



IF YOU
Believe

IN YOURSELF

Anything
IS POSSIBLE

Important Issues of the Day

- **Trump Threat – Page No.1 , GS 2**
- **Sabarimala judgment – Page No.1 , GS 2**
- **Delimitation, women's reservation – Page No. 8, GS 2**
- **Custodial killing – Page No.8 , GS 2,4**
- **Nuclear reactor – Page No. 14, GS 3**
- **Indian Softshell Turtles – Prelims**

A civilisation will die in Iran if deal not accepted, says Trump on 'deadline' day

Stanly Johny

U.S. President Donald Trump on Tuesday threatened that “a whole civilisation will die” if Iran does not accept his deal and re-open the Strait of Hormuz before his 8 p.m. Eastern Time (5.30 a.m. on Wednesday in India) deadline. Tehran, in turn, issued a warning that its response would deprive the U.S. and its allies of oil and gas for years.

U.S. Vice-President J.D. Vance, who is in Hungary, said his country has “tools in our toolkit that we so far haven’t decided to use” against Iran, without elaborating further. The White House later said Mr. Vance did not mean use of the nuclear weapons. Respond-



Iranian children in Tehran on Tuesday marking 40 days since the fatal strike on a girls’ primary school during the ongoing war. REUTERS

ing to a post on X that said Mr. Vance implies the President would use nuclear weapons, the White House Rapid Response said: “Literally nothing @VP said here ‘implies’ this, you absolute buffoons”.

Iran’s UN representative, Amir-Saeid Iravani, said Mr. Trump’s threats

“constitute incitement to war crimes and potentially genocide”, adding that “immediate and proportionate” action will be taken if the U.S. President follows through on it.

If the U.S. “crosses red lines, Iran’s response will extend beyond the region”, Iran’s Revolutionary

Guards (IRGC) said in a statement. “Iran will attack the infrastructure of the U.S. and its partners that will leave the U.S. and its allies deprived of oil and gas in the region for years,” it said.

The statements came as Tehran reported the U.S. and Israel had already begun attacking key infrastructure including bridges and railways.

Iran’s Mehr news agency also reported that U.S. and Israel carried out strikes on Kharg Island in the Persian Gulf, which is a key export terminal for Iran’s oil and gas.

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- **To give the devil its due, Pakistan's Chief of Defence Forces Field Marshal Asim Munir's recent diplomatic avatar has shown a sense of anticipation of the incipient conflict and hyperactivity in its wake.**
- **He was everywhere: soothsaying Trump 2.0, at the signing of Pakistan's Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement (SDMA) with Saudi Arabia, and selling weapons to the Libyan warlord and the Sudanese Army Chief.**
- **But his most ambitious rainbow chase has been the self-proclaimed role of an indispensable mediator in Iran's war with the United States/Israel.**

With reference to the geographical location of Iran, consider the following countries:

1. Azerbaijan
2. Armenia
3. Afghanistan
4. Syria

Which of the above share a land border with Iran?

- (a) 1, 2 and 3 only
- (b) 1 and 4 only
- (c) 2, 3 and 4 only
- (d) 1, 2, 3 and 4



Mains Question

“Pakistan’s mediation in the ongoing conflict between United States and Iran reflects evolving regional geopolitics in West Asia.”

Critically examine Pakistan’s role as a mediator and analyse its implications for India’s strategic, economic, and diplomatic interests. *(15 Marks, 250 words)*

“संयुक्त राज्य अमेरिका और ईरान के बीच चल रहे संघर्ष में पाकिस्तान की मध्यस्थता पश्चिम एशिया की बदलती भू-राजनीति को दर्शाती है।”

पाकिस्तान की मध्यस्थ की भूमिका का समालोचनात्मक विश्लेषण कीजिए तथा भारत के रणनीतिक, आर्थिक एवं कूटनीतिक हितों पर इसके प्रभावों का मूल्यांकन कीजिए। *(15 अंक, 250 शब्द)*

Supreme Court begins review of 2018 Sabarimala judgment

Krishnadas Rajagopal

NEW DELHI

Justice B.V. Nagarathna, the sole woman judge in the Supreme Court and part of the Constitution Bench hearing a reference spurred by a 2018 judgment upholding the right of women of menstruating age to enter the Sabarimala shrine in Kerala, said on Tuesday that social ills cannot be branded and passed off as 'essential religious practices'.

The Union government, which holds the position that the Sabarimala judgment was an intrusion into free exercise of religious freedoms and denominational rights, said the legislature, not courts, drives



reform in religion, if need be.

"If social evils are given a religious colour, then the courts can intervene to distinguish [between] the two," Justice Nagarathna said.

Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta, who opened the arguments before the nine-judge Bench headed by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant, said the Preamble to the Constitution champions liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith, and worship.

The exchange marked the first day of hearing of a reference to evolve a 'judicial policy' for constitutional courts while dealing with questions of right to religious freedom enshrined in Article 25 and a denomination's privilege to manage its own religious affairs under Article 26 of the Constitution.

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- **The exchange marked the first day of hearing of a reference to evolve a 'judicial policy' for constitutional courts while dealing with questions of right to religious freedom enshrined in Article 25 and a denomination's privilege to manage its own religious affairs under Article 26 of the Constitution.**
- **In a 4:1 judgment, 5-membered constitution bench of Supreme Court, in Indian Young Lawyers Association vs. the State of Kerala, has allowed women of all ages to worship in Sabarimala Temple.**
- **In its judgment, SC stated that 'devotion cannot be subjected to gender discrimination'.**
- **Chief Justice Dipak Misra, Justice RF Nariman, Justice AM Khanwilkar and Justice DY Chandrachud constituted the majority, while the lone woman judge on the Bench, Justice Indu Malhotra dissented.**

- **Essential Religious Practice (ERP):** ERP refers to practices integral to a religion's doctrine, protected under Article 25. The judiciary determines ERP based on religious tenets.
- **Santhara (Sallekhana):** In 2015, the Rajasthan High Court ruled Santhara as non-essential to religion, but the Supreme Court stayed the order, allowing the practice to continue.
- **Triple Talaq Case:** The SC invalidated instant triple talaq, ruling it was not an essential Islamic practice and violated women's rights.

With reference to the “Doctrine of Essential Religious Practices” in India, consider the following statements:

1. It is explicitly mentioned in the Constitution of India.
2. It is used by courts to determine whether a practice is protected under religious freedom.
3. It originated from judicial interpretation by the Supreme Court.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Mains Question

“The Doctrine of Essential Religious Practices has been central to the adjudication of religious freedom in India, yet it raises concerns regarding judicial overreach.”

Critically examine the doctrine in the light of constitutional provisions and recent judicial pronouncements. *(15 Marks, 250 words)*

“भारत में धार्मिक स्वतंत्रता के निर्धारण में ‘आवश्यक धार्मिक प्रथाओं का सिद्धांत’ केंद्रीय रहा है, किन्तु यह न्यायिक अतिक्रमण (judicial overreach) की चिंताएँ भी उत्पन्न करता है।”

संवैधानिक प्रावधानों तथा हाल के न्यायिक निर्णयों के संदर्भ में इस सिद्धांत का समालोचनात्मक परीक्षण कीजिए। *(15 अंक, 250 शब्द)*

Fast breeder nuclear reactor at Kalpakkam takes 'critical' leap forward

Jacob Koshy
NEW DELHI

Marking a significant step forward in India's nuclear power programme, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, via a post on social media platform X late on Monday said that the prototype fast breeder reactor (PFBR) at Kalpakkam, Chennai, had achieved "criticality". This means that the nuclear reaction in the reactor had become safely self-sustaining, and was on its way to being able to produce electricity.

"Today India takes a defining step in its civil nuclear journey advancing the second stage of its nuclear programme...the PFBR at Kalpakkam has attained criticality...it is a decisive step towards harnessing our vast thorium reserves," Mr. Modi posted.

While it will be some months before the PFBR is powered up to its full capacity, and even longer before it produces useful electricity, multiple experiments have to be conducted at low power to check if it's running as expected, which must be evaluated by the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board before it grants a go-ahead for commercial power operation, this the beginning of the second stage of India's nuclear programme.

Since it was first formally approved as a project by the government in 2003, the PFBR at Kalpakkam has taken over two decades to reach this stage.

PFBR as a bridge

India's nuclear reactors are heavily dependent on imported uranium. The country's three-stage programme, conceived in the

1950s, envisages being able to be independent of imported uranium, creating its own stockpile of suitable uranium, and eventually harnessing thorium, of which it has vast stores. The PFBR development serves as an essential bridge.

"This is a historic moment," Anil Kakodkar, Member, Atomic Energy Commission and former head of the Department of Atomic Energy, told *The Hindu*, adding, "What this means is that we are now on our way to extract 80-100 times more energy from a given quantity of uranium."

The PFBR is a 500 MW sodium-cooled, pool-type fast breeder reactor designed by the Indira Gandhi Centre for Atomic Research and built by Bharatiya Nabhikiya Vidyut Nigam Limited, both op-



Prime Minister Narendra Modi witnesses initiation of core loading of indigenous prototype fast breeder reactor at Kalpakkam. PTI

erating under the Department of Atomic Energy.

Uranium powerhouse

India's pressurised heavy water reactors (PHWR) burn up uranium to produce electricity and small quantities of plutonium. However, less than 1% of the energy from this uranium (that can be used as heat and make electricity)

is extracted from these reactors. The 'depleted' uranium in India isn't considered 'waste' but is reprocessed and stored. It, however, cannot be used back in the existing PHWRs.

"The PFBR reactor is designed to use the 'spent' uranium from the PHWR as well as produce more plutonium. We are no lon-

ger using fresh, mined uranium here. As a thumb rule, this means that the 1% energy extracted can go up to nearly 10% for a single cycle and for every additional cycle 10% more. The efficiency of the uranium that is mined goes up substantially, Ravi Grover, Member, Atomic Energy Commission, told *The Hindu*.

"The burn-up or the energy extracted goes from about 8,000 units (in a PHWR) to nearly 100,000 units," Mr. Grover said.

Two more reactors

India's current plan, Mr. Grover said, was to construct two more PFBR at Kalpakkam, though this would only be following a proper assessment of the performance of the PFBR for a year. In the current scheme of things, the PFBR

will produce only "marginally more" plutonium.

"Our current priority is to use the uranium that we have far more efficiently. There is a reprocessing plant to come up on site at Kalpakkam which will use the processed spent fuel from the PFBR and for the two future PFBR. The PFBR will use depleted uranium (from the Pressurised Heavy Water Reactors or PHWRs).

In the future, we will use thorium, but that is still a long time away, and what kind of reactors we will use for that, we need more work and have to wait and watch," he said, adding, "These reactors are self-sustaining but as and when we need more plutonium in the future, the design has to be optimised to extract more plutonium."

Currently, India has a fleet of 18-20 PHWRs that

use natural uranium as fuel and produce plutonium-239 (Pu-239) as a by-product in spent fuel. India's full fleet of 23 nuclear reactors have a combined capacity of 7.48 GW. India hopes to have 100 GW by 2047 and this is premised on a larger fleet of Bharat Small Modular Reactors (which are scaled down PHWR) that are in the pipeline.

A significant technological challenge that has led to delays in the PFBR is the use of liquid sodium as a coolant to manage the extremely high heat from fissioning uranium atoms in the PFBR. In India's current reactors, the heat is largely absorbed by 'heavy water', or in some cases, ordinary water. Once fully operational, the PFBR is expected to generate 500 MW of electricity, with a design life of 40 years.

- **India is one of the few countries in the world with a long experience of developing nuclear technologies, including the generation of nuclear power.**
- **This includes a mastery over the pressurised heavy water reactor (PHWR) technology, or reactors that use natural uranium as fuel and heavy water (deuterium oxide) as coolant and moderator.**
- **These reactors now comprise the bulk of India's installed atomic power capacity of 8,180 MWe (megawatt electric), alongside some imported light water reactors (LWRs) units.**
- **Two other technologies are a work-in-progress: atomic reactors called fast breeders and a longstanding project that aims at eventually fabricating thorium-based nuclear reactors.**

- **This programme envisages a pathway to utilising India's abundant thorium reserves – found in coastal and inland placer sands on the beaches of Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and Gujarat, and in the inland riverine sands of Jharkhand and West Bengal – to generate electricity.**
- **The vital second stage of India's three-stage nuclear programme got a boost Monday with the country's first indigenous Fast Breeder Reactor (FBR) at Kalpakkam in Tamil Nadu attaining criticality.**
- **Attaining criticality, or going critical, means the initiation of a self-sustaining nuclear fission reaction that will eventually lead to the generation of power by the 500-megawatt electric (MWe) FBR.**
- **Attaining criticality is a key milestone before full power generation, indicating that the reactor core is functioning as designed and that each fission event in the core now releases a sufficient number of neutrons to sustain an ongoing series of reactions.**

- **A Fast Breeder Reactor is an advanced nuclear reactor that generates more fissile material (fuel) than it consumes while producing electricity.**
- **Fuel: It uses a Uranium-Plutonium Mixed Oxide (MOX) fuel.**
- **The Breeding Process: The reactor core is surrounded by a blanket of fertile material (Uranium-238). When these U-238 atoms capture fast neutrons, they undergo transmutation to become Plutonium-239, which is a high-grade nuclear fuel.**
- **Coolant: Instead of water, it uses Liquid Sodium as a coolant because sodium does not slow down neutrons, allowing the fast reaction necessary for breeding.**
- **Heat Exchange: The heat generated by fission is transferred to the liquid sodium, which then heats water to produce steam to turn turbines.**

| Stage | Aim | Fuel/Coolant/ Moderator | Nuclear Reactor | Current Status |
|---------|---|--|--|--|
| Stage 1 | <p>It aims to generate electricity while producing plutonium-239 (Pu-239) as a byproduct.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Plutonium is key for the next stages of the programme. | <p>Fuel: Uranium (U-238)</p> <p>Moderator: Heavy water (deuterium oxide)</p> | Pressurized Heavy Water Reactors (PHWRs) | India has already constructed 18 PHWRs, as the foundation of India's nuclear power infrastructure. |

Stage 2

It focuses on **Fast Breeder Reactors (FBRs)**, which utilize **Pu-239** from the first stage to generate more fissile material than they consume.

- These reactors convert **fertile uranium-238** into **Pu-239**, enhancing the nuclear fuel cycle efficiency and providing a sustainable fuel source.

Mixed Oxide of **Plutonium-239** and **Uranium-238**

Fast Breeder Reactors (FBRs)

The **Prototype FBR** at **Kalpakkam, Tamil Nadu**, is a key development in this stage.

Stage 3

It focuses on **Thorium Reactors**, which use **Thorium-232** to produce **uranium-233**, a fissile material.

- Leveraging India's abundant thorium reserves, this stage offers a long-term solution for nuclear fuel needs, ensuring sustainable energy security.

Thorium-232
(converted into Uranium-233)

Thorium-Based Reactors
(Thorium Cycle)

Research into thorium-based reactors is ongoing, with the **Advanced Heavy Water Reactor (AHWR)** being developed as part of this stage.

Q. In India, why are some nuclear reactors kept under “IAEA safeguards” while others are not? (2020)

(a) Some use uranium and others use thorium

(b) Some use imported uranium and others use domestic supplies

(c) Some are operated by foreign enterprises and others are operated by domestic enterprises

(d) Some are State-owned and others are privately owned

Delimitation, women's reservation, political dynamics

In September 2023, Parliament passed the Constitution (One Hundred and Sixth Amendment) Act, 2023, or the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam, which commits to reserving one-third of seats in the Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabhas for women, including in constituencies already earmarked for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. However, this potentially transformative measure falls short of immediacy: its implementation is deferred until after the next Census and the subsequent delimitation exercise.

During parliamentary debates, the Congress party, along with several other Opposition parties, demanded its immediate operationalisation, ideally for the 2024 general election. Women's rights groups criticised the government for tying the quota to delimitation after the new Census, arguing that it creates unnecessary delays. The National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government rejected this, maintaining that such a major change, without updated Census data and delimitation, would undermine both fairness and feasibility.

The shift now seems more deliberate

Less than three years later, that position appears to have shifted. Recent reports suggest that the government now plans to amend the Women's Reservation Act, 2023 by initiating a delimitation exercise based on the 2011 Census, rather than waiting for a fresh Census and a subsequent delimitation process tied to it. At the same time, the size of the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies may be expanded by nearly 50%, increasing the Lok Sabha's strength from 543 to 816 seats. In the absence of any formal articulation of the basis for such an expansion, questions arise about its implications for representational balance and political fairness.

Taken together, these developments – particularly the proposed increase in seats – point to a decoupling of women's reservation from the next Census, expected to include caste enumeration beyond the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, and the delimitation exercise that would follow. While this shift is framed as a means of expediting implementation, it also suggests a more deliberate political reconfiguration underlying these far-reaching structural changes.

The timing is telling. Acting at this juncture allows the government to claim credit for a long-pending reform that previous administrations failed to implement, even if it entails departing from the sequencing that it had earlier defended. It has clear electoral implications, likely to mobilise women voters in upcoming Assembly elections across key States/Union Territory, consolidate support ahead of the 2027 contests, and position the Bharatiya Janata Party as the party that delivered on women's reservations and gender justice. This claim could, in turn, become a chief plank of its campaign for the 2029 general election.



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Implementing women's reservation without waiting for the Census or delimitation exercise could undermine representation and the intended reforms

Delimitation, however, remains contentious, questioning whether representation should be based solely on population or also consider economic, social, and demographic factors. A strictly population-based approach would strengthen the parliamentary power of northern States where fertility rates remain relatively high, while reducing the relative influence of southern and peninsular states that have stabilised population growth and significantly drive India's economy and employment. This dynamic is likely to deepen the existing north-south divide, driven by demographic asymmetries and uneven development outcomes, placing additional strain on the federal compact and the balance of inter-State representation.

These conflicting concerns stem from the constitutional freeze on delimitation, leaving constituency boundaries and seat allocations unchanged since the early 1970s. After nearly five decades, the government now appears set to lift this freeze, proposing a roughly 50% expansion of the Lok Sabha alongside proportional increases in State Assemblies. This approach is intended to reassure southern States by preserving their relative share of seats and thus reducing resistance to delimitation. Yet, even with a uniform expansion, the absolute seat counts of northern States would rise significantly, further tilting the existing balance of power in their favour. For instance, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar together could approach 180 seats, while the five southern States (Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana) combined may reach around 195, raising the possibility that the northern bloc could still wield disproportionate political weight. In a first-past-the-post system, where numerical strength ultimately determines both electoral victory and seats gained, such an increase risks entrenching structural disadvantages for less populous regions, even if formal proportionality is preserved.

The issue of data

These distributional concerns are compounded by the question of data. Basing women's reservation on the 2011 Census is problematic, particularly when a new Census is already underway. India in 2026 bears little resemblance to its 2011 demographic profile: migration, rapid urbanisation, and the after-effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have significantly reshaped population patterns over the past decade and a half, altering both urban and rural constituencies. Proceeding with outdated data risks misrepresenting current realities at the very moment when foundational decisions on delimitation, seat expansion, and the operationalisation of women's reservation are being made. Yet, the urgency to move ahead suggests a calculated political judgement: that the imperative of delivering women's reservation will outweigh resistance, as few can afford to oppose its expeditious implementation, leaving little

room to contest either the process or its sequencing. The issue is further complicated by what the next Census itself may reveal. Widely expected to be a landmark exercise, the availability of caste data could sharpen demands for greater representation of disadvantaged caste groups, particularly given their demographic strength. It may also amplify calls for sub-quotas within women's reservation, especially from Other Backward Classes (OBCs), including Muslim OBC communities that remain underrepresented. Several political parties and women's organisations have already voiced such demands. By moving ahead without waiting for the 2026-27 Census, the government appears to be postponing these pressures, but only temporarily.

A further concern is the lack of clarity on how women's reservation will operate in practice. While the amendment mandates a one-third quota, it defers critical details, especially the rotation of reserved constituencies. This is not a minor issue: rotation determines who can contest, from where, and with what continuity, shaping both accountability and constituency development. Earlier proposals cautioned that frequent rotation could disrupt these goals, yet the current framework leaves the design unresolved. Reports suggest that in smaller States and Union Territories with one or two Lok Sabha seats, the rotation of reserved constituencies may operate differently, resulting in less frequent turnover, while in larger States, some seats could remain reserved across successive terms. However, the law itself provides only for rotation after delimitation, leaving the precise mechanism to be defined.

The need for deliberation

None of this diminishes the core premise: women's reservation is long overdue and politically imperative. Evidence from other countries suggests that quotas can be effective, and there is little reason to believe that India would be an exception. Taken together, women's reservation, seat expansion and delimitation are not isolated changes; they will jointly reshape who is represented, from where, and in what proportions. Seen in this context, they mark a foundational reordering of the electoral map – one that will redraw constituencies, recalibrate the weight of States, and reconfigure the social composition of legislative bodies. Far from a marginal or technical adjustment, this is a structural shift that could rebalance political power across regions, social groups, and genders.

Precisely because of the scale of this shift, implementation must be preceded by thorough deliberation grounded in the latest data. Departing from the logical and constitutionally settled sequence risks distorting representation and seat distribution, thereby weakening the very reform it seeks to advance. India stands on the cusp of one of the most significant transformations of its representative system since the early decades of the Republic.

- **In September 2023, Parliament passed the Constitution (One Hundred and Sixth Amendment) Act, 2023, or the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam, which commits to reserving one-third of seats in the Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabhas for women, including in constituencies already earmarked for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.**
- **However, this potentially transformative measure falls short of immediacy: its implementation is deferred until after the next Census and the subsequent delimitation exercise.**
- **Recent reports suggest that the government now plans to amend the Women's Reservation Act, 2023 by initiating a delimitation exercise based on the 2011 Census, rather than waiting for a fresh Census and a subsequent delimitation process tied to it.**
- **At the same time, the size of the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies may be expanded by nearly 50%, increasing the Lok Sabha's strength from 543 to 816 seats.**

- **Delimitation, however, remains contentious, questioning whether representation should be based solely on population or also consider economic, social, and demographic factors.**
- **A strictly population-based approach would strengthen the parliamentary power of northern States where fertility rates remain relatively high, while reducing the relative influence of southern and peninsular states that have stabilised population growth and significantly drive India's economy and employment.**
- **A further concern is the lack of clarity on how women's reservation will operate in practice.**
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Systemic reckoning

Sattankulam verdict should sensitise the police against use of excessive force

Delivery of justice to hapless victims of police brutality requires a combination of an actively engaged judiciary, the courage of victims and witnesses to speak out against the khaki fraternity, and a determined investigation to assemble irrefutable evidence. All these factors perfectly aligned to uncover the truth behind the custodial killing of an innocent trader, Jayaraj, and his son Benicks, who were tortured at the Sattankulam police station in Thoothukudi, Tamil Nadu, six years ago. Relying on the CBI's scientific evidence, despite early attempts to destroy it, a trial court in Madurai has now convicted all nine policemen arraigned in the case. A tenth accused had died earlier of COVID-19. While the awarding of the death penalty to the convicts militates against the principle of rehabilitative justice, the conviction sends a strong message to those in uniform who assume the power to wield force against unarmed citizens as if it were a statutory right. This case might have passed off as yet another suspicious custodial death but for overwhelming evidence of torture and public outrage. The police picked up Jayaraj on false charges of violating lockdown conditions during the pandemic, and Benicks was detained later when he confronted them for assaulting his father. The two men were stripped, brutally beaten overnight, and even forced to clean their own blood with their clothes. After registering an FIR on trumped-up charges, the in-

conditions during the pandemic, and Benicks was detained later when he confronted them for assaulting his father. The two men were stripped, brutally beaten overnight, and even forced to clean their own blood with their clothes. After registering an FIR on trumped-up charges, the injured men were produced before a government doctor, who dubiously issued a "fit for remand" report. The jurisdictional magistrate too mechanically remanded them to judicial custody, ultimately leading to their deaths.

That the policemen felt entitled was evident when a Judicial Magistrate found the atmosphere at the station hostile and "intimidating". Justices P.N. Prakash and B. Pugalendhi of the Madurai Bench of the Madras High Court, having taken *suo motu* cognisance, in an extraordinary direction, asked revenue officials to take control of the station to safeguard evidence. The turning point came when a head constable, Revathi, testified against her colleagues. The CBI established that blood samples recovered from the station matched the victims' DNA, while call data records confirmed the presence of both the victims and the accused at the time of the crime, sealing the case. The trial court appears to have applied uniform proportionality in assigning culpability to all accused. This may not withstand scrutiny in higher courts, as seen in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination case, where the Supreme Court, in 1999, upheld the death sentences of only four of the 26 convicted by the TADA court. Nonetheless, the convictions should help sensitise the police force that excesses will not go unpunished.

- **Delivery of justice to hapless victims of police brutality requires a combination of an actively engaged judiciary, the courage of victims and witnesses to speak out against the khaki fraternity, and a determined investigation to assemble irrefutable evidence.**
- **All these factors perfectly aligned to uncover the truth behind the custodial killing of an innocent trader, Jayaraj, and his son Benicks, who were tortured at the Sattankulam police station in Thoothukudi, Tamil Nadu, six years ago.**
- **Relying on the CBI's scientific evidence, despite early attempts to destroy it, a trial court in Madurai has now convicted all nine policemen arraigned in the case.**
- **The police picked up Jayaraj on false charges of violating lockdown conditions during the pandemic, and Benicks was detained later when he confronted them for assaulting his father. The two men were stripped, brutally beaten overnight, and even forced to clean their own blood with their clothes.**

- **In 2020, SC in Paramvir Singh Saini vs. Baljit Singh directed the Centre to install CCTV cameras and recording systems in all police stations to deter custodial torture.**
- **Custodial violence: It is not defined in any Indian statute. The term combines custody (meaning lawful detention or safekeeping) with violence, referring to physical or psychological harm inflicted on a person in police or judicial custody.**
- **Under Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), 2023, custody is classified into police custody (up to 15 days for interrogation) and judicial custody (detention in prison until bail or completion of sentence).**
- **Custodial violence includes torture, assault, harassment, humiliation, rape, and even deaths that occur while a person is under official custody.**

- **Article 21:** Guarantees the right to life and personal liberty, which includes the freedom from torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment.
- **Article 20(1):** It states that no person can be convicted for an act that was not an offence under the law at the time it was committed, thereby prohibiting excessive or retrospective punishment.
- **Article 20(3):** Protects an individual from being compelled to self-incriminate, safeguarding the accused from coerced or forced confessions through torture or pressure.
- **Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (2023):** It penalizes those who intentionally cause hurt or grievous hurt to extract confessions, information, through violence or coercion.

- **United Nation Charter, 1945:** It mandates that prisoners be treated with dignity, affirming that their fundamental rights and freedoms remain protected under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (India ratified the ICCPR in 1979).
- **Law Commission of India:** In its 273rd Report (2017), urged India to ratify UNCAT and enact a dedicated law criminalising torture.
- **India must clearly define “custodial violence” in law and ratify the UN Convention Against Torture (CAT).,** which it signed in 1997 but has not yet ratified.

Mains Question

“Custodial deaths strike at the core of the right to life and dignity guaranteed under the Constitution of India.”

Examine the causes of custodial deaths in India and evaluate the effectiveness of existing legal and institutional safeguards to prevent them. *(15 Marks, 250 words)*

“हिरासत में मृत्यु (Custodial Death) भारत के संविधान द्वारा प्रदत्त जीवन और गरिमा के अधिकार के मूल को प्रभावित करती है।”

भारत में हिरासत में मृत्यु के कारणों का परीक्षण कीजिए तथा उन्हें रोकने के लिए उपलब्ध कानूनी एवं संस्थागत उपायों की प्रभावशीलता का मूल्यांकन कीजिए। *(15 अंक, 250 शब्द)*

Indian Softshell Turtles



- **Police in Greater Noida rescued 16 Indian Softshell turtles from a smuggler during a routine check.**
- **The turtles, native to the Ganga river system and protected under Schedule I of the Wildlife Protection Act, were being illegally transported.**
- **The Indian Softshell Turtle (*Nilssonia gangetica*), also known as the Gangetic Softshell Turtle, is a large freshwater reptile.**
- **Unlike most turtles that have a hard, bony scute, these belong to the family Trionychidae, characterized by a leathery shell that lacks a traditional keratinized cover.**

- **IUCN Red List: Endangered.**
- **Wildlife Protection Act (1972): Schedule I (India's highest level of legal protection, equivalent to that of the Tiger).**
- **CITES: Appendix I.**

Habitat and Distribution:

- **Primary Range: Found predominantly in the Ganges, Indus, and Mahanadi river systems.**
- **Environment: They prefer deep, turbid rivers, streams, large canals, lakes, and ponds with mud or sand bottoms where they can easily bury themselves.**
- **Geographic Spread: Distributed across India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Nepal.**

- **Soft Shell:** It has a flat, oval, and leathery carapace (upper shell) that is olive-green or dull green in color.
- **Distinct Head:** The head is large with a distinctive snout-like proboscis (pointed nose) that allows it to breathe while remaining submerged.
- **Size:** They are massive, with the carapace length reaching up to 94 cm.
- **The 20-Claw Myth:** Poachers specifically target individuals with 20 claws (five on each limb), as they are falsely believed to bring good luck or have higher medicinal value in the black market.
- **Diet:** They are omnivorous scavengers, feeding on fish, mollusks, frogs, and occasionally rotting vegetation or carcasses.

Thank You!

