **In 2018, as the first presidency of Donald Trump began, the U.S. exited the agreement leaving not just Iran but also its allies in Europe in the lurch. Russia and China, technically allies for Iran, but not wanting a nuclearised West Asia, were also left stumped.**
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Turkey

Arm. Azer.

Turkmenistan

Caspian Sea

★ Tehran

Iraq

Iran

Afghanistan

Persian Gulf

Pakistan

Mains Question

Discuss the significance of the India–Iran partnership in the context of regional connectivity and trade, with special reference to the Chabahar Port project. How do external pressures such as sanctions and shifting global alignments impact this relationship?

क्षेत्रीय संपर्क एवं व्यापार के संदर्भ में भारत–ईरान साझेदारी के महत्व पर चर्चा कीजिए, विशेष रूप से चाबहार बंदरगाह परियोजना के संदर्भ में। साथ ही, प्रतिबंधों तथा बदलते वैश्विक शक्ति-संतुलन जैसे बाहरी दबाव इस संबंध को किस प्रकार प्रभावित करते हैं?

Privacy, transparency

There must be no information asymmetry between state and citizens

On Monday, the Supreme Court of India referred a series of petitions challenging the amendment to Section 8(1)(j) of the Right to Information (RTI) Act by Section 44(3) of the Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023, to a Constitution Bench, recognising its “constitutional sensitivity”. The Chief Justice of India even remarked that the Court might “have to lay down what is meant by ‘personal information’”. The RTI Act, 2005 was enacted to create an informed citizenry and ensure state accountability, which is vital for a democracy. Over two decades later, the DPDP Act has delivered a body blow by diluting one of its foundational sections. Section 8(1)(j) originally allowed the withholding of personal information only if it had no relationship to any public activity or interest, or if its disclosure resulted in an unwarranted invasion of privacy. Crucially, the section included a “public interest override” as an integral feature of the 2005 Act, permitting disclosure if a Public Information Officer was satisfied that the larger public interest justified it. The DPDP amendment removes this override and prohibits the disclosure of “any information which relates to personal information”, amounting to a blanket ban. This enables rejecting requests concerning officials, procurement records, audit reports or public

“intimate uses” paradox here: while Section 7 of the DPDP Act allows the state to process personal data without consent, the RTI amendment prevents citizens from using similar principles to seek transparency from the state. Thus, while the government can monitor the citizen, the citizen is denied the ability to scrutinise the government.

This amendment also creates a severe “chilling effect” on the press. As argued in one of the writ petitions by The Reporters’ Collective, journalists could be classified as “data fiduciaries” under the DPDP Act and its Rules when collecting information for investigative reports. Non-compliance with the Act can attract fines up to ₹250 crore. Such a legal framework threatens reducing journalism to just publishing government releases. It is ironic that the DPDP Act provides exemptions to startups but omits similar protections for journalism. This is in sharp contrast with the European Union’s General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which balances privacy and transparency to ensure accountability. The Constitution Bench must refer to the judgment, *Central Public Information Officer* (2019), which held that personal information should remain private unless disclosure is necessary for the larger public interest. It is known that the RTI has significantly reduced state-citizen (this includes the poor) information asymmetry over two decades. Ensuring its survival is essential for a responsive government.

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Flight overreach

Disruptive behaviour must not be confused with airing of grievances

A disturbing phenomenon in aviation is unruly passenger behaviour. The International Air Transport Association (IATA) has pointed out that in 2023, there was one incident for every 480 flights, from one for every 568 flights in 2022. In India, the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) is proposing to amend rules such that airlines can directly impose a flying ban of up to 30 days without referring the matter to the competent authority. The DGCA has broadened the concept of unruly behaviour too with six new categories: smoking on board, consumption of alcohol on domestic flights, tampering with emergency exits, unauthorised use of life-saving equipment such as life jackets, engaging in protests or sloganeering, and unruly conduct arising from intoxication. Currently, airlines must report disruptive passengers to an independent committee, headed by a retired district and sessions judge, which will decide within 45 days whether to add them to the official no-fly list. Unruly behaviour would now be monitored by airlines from the check-in counter although the focus is on the flight since such behaviour can impact passenger safety and comfort.

It would seem tolerance levels are dipping with several incidents such as attempts to open emergency exits and accessing lifesaving equipment without reason. Reports also cite passengers abusing crew and fellow travellers, and the loud chanting of prayers and bhajans. The amendments seek to empower airlines and cabin crew act immediately, unlike before, when such behaviour was overshadowed by lengthy No-Fly List procedures that focused on more serious issues such as national security. Whether the proposed changes would lead to high-handedness and offset the balance of power between passengers and airline staff is a moot point. Aviation experts stress that the cabin crew's primary role is for flight safety. However, a credible argument against the proposed amendments would cite the IndiGo fiasco where the airline's response to pilot deployment rules was found to be influenced by revenue considerations, leading to much anger among passengers. It would seem that the amendments would empower airlines against "unruly" behaviour arising from legitimate anger over unfair practices too. So, while the amendments may be necessary in the overall interest of flight safety and a smooth passenger experience, they should not serve other purposes such as deflecting passenger grievances. One safeguard would be to make a distinction between "unruly" behaviour on the ground versus disruptive behaviour during flight. Safeguards are needed to allow redress against airline overreach.

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Thank You!

