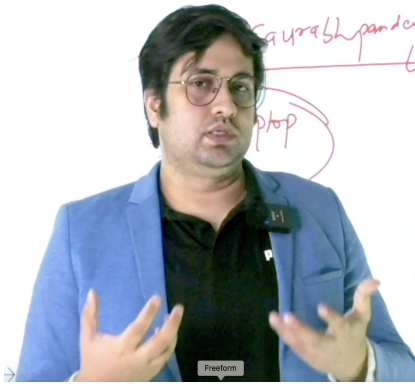
# Topics - MINDS MAPS included (Daily current affairs 4th January 2025

- Target UPSC CSE Prelims 2025
- **India-China Dispute Over Territory and Hydropower Projects.**
- **One Nation, One Election:**
- **The Growth of International Trade and Cross-Border Insolvency Challenge**
- **Tungsten Reserves in India**
- **Mapping - North sea**
- **Mains**



By saurabh Pandey

THE HINDU

# Target Mains -2025/26 -

**Q** Essay topic → "Be who you are and say what you feel, because those who mind don't matter, and those who matter don't mind."

**Q. With reference to the Sangit Kalanidhi Award consider the following statements. (The Hindu)**

**1) Is the title awarded annually to a Hindustani musician by the Indore Music Academy.**

**2) From 1929 to 1941, the award did not exist.**

**Whichever of the given statements is/are correct.**

**A) 1 Only**

**B) 2 Only**

**C) Both 1 and 2**

**D) Neither 1 or 2**

# India ‘protests’ new Chinese counties in Ladakh

Beijing forms 2 new counties in Hotan prefecture that incorporate territory of India’s Ladakh

India has ‘never accepted’ illegal Chinese occupation in this area, says the Ministry of External Affairs

MEA raises ‘concerns’ over announcement of mega dam project over Yarlung Tsangpo

Kallol Bhattacherjee
NEW DELHI

India has lodged a “solemn protest” with China over the formation of two counties in the Hotan prefecture that incorporates territory of India’s Ladakh.

Speaking to reporters during the weekly briefing on Friday, Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal reminded China that India “never accepted” Beijing’s “illegal occupation of Indian territory in this area”.

## Concerns conveyed

He further stated categorically that India has also conveyed its “concerns” about the building a mega hydro power project in the upstream Yarlung Tsangpo, which is the Tibetan name of Brahmaputra, that flows through Arunachal Pradesh and Assam.

“We have never accepted the illegal Chinese occupation of Indian territory in this area. Creation of new counties will neither have a bearing on India’s long-standing and consistent position regarding our sovereignty over the area nor lend legitimacy to China’s illegal and forcible occupation of the same,” said Mr. Jaiswal. “We have lodged a solemn protest with the Chinese side through diplomatic channels,” he said.

The protest from the Indian side came after Chinese news agency Xinhua reported on December 27, 2024 that the authorities in northwest Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region had declared the formation of He’an County and Hekang County, in the Hotan prefecture. The Hotan prefecture contains parts of Aksai Chin that India accuses China of occupying and formation of the two new counties appears like Beijing firming up administrative measures in the region.

**Fresh row:** New counties in Hotan will have no bearing on India’s sovereignty over the area, says MEA spokesperson. GETTY IMAGES

## India-China meet

The protest from the Indian side is significant as it comes against the backdrop of the December 18, 2024 meeting between the Special Representatives for the border mechanism – National Security Adviser Ajit Doval and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi.

The meeting is to resolve the tension that erupted in eastern Ladakh in June 2020 that has since been termed the ‘Galwan clashes’.

In another significant turn, Mr. Jaiswal categorically spelt out India’s concern on the announced mega dam project over Yarlung Tsangpo in the deep gorges of the eastern Himalayas that fall under Chinese control. “As a lower riparian state with established user rights to the waters of the river, we have consistently expressed, through expert-level as well as diplomatic channels, our views and concerns to the Chinese side over mega projects on rivers in their territory,” said Mr. Jaiswal.

## World’s largest dam

Chinese news agency Xinhua had earlier announced that Beijing has approved the construction of the world’s largest dam, estimated at $137 billion on the Brahmaputra river in Tibet close to the Indian border.

The Chinese authorities have approved the construction of the hydel power project in the lower reaches of Yarlung Tsangpo. The mega dam is designed to be the largest infrastructure project in the world. Once constructed, the gigantic dam would dwarf even the Three Gorges Dam, which is now considered to be the largest. The MEA spokesperson hinted that the announcement of the dam was not communicated to India through official channels as is the norm in the case of neighbours sharing major rivers and said the Ministry of External Affairs got to know the information through a news report by Xinhua on December 25, 2024. India’s view, Mr. Jaiswal said, was “reiterated, along with need for transparency and consultation with downstream countries, following the latest report.”

“The Chinese side has been urged to ensure that the interests of downstream states of the Brahmaputra are not harmed by activities in upstream areas. We will continue to monitor and take necessary measures to protect our interests,” said Mr. Jaiswal.

# Topic → India-China Dispute Over Territory and Hydropower Projects

**Key Developments**

🇮🇳 India's Protest: India has lodged a "solemn protest" with China over the creation of two counties in the Hotan prefecture, which encroach on Indian territory in Ladakh.
🏞️ Territorial Dispute: The Indian Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) emphasized that India has never accepted China's illegal occupation of the disputed area.

⚡ Hydropower Concerns: India expressed concerns about a mega hydropower project on the Yarlung Tsangpo (Brahmaputra) river, which flows through Arunachal Pradesh and Assam.

🏗️ Dam Construction: China has approved the construction of the world's largest dam on the Brahmaputra river, with an estimated cost of $137 billion. India learned about this through a news report rather than official channels.

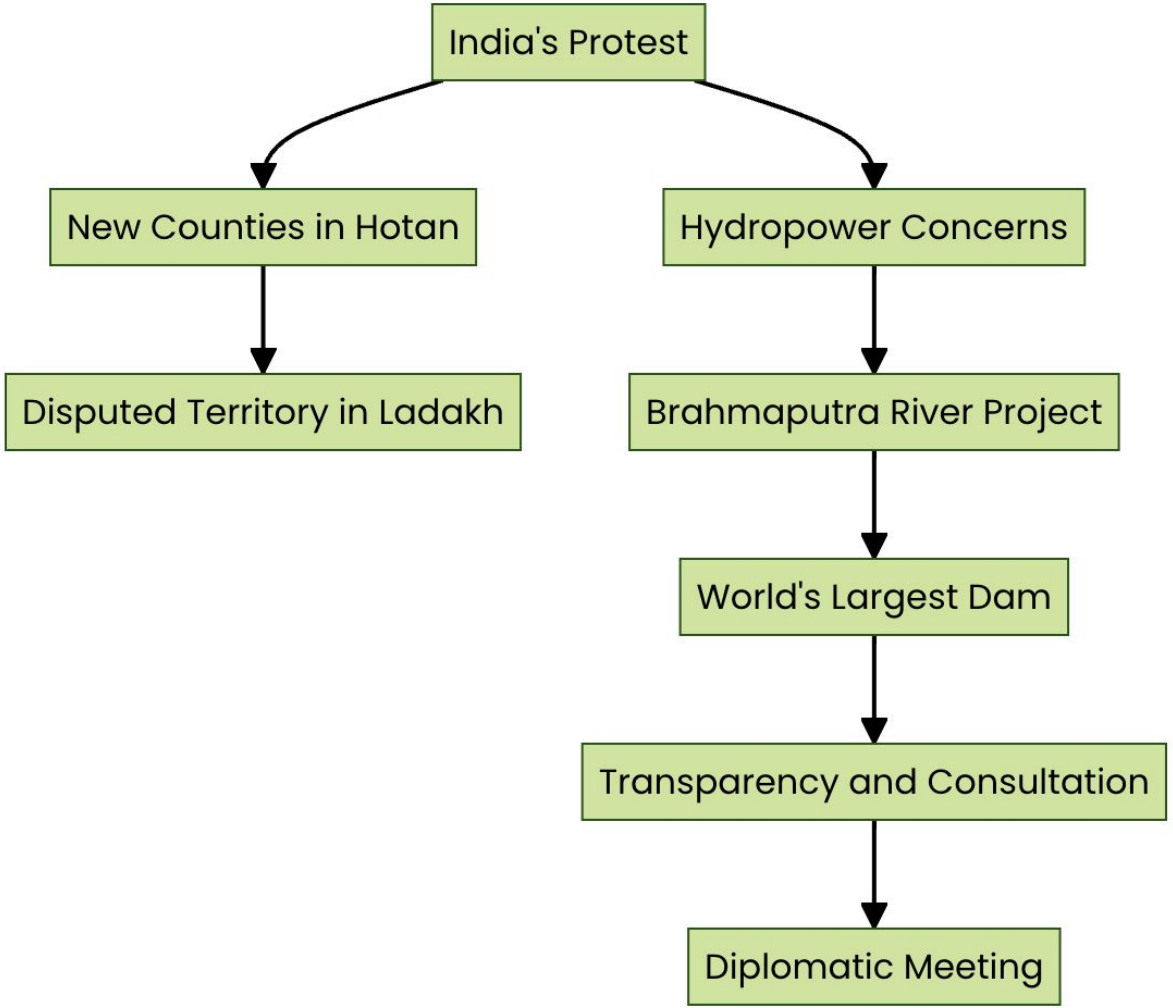
🔄 Call for Transparency: The MEA spokesperson reiterated the need for transparency and consultation with downstream countries regarding projects on shared rivers.

📅 Recent Developments: The protest follows a report from Chinese news agency Xinhua about the new counties, which India views as an attempt by China to solidify its administrative control over disputed territories.

🤝 Diplomatic Engagement: A meeting between Indian National Security Adviser Ajit Doval and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi is planned to address ongoing tensions stemming from the Galwan clashes in June 2020.

**Summary**

India has formally protested China's establishment of new counties in disputed territory and raised concerns over a major dam project on the Brahmaputra river, emphasizing the need for transparency and cooperation


India's Protest
New Counties in Hotan
Hydropower Concerns
Disputed Territory in Ladakh
Brahmaputra River Project
World's Largest Dam
Transparency and Consultation
Diplomatic Meeting

# The looming threat to federalism and democratic tenets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The ruling government, led by the Bharatiya Janata Party/National Democratic Alliance, has been pursuing the One Nation, One Election framework (ONOE) with all seriousness. This proposal seeks to synchronise the Lok Sabha and State Assembly elections under one single electoral cycle. While the advocates of the ONOE have cited several administrative and fiscal efficiencies, its opponents point to the far-reaching consequences of this plan on the democratic and federalist character of India, as laid out in the Constitution of India.

**The historical context**

Simultaneous elections are not something very new in India. During the initial years after Independence, the Election Commission of India (ECI) used to conduct simultaneous elections for both Parliament and State Assemblies. But this cycle of cooperative federalism was disrupted at the very outset with the appearance and imposition of Article 356, which is popularly known as President's Rule. When this was done for the first time in Kerala in 1959, an element of federal overreach began to take hold of the Union-State relations, as the will of the Union appeared to override State autonomy. The arrangement was essentially meant to be a constitutional mechanism and provided for restoring normalcy in States where governance had become well-nigh impossible.

Article 356 was optimistically termed a "dead letter" by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, to be used sparingly. Yet, as H.V. Kamath aptly remarked, "Dr. Ambedkar is dead, and the Articles are very much alive", reflecting the misuse that is implicit in this provision as a tool of political expediency. From 1950 to 1994, successive governments, notwithstanding their political hue, indulged in the misuse of Article 356 to the extent of dismissing 'politically obnoxious' elected State governments. Even after the S.R. Bommai case judgment, which aims to restore the federal government's rights and limit the arbitrary acts of Governors, incidents continue. Its frequent invocation – over 130 times since Independence – has distorted that purpose.

Defection has also emerged as a strong threat to the stability of State governments. Democratically-elected governments have fallen after legislators have changed sides over various enticements. It was to prevent this form of democratic erosion that the Anti-Defection Law was enacted through the 52nd Amendment Act of 1985 as part of the Tenth Schedule of the Constitution, which attracts the disqualification penalty against defectors. But there are still loopholes. The absence of any sort of time-bound framework for Speakers to decide on disqualification petitions and provisions for "group defections" has rendered the law ineffective. The result is that defections are still commonplace, leading to unconstitutional changes in regimes.

'One Nation One Election' should not become a device for the centralisation of powers; issues such as a strengthening of anti-defection laws cannot be glossed over

This is where the proposition put forward by the ONOE to align State election cycles with that of the Lok Sabha gets deeply problematic. In fact, the proposal goes all the way to make amendments in the Constitution, particularly in Articles 83 and 172, which guarantee a five-year term for Parliament and State Assemblies. Some blatant omissions in the governance regime include the misuse of Article 356 and the inadequacy of anti-defection laws. The State governments would face a much tighter squeeze in the ONOE, as their terms would be curtailed or extended to bring them in line with the national election cycle. This reduction in State autonomy is more than an administrative nuisance. It constitutes a deep attack on the federalist structure of the Constitution.

**Federal structure under siege**

The federal system of India, being a basic feature of Indian democracy, enables States to function as relatively independent units in solving problems of a localised nature. State elections that would have to be held along with the national elections would blur and impair the ability of electors to evaluate the performance of the State government. If the ONOE is held and if there happens to be a midterm ONOE, then State governments which were elected only for 'abbreviated' tenures would breach the democratic principle of "one person, one vote, one value". In case a State government falls midterm, say after three years, the ONOE would lead to elections for a new government that would serve only the remaining time in the synchronised electoral cycle, roughly two years.

This cuts down the tenure of a government, making the mandate of the voter of little value; a new government would not complete its full term, reducing the democratic principle of complete representation. Truncated terms are not only an issue when it comes to State governments but are also of concern to the Lok Sabha too. For instance, from the political turbulence of the mid-1990s, there were elections in 1996, 1998, and 1999.

In fact, if the ONOE had been in place, there would have been another election in 2001, which would add up to four elections in five years. The frequency of elections results in increased costs – financial, administrative, and in terms of human capital – which are not realised in the efficiency that the ONOE is touted to bring. On nominal and practical grounds, each government needs a realistic time period to analyse the existing socio-political- economic state of affairs, frame adaptive policies and do course corrections. This artificially imposed reduction in the tenure of a government could disrupt governance, resulting in negative consequences that outweigh the usual policy paralysis caused by the enforcement of the Model Code of Conduct during elections.

The challenges in terms of logistics in implementing the ONOE are monumental. India's large electorate base, of over 900 million voters, demands enormous resources to conduct elections. If the Lok Sabha, State and local body elections are aligned, the burden would increase manifold and eventually affect the ECI, security forces, and administrative machinery. The risk of voter fatigue and confusion cannot be ruled out.

**Address the issues first**

There needs to be reflection before the ONOE can be espoused for fiscal and administrative efficiencies. There is a need to revisit some of the systemic challenges that plague State governments. There needs to be course correction to ensure that the ONOE does not become a device for the centralisation of powers without addressing issues such as the misuse of Article 356, a strengthening of anti-defection laws, and the issue of the stability of State governments. The federal character of the Constitution is not an arrangement in procedure but a recognition of the diversity and the plurality that constitute the country. Forcing States to fall in line with a unified electoral cycle unduly erodes the autonomy of States and dilutes the democratic essence of governance.

A hurried imposition of the ONOE, without sets of systemic reforms that are necessary to stem the erosion of federalism, would indeed be a frontal attack on the Constitution's basic structure. If this does not happen, then the ONOE can even be a blot instead of being deliverance for Indian democracy.

The fact that a malfunctioning fax machine sat at the heart of a cynical operation aimed at dispensing with the elected government of Jammu and Kashmir, illuminates the frailty as well as opacity regarding certain institutional processes in India, all too sharply. A few such instances make it clear that systemic reform is the immediate need so that people become accountable to the principles of the Constitution.

As long as these foundational areas remain unsorted, the ONOE, rather than solving those structural vulnerabilities, may end up making them starker. True democratic governance requires much more than a routine exercise of simultaneous elections. It is an imperative commitment to the letter and spirit of federalism and to strengthening State governments as equal partners in the federal polity of India.

# Topic → One Nation, One Election: A Double-Edged Sword for Indian Democracy

## Historical Context of Simultaneous Elections

India's journey through electoral practices has been a tapestry woven with threads of both tradition and turmoil. Interestingly, the concept of simultaneous elections is not a novel idea in the Indian political landscape.

**Initial Practices:** After Independence, the Election Commission of India (ECI) orchestrated simultaneous elections for both the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies. This model represented a period of cooperative federalism, where elections were conducted in a synchronized manner, allowing for a cohesive governance framework.

**Disruption by Article 356:** The tranquility of this system was disrupted with the introduction of Article 356, often referred to as President's Rule. This provision, which allows the central government to assume control over a state in times of political instability, marked a pivotal shift in Union-State relations. The first invocation in Kerala during 1959 set a precedent that many argue undermined state autonomy.

**Misuse and Historical Evolution:** Over time, successive governments have invoked Article 356 more than 130 times, often using it as a political tool against 'unfavorable' state governments. This misuse has raised questions about the integrity of federalism in India. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar’s optimistic view of Article 356 as a "dead letter" contrasts sharply with its active use in contemporary politics

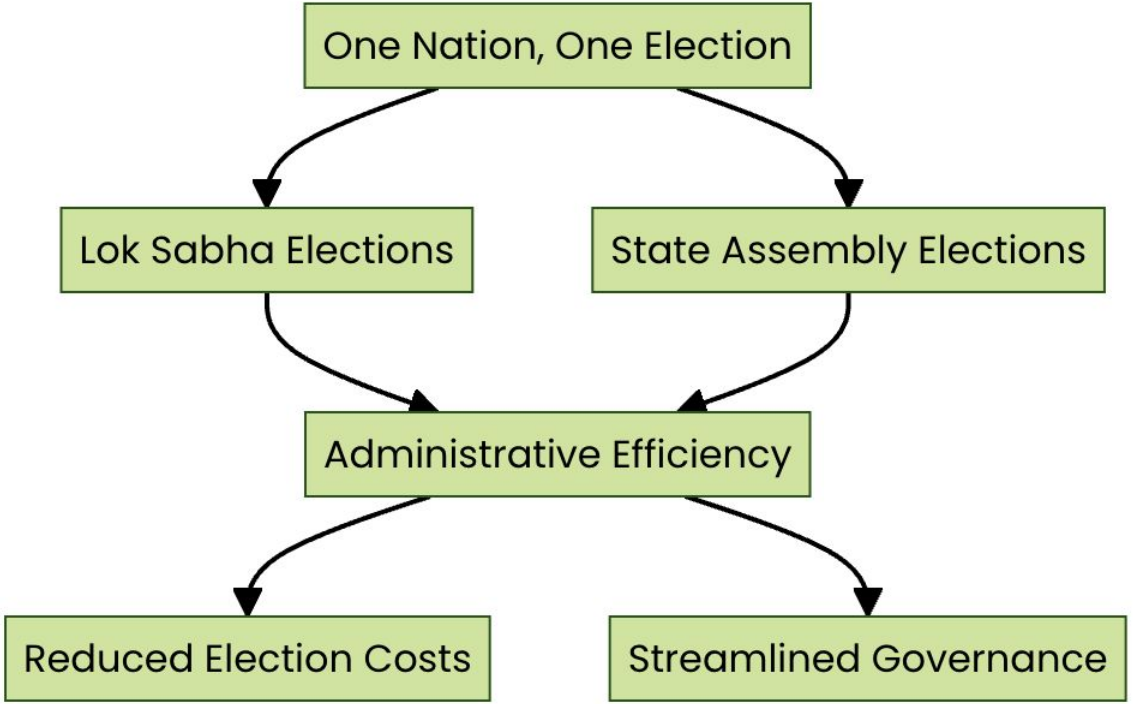
# The Proposal of One Nation, One Election

The One Nation, One Election (ONOE) proposal has been a cornerstone of the current government's electoral strategy. But what does it entail?

**Framework Overview:** The ONOE aims to synchronize Lok Sabha and State Assembly elections, thereby consolidating the electoral calendar. This proposal is rooted in the belief that conducting elections simultaneously will yield administrative and fiscal efficiencies.

**Proponents' Claims:** Advocates argue that this model will reduce election fatigue, lower costs of conducting multiple elections, and streamline governance. They contend that it will enable governments to focus more on policy implementation rather than being in perpetual election mode.

**Constitutional Amendments Needed:** Implementing the ONOE would necessitate significant amendments to the Constitution, particularly Articles 83 and 172, which stipulate the tenure of Parliament and State Assemblies. This raises concerns about the implications for democratic representation and the autonomy of state governments


One Nation, One Election
Lok Sabha Elections
State Assembly Elections
Administrative Efficiency
Reduced Election Costs
Streamlined Governance

## Implications for Federal Structure and State Autonomy

The ramifications of the ONOE proposal extend far beyond mere administrative efficiencies; they delve deep into the fabric of India's federal structure.

**Erosion of State Autonomy:** By aligning state election cycles with national ones, the ONOE threatens to dilute the autonomy of state governments. This could lead to a scenario where state governments are perceived as mere extensions of the central authority, undermining the principle of cooperative federalism.

**Impact on Voter Evaluation:** Holding state elections alongside national elections could impair voters' ability to evaluate state government performance independently. The amalgamation of issues at the national and state levels could lead to voter confusion, ultimately affecting the quality of representation.

**Truncated Mandates**: A particularly concerning aspect of the ONOE is the potential for truncated tenures. If a state government falls midterm, a new government might only serve a fraction of its intended term, thereby violating the democratic principle of "one person, one vote, one value".

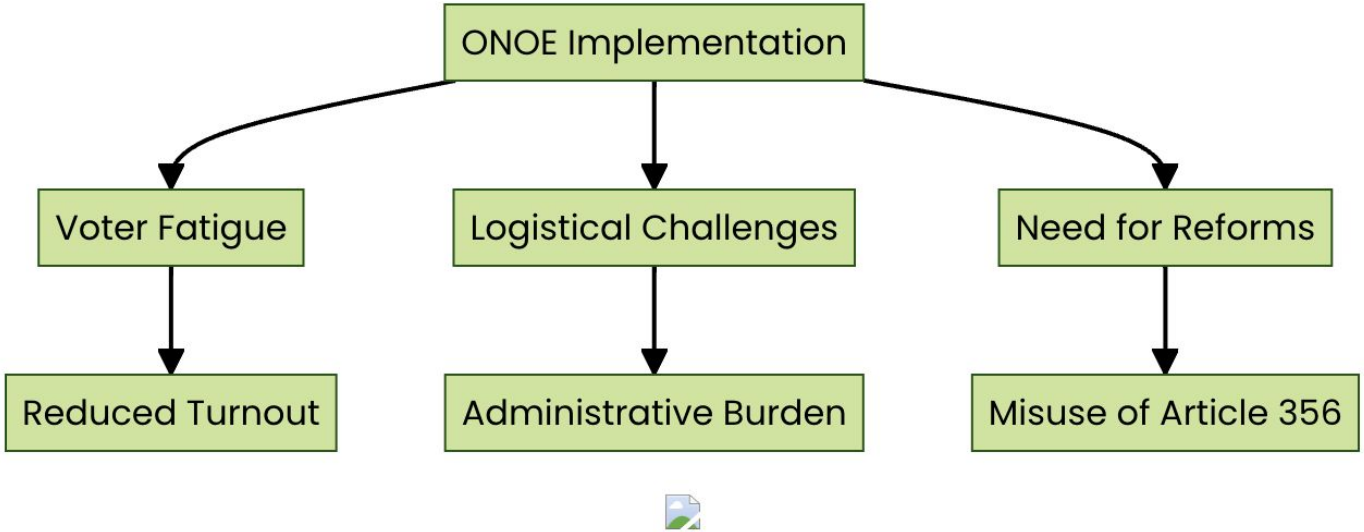
## Challenges and Logistics of Implementation

While the ONOE proposal is ambitious, its implementation poses monumental challenges that cannot be overlooked.

**Voter Fatigue:** The sheer scale of synchronizing elections for over 900 million voters raises concerns about voter fatigue and confusion. The logistical challenges of managing such a vast electorate are significant, potentially impacting voter turnout and engagement.

**Historical Election Frequencies:** Historical data reveals that the frequency of elections has varied significantly over the years, with multiple elections occurring within short spans. For instance, the mid-1990s saw elections in 1996, 1998, and 1999, highlighting the unpredictability of Indian electoral politics.

**Need for Systemic Reforms:** Before any consideration of the ONOE, it is imperative to address systemic challenges such as the misuse of Article 356 and the inadequacies of anti-defection laws. Only through comprehensive reforms can the integrity of India's democratic framework be preserved


ONOE Implementation
Voter Fatigue
Logistical Challenges
Need for Reforms
Reduced Turnout
Administrative Burden
Misuse of Article 356

# India, cross-border insolvency and legal reform

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The growth in international trade has amplified cross-border insolvency challenges, highlighting the need for effective regulation. A reliable and predictable insolvency framework is essential for economic stability, attracting foreign investments, and facilitating corporate restructuring.

Under the British Raj, India faced significant challenges in managing financial failures and cross-border commerce. To address domestic insolvencies, the Indian Insolvency Act of 1848 was introduced as the first insolvency law. This was later replaced by the Presidency-Towns Insolvency Act 1909, which applied to Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras, and the Provincial Insolvency Act, 1920, which governed insolvencies in mofussil regions. While these laws provided a framework for handling domestic insolvencies, they failed to address the complexities of cross-border insolvencies, leaving a critical gap in the legal system.

**An evolution**

After Independence, these laws remained unchanged, despite the Third Law Commission's 26th Report (1964) recommending modernisation. It was only in the 1990s, driven by economic liberalisation and the pressures of globalisation, that the need for a comprehensive insolvency law, with provisions for cross-border cases, became a focus of national discussions. Committees such as the Eradi Committee (2000), Mitra Committee (2001), and Irani Committee (2005) recommended adopting the United Nations Commission On International Trade Law (UNCITRAL) Model Law on Cross-Border Insolvency, 1997. In 2015, the Bankruptcy Law Reform Committee, drafted the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) Bill, focusing on domestic insolvencies.

Following concerns from the Joint Parliamentary Committee about the absence of cross-border insolvency provisions, clauses 233A and 233B were added, later codified as Sections 234 and 235 of the IBC. Section 234 allows the Indian government to enforce IBC provisions in foreign countries through reciprocal agreements, while Section 235 outlines the procedure for seeking assistance from foreign courts through a letter of request.

The dismal state of cross-border insolvency law and regulation, with unenforceable governing sections and slow progress on amendments, needs to be reversed

**Cross-border insolvency challenges in India**

*The State Bank of India vs Jet Airways (India) Limited* (2019, SCC OnLine NCLT 7875), brought Sections 234 and 235 of the IBC under scrutiny. The National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) identified two critical issues – first, the absence of a reciprocal arrangement between India and the Netherlands for cross-border insolvency resolution, and, second, the non-notification of these sections by the central government, making them legally unenforceable. The case highlighted the inactive status of these provisions, effectively labelling them as "dead letters" – provisions that exist in theory but cannot be applied in practice.

To address this regulatory gap, the Ministry of Corporate Affairs constituted two expert committees: the Insolvency Law Committee (2018) and the Cross-Border Insolvency Rules/Regulation Committee (2020). Both committees identified the shortcomings in the current framework and recommended adopting the UNCITRAL Model Law on Cross-Border Insolvency. These recommendations were later endorsed by the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Finance in its Thirty-Second Report, "Implementation of IBC - Pitfalls and Solutions" (2021), and reiterated in its Sixty-Seventh Report", (2024).

In both reports, the Standing Committee stressed the urgent need for a cross-border insolvency framework to strengthen the IBC, 2016. However, the dismal state of cross-border insolvency regulation in India persists, with unenforceable governing sections and extremely slow progress on necessary amendments.

In *Jet Airways (India) Limited vs State Bank of India* (2019 (SCC OnLine NCLAT 1216), the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) considered a "cross-border insolvency protocol", an internationally recognised approach now used as an ad hoc solution for regulating cross-border insolvencies.

**The need for reform**

First, while protocols have been effective in addressing individual cases, they remain an ad hoc/temporary solution. The need for court approvals increases judicial burden, transaction costs, and delays resolutions, reducing the debtor's asset value. Experts underline the importance of adopting a structured framework. Therefore, it is recommended that India adopt the UNCITRAL Model Law.

Second, reforming the outdated communication methods between Indian and foreign courts is crucial, especially for cross-border insolvency cases. The adoption of the Judicial Insolvency Network (JIN) Guidelines (2016) and its Modalities of Court-to-Court Communication (2018) would modernise judicial coordination, enhance transparency, and improve efficiency in handling cross-border insolvency matters.

Third, Section 60(5) of the IBC, with its non-obstante clause, restricts civil courts from exercising jurisdiction over insolvency matters, including cross-border cases, leaving the NCLT as the sole adjudicating authority. However, the NCLT lacks the power to recognise or enforce foreign judgments or proceedings, which significantly limits its effectiveness in managing cross-border insolvency matters. This limitation is further exacerbated by the failure to implement Rule 11 of the NCLAT Rules, 2016, for IBC matters, preventing the NCLT from exercising inherent jurisdiction or comity to address cross-border insolvency issues. To resolve these challenges and ensure effective management of cross-border insolvency cases, it is imperative to expand the powers of the NCLT.

Implementing these key recommendations will pave the way for India to develop a strong and sustainable framework for managing cross-border insolvencies.

# Topic → The Growth of International Trade and Cross-Border Insolvency Challenges

**Introduction**

With international trade booming, businesses are crossing borders like never before. But with this growth comes a whole new set of challenges, especially when it comes to managing financial failures across different countries.

## Historical Context of Insolvency in India

## The Indian Insolvency Act of 1848

Back in the day, under British rule, India faced significant hurdles in managing financial failures. The Indian Insolvency Act of 1848 was the first attempt to tackle domestic insolvencies. It was a step in the right direction, but it didn't quite cover the complexities of cross-border insolvencies.

## The Presidency-Towns Insolvency Act 1909

Fast forward to 1909, and we saw the introduction of the Presidency-Towns Insolvency Act, which applied to major cities like Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras. This act was a bit more refined but still left a lot to be desired when it came to handling cross-border issues.

## The Provincial Insolvency Act 1920

Then came the Provincial Insolvency Act of 1920, which aimed to govern insolvencies in the mofussil regions. While these laws provided a framework for domestic insolvencies, they didn't address the complexities of cross-border insolvencies, leaving a critical gap in the legal system.

## The Evolution of Insolvency Laws Post-Independence

## Recommendations for Modernization

After India gained independence, these laws remained unchanged for decades. It wasn't until the 1990s, driven by economic liberalization and globalization, that the need for a comprehensive insolvency law became a hot topic. The Third Law Commission's 26th Report in 1964 had already recommended modernization, but it took a while for things to pick up.

## The Role of the Bankruptcy Law Reform Committee

In 2015, the Bankruptcy Law Reform Committee drafted the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) Bill, focusing primarily on domestic insolvencies. However, concerns about cross-border insolvency provisions led to the introduction of Sections 234 and 235.

# The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC)

## Sections 234 and 235 Explained

These sections allow the Indian government to enforce IBC provisions in foreign countries through reciprocal agreements and outline the procedure for seeking assistance from foreign courts.

## Cross-Border Insolvency Challenges in India

### The Jet Airways Case

The case of State Bank of India vs Jet Airways (India) Limited in 2019 brought Sections 234 and 235 under scrutiny. The National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) identified two major issues: the lack of a reciprocal arrangement between India and the Netherlands and the non-notification of these sections by the central government, rendering them legally unenforceable.

### Regulatory Gaps Identified

This case highlighted the inactive status of these provisions, effectively labeling them as “dead letters.” To address this gap, the Ministry of Corporate Affairs formed expert committees to identify shortcomings and recommend adopting the UNCITRAL Model Law on Cross-Border Insolvency.

# The Need for Reform

## Structured Framework Adoption

While ad hoc solutions have been effective in individual cases, they're not sustainable. Experts emphasize the need for a structured framework, recommending that India adopt the UNCITRAL Model Law.

### Modernizing Communication Methods

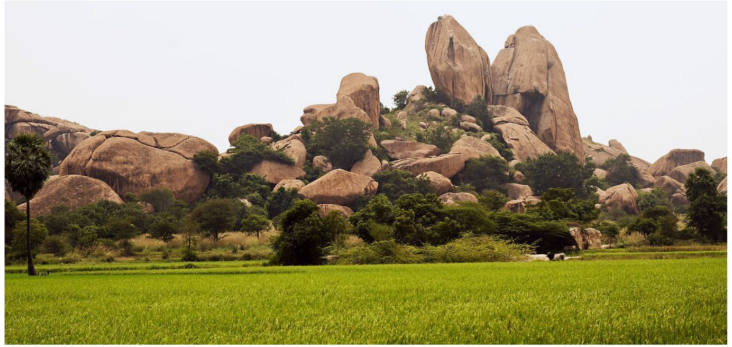
Reforming outdated communication methods between Indian and foreign courts is crucial. Adopting the Judicial Insolvency Network (JIN) Guidelines would modernize judicial coordination and improve efficiency in handling cross-border insolvency matters.

## Expanding NCLT Powers

Currently, the NCLT lacks the power to recognize or enforce foreign judgments, which limits its effectiveness. Expanding its powers is essential for effective management of cross-border insolvency cases.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the growth of international trade has indeed amplified cross-border insolvency challenges. A reliable and predictable insolvency framework is not just a legal necessity; it's vital for economic stability and attracting foreign investments. By modernizing our laws and adopting structured frameworks, India can pave the way for a robust system that effectively manages cross-border insolvencies.



Arittapatti, a biodiversity heritage site, at Melur taluk in Madurai. G. MOORTHY

# In Madurai, mining for tungsten and trouble

There have been sustained protests in Madurai district of Tamil Nadu ever since the Union government announced in November 2024 that it had granted tungsten mining rights in eight blocks to Hindustan Zinc, a subsidiary of Vedanta. The residents of the region, particularly Melur taluk, which has the Arittapatti biodiversity heritage site, worry about their land, lives, and livelihoods, reports **C. Palanivel Rajan**

On the hot afternoon of December 29, more than 300 women at Kesampatti village in Melur taluk in Madurai district, stand in a circle. Most of them are daily wage labourers or farm workers and are of different ages. Clad in colourful sarees, the women clap their hands, sing, and dance in a synchronised fashion. This is *kummi*, a folk dance that is performed in parts of Tamil Nadu.

However, this is not a festival or religious event, when *kummi* is generally performed; it is a protest site at the entrance of the village. Through performance, the women are agitating against the Union government's proposed extraction of tungsten, a rare element found in this region, which is critical for automobile and defence industries and green energy technologies. *Engu mala sami kovalkarana iranthu malkaiyum nilathoyum kappan* (Our hill god being a protector will protect both our people and land)," goes their *kummi* song.

A. Kalpana, who has never participated in a protest, says, "Our art, religion, food, culture, and tradition are interlinked with this landscape. Without our land, we will become nothing."

The *kummi* protest is part of the weekly agitations that have been organised by activists and the residents of panchayats in Melur taluk since November 7, 2024. The Ministry of Mines announced that it had granted tungsten mining rights in eight blocks, spanning 5,000 acres, through an auction, to Hindustan Zinc Limited, a subsidiary of Vedanta Limited, a listed company. The Melur region, proposed for mining, includes the villages of Arittapatti and Nayakkarpatti, which are rich in scheelite, a key source of tungsten, and are also home to several heritage sites.

On November 23, more than 20 panchayats of four panchayat unions in Madurai passed resolutions against the project. A few days later, Chief Minister M.K. Stalin urged the Modi government to cancel the award of tungsten mining rights in Madurai district and said that he would not allow it as the people were opposed to it. The Ministry, in turn, issued a statement saying "inputs were taken from the Government of Tamil Nadu before the block was put up for auction."

C. Jeeva, a resident of Kesampatti and an organiser of the protest, says, "Though we have organised similar protests and rallies against granite-quarrying in the Melur region in the past, we know that the struggle this time is against the Union Ministry and one of the biggest conglomerates in the world. It is going to be a tiring and prolonged battle, but we will persist."

> Our art, religion, food, culture, and tradition are interlinked with this landscape. Without our land, we will become nothing.
>
> **A. KALPANA**
> Protester

### Anger in Arittapatti

K. Selvaraj, 44, an environmental activist based in Kambur village near Melur taluk, is critical of the Ministry's decision of naming the project after a hamlet of about 20 houses.

"By naming it after Nayakkarpatti, they made sure that it did not get immediate attention from the public. If it had been named Melur or Madurai tungsten block, the opposition to this would have been instant and more intense," he says.

Selvaraj has been part of protests earlier. Last year, hundreds of residents from over 15 villages in Melur taluk staged a sit-in protest at Sekkipatti village condemning the district administration for inviting tenders for the operation of granite quarries in the taluk. This time, he was among the first few to oppose the project through petitions and Gram Sabha resolutions. "I went around telling people about the problems that the project will cause, and organised meetings to discuss protests and legal remedies," he says.

Selvaraj says no panchayat president opposed the resolutions. "Since, this is a government project, some of the presidents were hesitant to record our resolutions, but eventually they agreed," he says.

The protests and resolutions, Selvaraj says, were necessary, since Nayakkarpatti block comprises 11 villages, including Arittapatti, a biodiversity heritage site.

A. Durka Devi, 26, the only postgraduate degree holder from Nayakkarpatti, says the seven rocky granite hills that include areas of the Koolampatti, Arittapatti, Nayakkarpatti, and Meenakshipuram villages have historical significance. "These hills contain evidence dating back to the 16th century Pandya kingdom. They also feature several megalithic structures, rock-cut temples, Tamil Brahmi inscriptions, and Jain beds. If not for these historical records, this place would have been turned into stone, dust, and sand long ago," she says.

Noting the importance of the Melur region, a group of archaeologists, including C. Santhalingam, released a statement supporting the people's protest against the mining project. In it, they wrote that two Brahmi stone inscriptions dating back 2,300 years could be found in the Kazhinja malai, one of the seven hills. They also said that the Laguleesar sculpture in a 7th-8th century rock cut temple in the area was rare and should never be disturbed.

Devi says Arittapatti was notified as Tamil Nadu's first biodiversity heritage site in 2022. The site covers the Arittapatti and Meenakshipuram villages in Madurai district. "It houses around 250 species of birds, including three raptors – the Laggar falcon, the Shaheen falcon, and Bonelli's eagle; 200 natural spring ponds; and three check dams," she says, the information at her fingertips. The region is also home to wildlife, including the Indian pangolin and slender loris.

The rocky hills stand tall and are surrounded

Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam leader, Vaiko, staging a protest at Melur taluk against the proposed project in Madurai. G.MOORTHY

> The people know that the State government had no say in projects like these. But our hope is that the government will at least stand by our side
>
> **K. SELVARAJ**
> Environmental activist

by green patches of farmland. The farms, which are mostly fed by the Mullaperiyar dam, use the ponds as their water source, say residents.

Given the massive opposition to the project, especially in Arittapatti, on December 24 the government asked the Geological Survey of India to redefine the boundaries of the Nayakkarpatti block by excluding the biodiversity heritage site from it. It also asked the Tamil Nadu government to keep the process of issuing the Letter of Intent to the preferred bidder, Hindustan Zinc, on hold for the time being.

But the resurvey order caused more fear. The residents say they had thought the project was coming to a halt altogether as the Tamil Nadu government had passed a resolution in the State Assembly on December 9 saying it would not allow the mining project.

Selvaraj sits on one of the hillocks near Arittapatti along with villagers to discuss the next steps. They decide that they will embark on a 25-kilometre-long protest march from Narasingampatti in Melur taluk to Tallakulam in Madurai city on January 7.

Turning away from the villagers, Selvaraj says the entire population of Melur taluk depends on land for their livelihood, as their primary income is through farming and livestock management. But more importantly, the people consider the hills sacred, he says.

"Humans who did some sort of sacrifice for the village or to the people became gods. And they now reside in these hills, so we celebrate them and worship them," says K. Revathi, 25, an agricultural worker from Nayakkarpatti.

Devi says she does not understand the Union government's plan. "What is the point of saying they will leave out Arittapatti alone when they want to destroy the rest?" she asks.

### The State government's say

There is also suspicion about the State government's position and motives. I. Selvam, 42, a farmer in Arittapatti, says while the State government had initially said it was against the mining project, Ministers have been trying to prevent villagers from passing resolutions at Gram Sabha meetings. "Knowing that the Gram Sabha decisions will have an effect on the implementation of the project, Commercial Taxes and Registration Minister P. Moorthy (representing Madurai East) influenced the villagers and told them not to pass resolutions during meetings," Selvam alleges. "The people know that the State government had no say in projects like these. But our hope is that the government will at least stand by our side."

In an order dated October 21, 2024, the Ministry of Mines had said that it had been empowered to auction blocks for the grant of an exploration license under Section 20A of the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957.

Citing the amendment, R.S. Mughlan, an environmental activist known for his agitation against the Sterlite copper plant in Thoothukudi and the Kudankulam nuclear power plant in Tirunelveli, says the State government's authority over resources has always been limited in matters of national interest, such as nuclear power.

"This was evident yet again when Union Minister of State R. Sudha asked in the Lok Sabha whether the Union government would loan oil and gas exploration activities in the delta districts, which have been declared as special agricultural zones by the State government," says Mughlan. "The Union Minister of State, Kirti Vardhan Singh, replied that certain areas were notified as eco-sensitive zones or areas based on proposals from States, but said that there was no such proposal from the Tamil Nadu government."

Mughlan says all political parties want to play the blame game. The All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam has opposed the project through protests and rallies and has also held the ruling Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam government responsible for auctioning the mine. The BJP has slammed the two Dravidian parties for "misleading" the people. Bharatiya Janata Party State President K. Annamalai, who finds himself in a tricky spot, has said he has appealed to the Minister for Mines, G. Kishan Reddy, to keep the project on hold. Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam leader Vaiko has accused the Centre of awarding the tungsten mining contract to Hindustan Zinc without consulting the State government. "In the midst of this, political parties fail to understand the toll that so-called developmental projects take on the lives of the people," he says.

He explains the potential effects of the tungsten project: "Studies in China show that communities near tungsten mining sites have experienced elevated levels of tungsten in soil and water, leading to increased health risks. What assurance do the people of Madurai have that their health and lives will be fine?"

Mughlan cites the Bhopal gas tragedy as an instance of government apathy. "It took 40 years for the government to remove hundreds of tonnes of toxic waste from Bhopal from the chemical factory. This shows India's backwardness in dealing with such tragedies," he adds.

After submitting a petition to G. Kishan Reddy during the last Parliament session, Madurai MP Su. Venkatesan organised a protest along with fellow cadres of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) in Melur to inform people about the importance of their role in opposing the project.

"Though the resolution passed by the Tamil Nadu government in the Assembly may have political value, it has no legal value owing to the amendment passed in 2023 (to strengthen the extraction and exploration of critical minerals)," Venkatesan explains. As the Union government has turned a deaf ear to the people's demands, the people must keep protesting, he says.

### The need for critical minerals

M. Vertiselvan, an advocate and a member of Poovulagin Nanbargal, an environmental organisation based in Tamil Nadu, says, "Critical minerals, which were included in the Act in 2023, have geopolitical value. Following the U.S. government's 2008 policy to secure critical minerals to shift the country's dependence from fossil fuels to renewable energy, the international market for critical minerals such as tungsten has been opened. That is why the Indian government has rushed out ways to secure critical minerals located in various places in the country."

Vertiselvan says if the State government truly objects to the project, it will have to pass a law to protect the natural resources of Melur taluk, similar to what it did to safeguard the delta region.

Selvaraj remembers how the protesters confronted representatives of the Geological Survey of India when officials visited the areas to study rocks. "It ended in an argument. We were unaware that the study was the first step towards destroying our livelihoods," he says.

He says in addition to the Nayakkarpatti tungsten block, another 35,000 hectares of land in Kambalpatti, Rayarpatti, and Rajamanpatti in Melur taluk have been studied and are ready to be auctioned. "Now, all they have to do is sanction the project," he says.

Mookayi, a woman in her 70s, standing next to Selvaraj, points to a hilltop and narrates the folktale of a village informer, Vemban, who protected the villagers from robbers and invaders. She says he starved to death on the same hill after the robbers pushed away the ladder that he would use to climb to the hilltop. To honour his life, the hillock was named Kazhinja malai.

Mookayi believes that Vemban still protects the village from the hilltop. "He will prevent this region from turning into dust," she says.

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## Topic → Tungsten Reserves in India

India is home to significant tungsten reserves, predominantly concentrated in certain states. The primary regions for tungsten mining include:

**Andhra Pradesh:** Known for its rich mineral deposits.
**Himachal Pradesh:** Emerging as a key player in tungsten production.
**Uttarakhand:** A vital area contributing to the national supply.

### Global Comparison

While India holds promising reserves, it is essential to place these figures within a global context. Countries like China and Russia dominate the tungsten market, making India’s role crucial yet challenging.

## Economic Impact of Tungsten Mining

The economic implications of tungsten mining in India are profound. Key contributions include:

**Job Creation:** Mining operations provide employment opportunities, bolstering local economies.
**Community Development:** Increased revenue can lead to improved infrastructure and services.

## National Economic Contribution

Tungsten mining also plays a vital role in contributing to India's GDP, as the demand for this mineral grows both domestically and internationally.

## Environmental and Regulatory Challenges

Despite its economic benefits, tungsten mining poses environmental concerns:

**Land Degradation:** Mining activities can lead to deforestation and soil erosion.
**Water Contamination:** Improper waste disposal can contaminate local water sources.

## Regulatory Framework

India’s regulatory framework aims to mitigate these challenges, but enforcement remains a hurdle. Ensuring compliance with environmental norms is crucial for sustainable mining practices.

## Future Prospects and Trends

The future of tungsten mining in India looks promising, with several trends emerging:

**Technological Advancements:** Innovations in mining technology can enhance efficiency and reduce environmental impacts.
**Growing Global Demand:** As industries expand, the demand for tungsten will likely increase, positioning India favorably in the global market.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, while India’s tungsten mining industry faces challenges, the potential for growth and economic impact is substantial. By addressing environmental concerns and leveraging technological advancements, India can secure its place in the global tungsten market.

# Tungsten Mining and Global Production Overview

## Primary Deposits in India

- 🏔️ **Significant Locations:**
  - Rajasthan: Degana mines
  - Andhra Pradesh: Srikakulam
  - Karnataka: Chitradurga and Mysuru

## Current Status

- 📉 **Import Dependency:** India heavily relies on imports due to limited domestic production capabilities.

## Global Reserves

- 🌍 **Major Holders:**
  - China: Over 80% of global production
  - Russia and Canada: Other significant reserves

# Trump calls to 'open up' North Sea and get rid of windmills

**Reuters**
WASHINGTON

U.S. President-elect Donald Trump called to "open up" the North Sea and get rid of windmills in a post on his social media platform Truth Social on Friday.

Oil companies have been steadily exiting the North Sea in recent decades with production declining from a peak of 4.4 million barrels of oil equivalent per day (boe/d) at the start of the millennium to around 1.3 million boe/d today.

**Apache's exit**

Mr. Trump's post was in response to a report about U.S. oil and gas producer APA Corp's unit Apache's plans to exit North Sea by year-end 2029.

**Oil production in the region declined from 4.4 mn barrels a day to around 1.3 mn barrels a day today**

North Sea production to fall by 20% year over year in 2025.

In October last year, the British government said it would increase a windfall tax on North Sea oil and gas producers to 38% from 35% and extend the levy by one year.

The government wants to use the revenue from oil and gas to raise funds for renewable energy projects.

North Sea producers have warned that the higher tax rate could lead to a sharp drop in investments and are exiting from the ageing basin ahead of the


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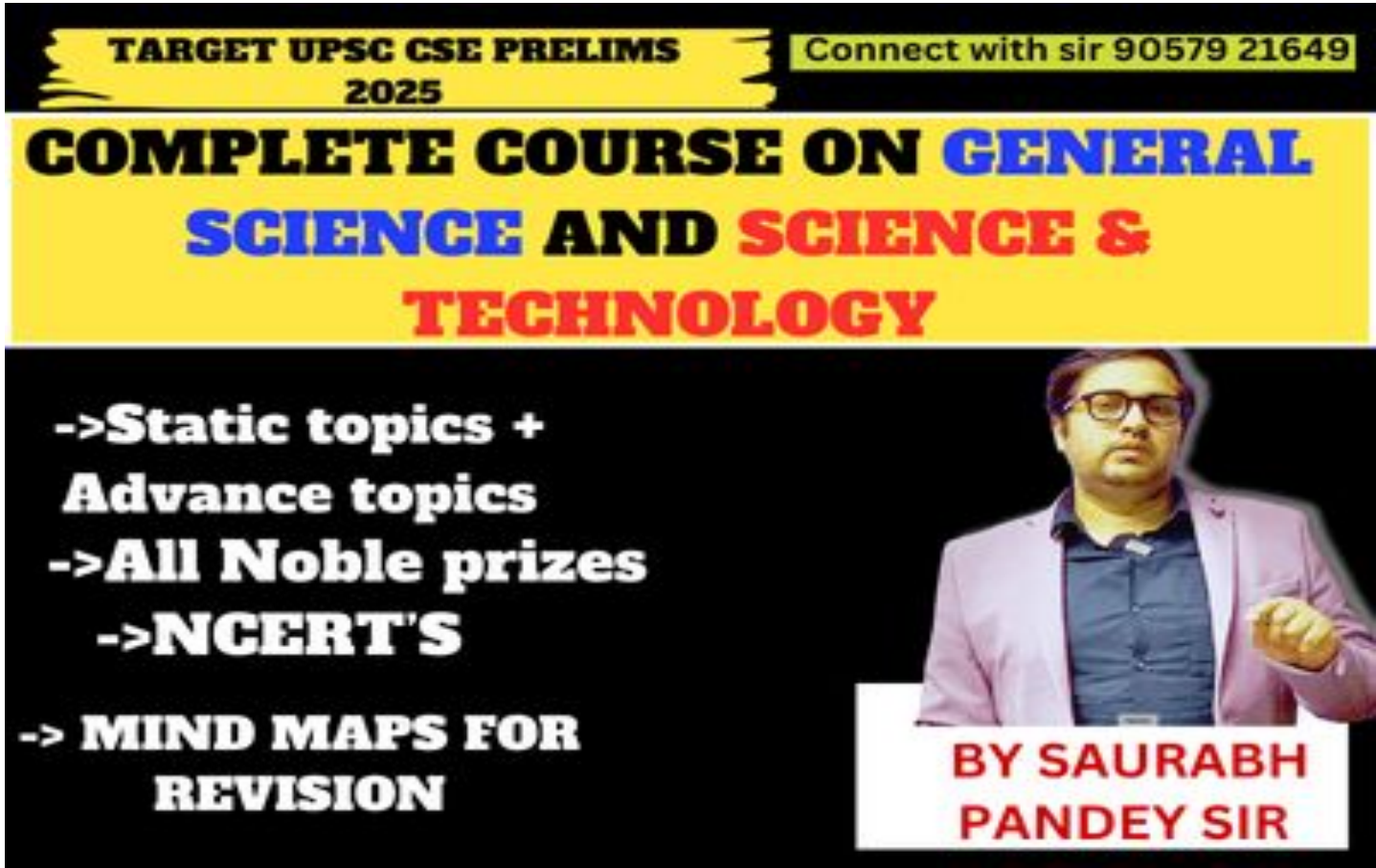

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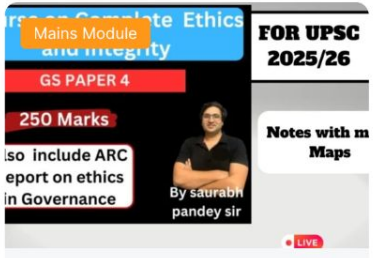


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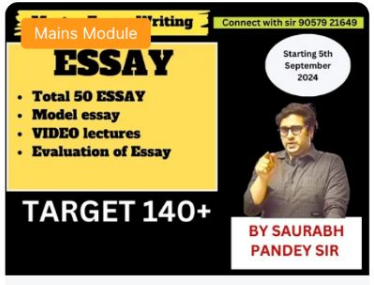


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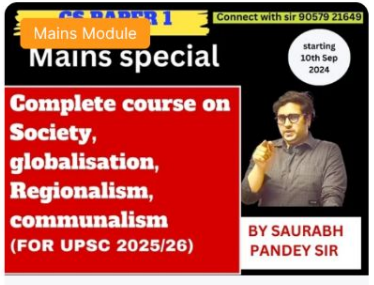


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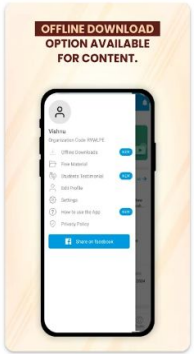



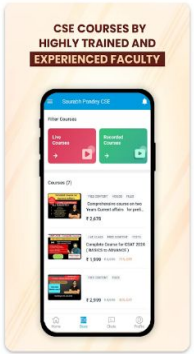


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**Q. With reference to the Sangit Kalanidhi Award consider the following statements. (The Hindu)**

**1) Is the title awarded annually to a Hindustani musician by the Indore Music Academy.**

**2) From 1929 to 1941, the award did not exist.**

**Whichever of the given statements is/are correct.**

**A) 1 Only**

**B) 2 Only**

**C) Both 1 and 2**

**D) Neither 1 or 2**

**Ans: B**

**Sangita Kalanidhi is the title awarded annually to a Carnatic musician by the Madras Music Academy.**

# Target Mains -2025/26 -

**Q** Essay topic → “Be who you are and say what you feel, because those who mind don't matter, and those who matter don't mind.”