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DAILY PRACTICE QUESTIONS

BEST FOR UPSC | UP PCS EXAM

DATE : **SEPTEMBER 23, 2026**



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DAILY PRACTICE QUESTIONS FROM STATIC PART

Q1. With reference to the classical dance traditions of India, consider the following statements:

1. **Sattriya**, which developed within the *sattras* of Assam, was historically associated with the Vaishnavite religious tradition initiated by Srimanta Sankardeva.
2. **Kuchipudi**, unlike Sattriya, developed entirely as a courtly dance tradition and had no historical association with religious or theatrical performance traditions.

Which one of the following is correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

Answer: (a)

Explanation:

Statement 1 is correct. Sattriya developed in Assam within the institutional setting of the **sattras**, the Vaishnavite monastic institutions associated with the Bhakti movement led by **Srimanta Sankardeva** and his successors. Its early performance tradition was closely connected with religious observances and devotional narratives.

Statement 2 is incorrect. Kuchipudi has a strong connection with **religious and theatrical traditions**, particularly the *Bhagavata Mela*-like performance tradition and dance-drama practices associated with the village of Kuchipudi in Andhra Pradesh. Its historical development cannot be reduced to a courtly tradition.

The conceptual trap is the assumption that the classical dances of India developed primarily in royal courts. Several of them evolved within **temple, monastery, devotional and community-based performance traditions** before acquiring wider recognition as classical forms.

Q2. In a freshwater lake receiving excessive anthropogenic nutrient inputs, which one of the following sequences most appropriately represents the progression that can lead from **eutrophication to fish mortality**?

- (a) Nutrient enrichment → increased algal productivity → decomposition of organic matter → depletion of dissolved oxygen → hypoxic/anoxic conditions
- (b) Nutrient enrichment → reduced primary productivity → increased dissolved oxygen demand by fish → oxygen supersaturation → fish mortality
- (c) Nutrient enrichment → direct chemical conversion of dissolved oxygen into nitrates → thermal stratification → permanent oxygenation of deep water
- (d) Nutrient enrichment → immediate elimination of phytoplankton → accumulation of atmospheric oxygen in bottom waters → anaerobic decomposition → fish mortality

Answer: (a)

Explanation:

Eutrophication involves the enrichment of a water body with nutrients, particularly **nitrogen and phosphorus**, often as a result of agricultural runoff, sewage and other anthropogenic sources.

Excess nutrient availability can stimulate excessive growth of algae and aquatic plants. When this biomass dies, its microbial decomposition consumes dissolved oxygen. Under favourable conditions, oxygen depletion can become severe enough to produce **hypoxia or anoxia**, particularly in deeper or poorly mixed portions of the water body.

This can cause stress or mortality among fish and other aerobic aquatic organisms.

Option (b) reverses the fundamental relationship between nutrient enrichment and primary productivity. Option (c) incorrectly describes the chemistry of eutrophication, while option (d) reverses the biological sequence. The important UPSC-level distinction is that **nutrients do not usually kill fish simply by their immediate presence; the major pathway is mediated through biological productivity and subsequent oxygen depletion.**

Q3. With reference to **dumping and countervailing measures in international trade**, consider the following statements:

1. Anti-dumping action is concerned with imports being sold at a price below the relevant normal value, whereas countervailing action addresses the injurious effects of certain subsidised imports.
2. The imposition of an anti-dumping duty necessarily establishes that the exporting country's government has provided a subsidy to the exporter.
3. Both anti-dumping and countervailing measures are trade-remedy instruments and their application is subject to prescribed investigative requirements rather than being automatically triggered merely by the existence of low-priced imports.

How many of the above statements are correct?

- (a) Only one
- (b) Only two
- (c) All three
- (d) None

Answer: (b)

Explanation:

Statement 1 is correct. **Anti-dumping measures** address situations in which a product is exported at a price considered to constitute dumping, generally involving comparison with its normal value, while **countervailing measures** are directed at the effects of certain government subsidies benefiting imported products.

Statement 2 is incorrect. Dumping and subsidisation are conceptually distinct. An exporter can engage in dumping without receiving a government subsidy. Therefore, the imposition of an anti-dumping measure does not establish the existence of a subsidy.

Statement 3 is correct. Neither a low import price by itself nor the mere existence of a subsidy automatically justifies a trade-remedy measure. Relevant investigations and findings concerning matters such as dumping/subsidisation, injury to the domestic industry and the causal relationship between the imports and injury are important components of the trade-remedy framework.

The key conceptual distinction is:

Dumping → pricing behaviour

Countervailing measure → subsidisation-related trade distortion

Thus, **Statements 1 and 3 are correct.**

Q4. With reference to the writ jurisdiction of the Supreme Court and High Courts in India, consider the following statements:

1. A writ of **Habeas Corpus** may be issued even against a private individual if a person is alleged to be unlawfully detained by that individual.
2. A writ of **Mandamus** can ordinarily be issued to compel a private individual to perform a purely private contractual obligation.
3. A writ of **Prohibition** is essentially preventive in character and is issued to restrain a judicial or quasi-judicial body from continuing proceedings beyond the limits of its jurisdiction.
4. A writ of **Certiorari** may be used not merely to correct absence or excess of jurisdiction but also, subject to constitutional limitations, to examine certain errors of law apparent in the proceedings of an inferior judicial or quasi-judicial authority.

How many of the above statements are correct?

- (a) Only one
- (b) Only two
- (c) Only three
- (d) All four

Answer: (c)

Explanation:

Statement 1 is correct. **Habeas Corpus** literally concerns the production of a detained person before the court. Its protection is not confined to detention by the State; in appropriate circumstances, it may also be directed against a private person unlawfully detaining another person.

Statement 2 is incorrect. **Mandamus** is generally issued to compel performance of a public or statutory duty. It is not ordinarily available merely to enforce a purely private contractual obligation against a private individual.

Statement 3 is correct. **Prohibition** is a preventive writ. It is issued by a superior court to prevent an inferior judicial or quasi-judicial authority from continuing proceedings in excess of or in the absence of jurisdiction. It therefore operates while the proceedings are still pending.

Statement 4 is also correct. **Certiorari** is primarily corrective and may be issued to quash an order or proceeding of an inferior court, tribunal or quasi-judicial authority where jurisdictional errors or recognised errors of law are involved, subject to the constitutional and judicial limitations governing writ jurisdiction.

The critical distinction is:

- **Prohibition** → prevents continuation of proceedings.
- **Certiorari** → ordinarily operates to quash an order/proceeding already made.
- **Mandamus** → commands performance of a public duty.
- **Habeas Corpus** → protects against unlawful detention.

Therefore, **three statements are correct.**

Q5. Consider the following Assertion and the two Reasons:

Assertion (A): Africa has the largest number of internationally recognised sovereign countries among the world's continents.

Reason 1 (R1): The present political map of Africa was significantly shaped by the territorial partition and administrative boundaries established during the colonial period.

Reason 2 (R2): The large geographical area of Africa, by itself, necessarily results in a larger number of sovereign countries than in every other continent.

Which one of the following is correct?

- (a) Both R1 and R2 are correct, and both explain A
- (b) Both R1 and R2 are correct, but only R1 explains A
- (c) R1 is correct, but R2 is incorrect, and R1 explains A
- (d) R1 is incorrect, but R2 is correct, and R2 explains A

Answer: (c)

Explanation:

The Assertion is correct under the commonly used geographical classification in which **Africa has 54 sovereign countries**, the largest number associated with any continent.

Reason 1 is correct and provides a relevant historical explanation. Africa's contemporary political map was substantially shaped by **European colonial expansion, partition and subsequent decolonisation**. Colonial administrative boundaries often became the territorial framework of newly independent states. However, Africa's present-day political geography cannot be attributed exclusively to colonialism; pre-colonial political formations, post-independence developments and other historical factors also matter.

Reason 2 is incorrect. **Geographical area does not mechanically determine the number of countries**. Asia is larger in area than Africa but has fewer countries under the commonly used classification. Likewise, political fragmentation depends upon historical, cultural, political, colonial and geopolitical processes rather than area alone.

The question therefore tests an important distinction between a **correlation with geographical size** and an actual explanation of political-territorial fragmentation.

Hence, **R1 is correct, R2 is incorrect, and R1 provides the relevant explanation for the Assertion.**

DAILY PRACTICE QUESTIONS FROM CURRENT AFFAIRS

Q1. With reference to the “**Call to Action for 6G Leadership and Security**”, consider the following statements:

1. It is a government-to-government initiative that seeks to promote secure, open, interoperable and resilient 6G networks, while also addressing risks arising from telecom supply chains.
2. India's participation in the initiative entails accepting a common supranational framework governing its domestic spectrum allocation and telecommunications policy.

Which one of the following is correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

Answer: (a)

Explanation:

Statement 1 is correct. India joined a US-led coalition of 26 governments supporting the **Call to Action for 6G Leadership and Security**. The initiative seeks coordination on secure, open, interoperable and resilient next-generation telecommunications networks. It also emphasises trusted supply chains, cybersecurity, Open RAN architectures and coordination in international standards-setting bodies.

Statement 2 is incorrect. A particularly important feature of the initiative is that it **does not replace national regulatory autonomy**. The framework explicitly preserves each participating country's independent policy choices, including **spectrum-allocation autonomy**.

The UPSC trap is to confuse **international coordination on technology standards and security** with **supranational regulation**. The former does not necessarily imply surrender of national regulatory sovereignty.

Q2. Under the **Consumer Protection (E-Commerce) (Amendment) Rules, 2026**, an e-commerce platform advertising a discount would, among other requirements, be expected to disclose:

- (a) only the maximum retail price and the discounted price, irrespective of the platform's pricing history
- (b) the discounted price and the lowest price at which the product was offered by that platform during the preceding 30 days
- (c) the average selling price of the product across all e-commerce platforms during the preceding 30 days
- (d) the lowest wholesale procurement price of the product during the preceding 30 days

Answer: (b)

Explanation:

The 2026 amendment strengthens transparency in digital pricing. Where a price reduction or discount is advertised, the platform must display both the **reduced price and the prior price**, with the latter defined as the **lowest price offered during the 30 days preceding the promotion**.

This provision is aimed at addressing potentially deceptive discount practices in which an artificially inflated "original price" is displayed merely to make a subsequent price reduction appear larger than it actually is.

The distractors deliberately introduce alternative benchmarks—MRP, industry-wide average price and wholesale procurement price—which are not the prescribed 30-day reference mechanism.

The amendment also covers other areas such as sponsored-search disclosures, search manipulation, dark-pattern compliance, grievance redressal and seller/product disclosures.

Q3. With reference to the **Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam Jan Seva Award 2026**, consider the following statements:

1. It is a civil-society recognition associated with the Sansad Ratna Awards platform rather than a constitutional or statutory award instituted by the Government of India.
2. The Prime Point Foundation, along with the Jury Committee associated with the Sansad Ratna Awards, is involved in its institution and nomination process.
3. Its scope is confined exclusively to serving Members of Parliament because the award originated within the Sansad Ratna framework.

How many of the above statements are correct?

- (a) Only one
- (b) Only two
- (c) All three
- (d) None

Answer: (b)

Explanation:

Statement 1 is correct. The Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam Jan Seva Award is described as a **civil-society recognition** under the aegis of the Sansad Ratna Awards platform. It is therefore important not to confuse it with a constitutional award or a statutory national civilian honour created by legislation.

Statement 2 is correct. The award is associated with the **Prime Point Foundation and the Jury Committee of the Sansad Ratna Awards**. The Sansad Ratna framework was established by the Prime Point Foundation in 2010, based on a suggestion of former President Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam.

Statement 3 is incorrect. The award's scope has expanded beyond parliamentarians. It can recognise **leaders, public servants and institutions** for public service, constitutional mandates, social justice and public welfare. The institutional dimension is therefore an important feature of the award.

Thus, **Statements 1 and 2 only** are correct.

Q4. Consider the following statements regarding the **Consumer Protection (E-Commerce) (Amendment) Rules, 2026**:

1. The amendment operates within the statutory framework of the Consumer Protection Act, 2019.
2. It applies to both marketplace-based and inventory-based e-commerce entities operating in India.
3. It requires e-commerce entities to become partners in the National Consumer Helpline convergence framework.
4. It treats the annual self-audit of compliance with the Guidelines for Prevention and Regulation of Dark Patterns, 2023 as a purely voluntary disclosure mechanism.

How many of the above statements are correct?

- (a) Only one
- (b) Only two
- (c) Only three
- (d) All four

Answer: (c)

Explanation:

Statement 1 is correct. The 2026 amendment is notified under the **Consumer Protection Act, 2019** and amends the Consumer Protection (E-Commerce) Rules, 2020.

Statement 2 is correct. The amended framework covers both **marketplace-based and inventory-based e-commerce entities** operating in India. This is significant because the regulatory approach is not restricted merely to platforms acting as intermediaries.

Statement 3 is correct. E-commerce entities are required to become partners in the **National Consumer Helpline (NCH) convergence framework**, thereby linking platform-level grievance mechanisms with the national consumer-support mechanism.

Statement 4 is incorrect. The amendment provides for **mandatory annual self-audits** concerning compliance with the Guidelines for Prevention and Regulation of Dark Patterns, 2023, along with prominent display of a compliance certificate on the user interface. It is therefore not merely a voluntary disclosure mechanism.

Hence, **three statements are correct.**

Q5. Consider the following statements regarding **Ecologically Sensitive Areas (ESAs)**:

1. An ESA is necessarily synonymous with a legally notified protected area such as a National Park or Wildlife Sanctuary.
2. The designation of an area as ecologically sensitive may be used as a regulatory mechanism to control or restrict activities having potentially adverse ecological consequences.
3. The identification of ecological sensitivity can involve consideration of factors such as biodiversity, landscape connectivity, fragile ecosystems and the cumulative impact of human activities.
4. An ESA notification necessarily prohibits every form of human activity within the notified area.

How many of the above statements are correct?

- (a) Only one
- (b) Only two
- (c) Only three
- (d) All four

Answer: (b)

Explanation:

Statement 1 is incorrect. An **Ecologically Sensitive Area is not synonymous with a protected area** such as a National Park or Wildlife Sanctuary. ESAs are a regulatory category intended to provide an additional layer of environmental protection around ecologically important or fragile regions.

Statement 2 is correct. The purpose of ESA designation is to **regulate or restrict activities** that may have significant ecological impacts. The approach is therefore not necessarily one of complete exclusion of human activity.

Statement 3 is correct. Ecological sensitivity can be assessed through multiple parameters, including biodiversity values, ecological fragility, landscape characteristics, wildlife habitats, connectivity and the potential cumulative effects of development.

Statement 4 is incorrect. ESA regulation does not inherently mean that **all human activity is prohibited**. Depending on the notification and applicable regulatory framework, certain activities may be prohibited, others regulated, and some permitted subject to conditions.

The conceptual distinction is therefore:

Protected area → conservation through a specific statutory protection regime

ESA → ecological sensitivity-based regulatory overlay/restriction

Thus, **Statements 2 and 3 only** are correct.

Q6. Consider the following statements about **Lipulekh Pass**:

1. It is situated in the Kumaon region of Uttarakhand.
2. It lies in the Pithoragarh district and is associated with the Vyas Valley.
3. It provides an important route towards the Tibetan region and is associated with the Kailash Mansarovar pilgrimage.
4. The geographical sensitivity of the pass is partly connected with the India–Nepal dispute concerning the source and course of the Kali River.

How many of the above statements are correct?

- (a) Only one
- (b) Only two
- (c) Only three
- (d) All four

Answer: (d)

Explanation:

All four statements are correct.

Lipulekh Pass is a **high-altitude Himalayan pass in Uttarakhand's Pithoragarh district**, within the Kumaon region and associated with the Vyas Valley. It provides an important overland connection towards the **Purang (Taklakot) region of Tibet**.

The pass has long been associated with the **Kailash Mansarovar Yatra**, giving it religious as well as strategic significance. It has also historically functioned as a cross-border trade route.

Its geopolitical sensitivity arises partly from the **Kalapani–Lipulekh–Limpiyadhura dispute between India and Nepal**. A central issue concerns the interpretation of the origin of the **Kali River**, with India and Nepal maintaining different positions concerning the location of its source and consequently the boundary alignment.

DAILY PRACTICE QUESTIONS FOR MAINS ANSWER WRITING PRACTICE

GS Paper I — Art & Culture

Q1. *Classical dance traditions in India represent not merely codified techniques of movement but complex systems in which mythology, regional traditions, music, language and institutional patronage interact. Examine with suitable examples.*

NCERT Linkage: *An Introduction to Indian Art, Part-I / Pan Indian Dance Forms*; supplemented by NCERT material on Indian performing arts. NCERT identifies forms such as Kathak, Bharatanatyam, Kathakali, Manipuri, Odissi, Kuchipudi, Mohiniyattam and Sattriya among India's classical dance traditions.

Sample Answer

Indian classical dance cannot be understood merely as a collection of formally codified movements. It represents a complex cultural system in which **religion, mythology, regional languages, music, costumes, institutions and historical patronage** have interacted over centuries. The diversity of classical dance forms therefore reflects both a shared pan-Indian aesthetic vocabulary and strong regional identities.

The conceptual foundation of many Indian dance traditions can be traced to the **Natyashastra**, which provides an important theoretical framework involving *abhinaya*, *rasa*, *bhava*, gesture and movement. However, the actual evolution of different dance forms occurred through diverse regional traditions rather than through mechanical application of a single text.

Bharatanatyam, for instance, developed within the cultural environment of Tamil Nadu and historically possessed strong associations with temples and devotional traditions. Its repertoire, *abhinaya* and musical framework remain closely connected with South Indian cultural traditions.

Kathak, in contrast, developed in northern India through the interaction of storytelling traditions, temple traditions and later courtly patronage. Its evolution demonstrates how a dance form can undergo substantial transformation when it moves between different institutional environments.

Odissi illustrates the relationship between dance, temple sculpture and devotional traditions of Odisha. Its characteristic poses and movements have visual parallels with sculptural representations found in temples.

Kuchipudi developed in Andhra Pradesh and has historically been associated with dance-drama traditions and Vaishnavite themes. Similarly, **Sattriya** developed within Assam's *sattras* under the Vaishnavite devotional tradition associated with Srimanta Sankardeva.



Thus, classical dance is also a repository of **regional memory**. Language determines the textual content of songs; local musical traditions influence accompaniment; costumes reflect regional aesthetics; and mythology provides narrative material.

At the same time, these traditions demonstrate considerable cultural interaction. Modern classical dance has also been shaped by institutionalisation, stage performance, academies, cultural organisations and national recognition. Consequently, the contemporary form of a classical dance may differ significantly from its historical social context.

The concept of "classical" itself therefore needs to be understood carefully. It does not imply that each dance form remained unchanged from antiquity. Rather, classical traditions have undergone **continuous reconstruction, codification and reinterpretation**.

Conclusion

Indian classical dances are simultaneously **regional and pan-Indian**. Their common aesthetic principles create a broader civilisational continuity, while their distinct histories preserve India's linguistic, religious and regional diversity. Their significance therefore lies not merely in technical choreography but in their ability to transmit cultural memory across generations.

GS Paper II — Election Commission of India

***Q2.** The Election Commission of India possesses extensive constitutional authority, yet the effectiveness of electoral management depends upon the institutional credibility, independence and perceived impartiality with which such authority is exercised. Discuss the constitutional basis of the Commission's powers and examine the major institutional challenges involved in maintaining public confidence in electoral processes.*

NCERT Linkage: *Indian Constitution at Work*, Chapter 3, **Election and Representation**. NCERT specifically discusses the Election Commission's constitutional position, electoral administration and the need for electoral reforms.

Sample Answer

Free and fair elections constitute the institutional foundation of representative democracy. The Constitution therefore established an independent Election Commission of India (ECI) rather than leaving the conduct of elections entirely to the executive government. Article 324 vests the ECI with the **superintendence, direction and control** of elections to Parliament, State Legislatures and the offices of President and Vice-President.

The constitutional design gives the Commission several important functions. It determines the election schedule, supervises electoral administration, recognises political parties, allots election symbols under the applicable framework, and exercises advisory and quasi-judicial functions in specified matters. The Commission can also issue directions to election officials and undertake measures intended to preserve a level playing field.

The **Model Code of Conduct** is another important instrument. Although it is not equivalent to an ordinary statute, the ECI derives significant regulatory authority from Article 324 in ensuring that electoral competition does not undermine the fairness of the process. The Commission itself identifies Article 324 as the constitutional foundation for its directions concerning free and fair elections.

However, constitutional power alone does not guarantee institutional credibility.

First, **appointments and institutional independence** are critical. The manner in which Election Commissioners are appointed can influence perceptions concerning institutional autonomy. A credible electoral institution must not merely be independent in law; it must also be perceived as sufficiently insulated from partisan influence.

Second, the Commission operates in an environment characterised by enormous political competition, social media, misinformation, campaign expenditure and increasingly sophisticated communication strategies. This creates difficulties in maintaining a level playing field.

Third, the Commission must balance **regulation with political freedoms**. Excessive intervention can raise concerns regarding political expression, while inadequate intervention can undermine electoral fairness.

Fourth, electoral disputes require consistency and transparency. Similar violations should attract reasonably consistent institutional responses if public confidence is to be maintained.

Finally, electoral integrity depends upon institutions beyond the ECI, including courts, political parties, media, civil society, election officials and voters.

Way forward

Institutional credibility can be strengthened through:

- transparent appointment and institutional procedures;
- reasoned and publicly accessible orders;
- consistent enforcement of electoral rules;
- greater transparency regarding complaints and their disposal;
- stronger technological and cybersecurity safeguards;
- enhanced voter education;
- timely adjudication of electoral disputes;
- and continuous consultation with stakeholders.

Conclusion

The ECI's constitutional position provides the **institutional foundation** for electoral integrity, but legitimacy ultimately depends upon how that authority is exercised. An effective election-management institution must combine **constitutional independence, administrative capacity, transparency, consistency and public accountability**. The objective is not merely to conduct elections on schedule but to ensure that citizens and political competitors regard the electoral process as credible.

GS Paper III — Free Trade Agreements

Q3. *Free Trade Agreements are often presented as instruments of trade liberalisation, but their developmental consequences depend upon the structure of tariff concessions, rules of origin, standards, domestic competitiveness and the adjustment capacity of vulnerable sectors. Examine in the context of India's evolving FTA strategy.*

Sample Answer

Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) are agreements through which participating countries provide preferential market access to one another by reducing or eliminating tariffs and, increasingly, addressing non-tariff barriers, services, investment and regulatory issues. For India, FTAs have increasingly become an important component of its strategy for integrating domestic production with global value chains.

The developmental impact of an FTA, however, cannot be judged merely by the nominal reduction in tariffs.

Potential benefits

The first benefit is **market access**. Lower tariffs can make Indian products more competitive in partner markets and potentially increase exports.

Second, FTAs can encourage **foreign investment**. Firms may locate production in India to use the country as an export base when preferential access to partner markets exists.

Third, deeper agreements can facilitate participation in **global value chains**. Modern manufacturing often involves inputs crossing several borders before the final product reaches consumers. Lower trade barriers can therefore improve the efficiency of production networks.

Fourth, FTAs can encourage domestic firms to improve productivity, technology and quality standards because greater exposure to international competition creates pressure for efficiency.

Potential risks

However, tariff reduction can simultaneously expose vulnerable domestic producers to greater import competition. Small enterprises and labour-intensive sectors may not possess the technological or financial capacity to adjust rapidly.

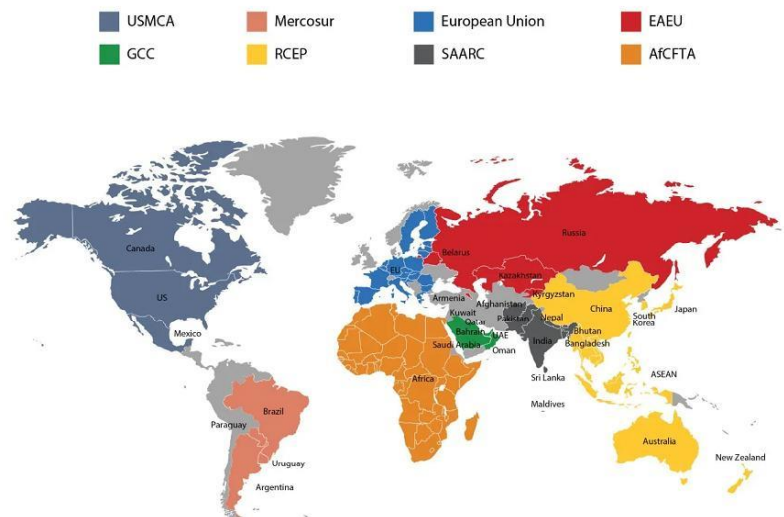
Another challenge is the **trade diversion** effect. Preferential tariffs can redirect imports towards an FTA partner even when a non-member country is a more efficient producer.

Rules of origin become particularly important. Without effective rules of origin, goods from a third country could enter India through the FTA partner and receive preferential treatment, undermining domestic producers and tariff policy.

Non-tariff barriers are equally significant. Even where tariffs are low, Indian exporters may encounter:

- technical standards;
- sanitary and phytosanitary requirements;
- certification procedures;
- labelling rules;

The World In Regional Free Trade Agreements



- environmental requirements;
- and complex customs procedures.

Therefore, an FTA does not automatically produce export growth.

India's strategic dilemma

India has to balance three objectives:

consumer welfare + domestic industrial development + export competitiveness.

A large reduction in import duties may benefit consumers through lower prices, but if domestic production capacity is destroyed, long-term industrial development can suffer.

Conversely, excessive protection can shield inefficient firms and prevent Indian enterprises from becoming internationally competitive.

Hence, the effectiveness of an FTA depends upon complementary domestic policies involving:

- logistics;
- infrastructure;
- skill development;
- quality certification;
- access to credit;
- technological upgrading;
- customs efficiency;
- and production-linked industrial policies.

FTA review mechanism

India should also insist upon systematic monitoring of existing agreements. Trade balances alone cannot provide a complete assessment. Indicators should include:

- export diversification;
- domestic value addition;
- employment;
- MSME participation;
- investment flows;
- technology transfer;
- utilisation of tariff preferences;
- and sector-specific adjustment costs.

Conclusion

An FTA should therefore not be regarded simply as a **tariff-cutting agreement**. Its developmental consequences depend upon the broader ecosystem within which trade liberalisation operates. For India, successful FTAs require a combination of **strategic negotiation abroad and competitiveness-enhancing reforms at home**. The objective should be to use international market access to strengthen domestic productive capacity rather than treating import liberalisation and export expansion as ends in themselves.

GS Paper IV — Ethics

Q4. *“Integrity in public administration is tested not when rules are absent, but when a public servant must choose between literal compliance with a rule and the larger public purpose behind that rule.” Discuss. Can administrative discretion be ethical without becoming arbitrary? Illustrate with suitable examples.*

NCERT Linkage: *Business Studies*, Chapter 6, **Social Responsibility of Business and Business Ethics**, provides a useful foundational distinction between legal compliance and ethical conduct. NCERT notes that ethical behaviour can require adherence to moral principles beyond merely observing laws and regulations.

Sample Answer

Integrity is one of the foundational values of public administration because public servants exercise authority and manage resources on behalf of citizens. However, integrity is sometimes narrowly understood as strict obedience to rules. Such an interpretation is incomplete. **Law provides the framework of administrative action, while ethics provides the moral orientation with which that framework is applied.**

Consider a welfare scheme under which an elderly beneficiary is eligible but cannot obtain a benefit because of a technical documentation requirement. An official may mechanically reject the application and claim procedural correctness. However, if the official has lawful discretion to facilitate verification through alternative evidence, using that discretion may better serve the purpose of the programme.

This illustrates the distinction between **rule compliance and rule purpose**.

Is discretion ethical?

Administrative discretion can be ethical when it satisfies certain conditions.

First, legality. Discretion cannot become a licence to disregard statutory provisions.

Second, transparency. The reasons for exercising discretion should be capable of being explained and recorded.

Third, consistency. Similar circumstances should ordinarily receive similar treatment.

Fourth, proportionality. Administrative action should not impose an excessive burden in relation to the legitimate objective being pursued.

Fifth, public interest. Discretion should be directed towards legitimate public purposes rather than personal, political or financial interests.

Ethical dangers of discretion

Discretion can become arbitrary when decisions are:

- selectively applied;

- politically motivated;
- based on personal preferences;
- discriminatory;
- opaque;
- or unsupported by objective evidence.

For example, relaxing a documentation requirement for one influential citizen while refusing the same accommodation to similarly situated vulnerable citizens would constitute an ethical failure even if the officer claims to be exercising discretion.

Thus, **compassion and impartiality must operate together.**

Integrity under conflicting pressures

Public servants may also face pressure from political superiors, colleagues, contractors or influential citizens. Integrity requires maintaining the distinction between:

lawful direction and improper influence.

An ethical administrator should document questionable instructions, seek written clarification where necessary, and use established institutional mechanisms rather than responding through personal confrontation or arbitrary refusal.

Ethical decision-making framework

A public servant facing an ethical dilemma can ask:

1. Is the proposed action legally permissible?
2. What is the purpose of the rule?
3. Who benefits and who bears the cost?
4. Would the same decision be defensible if publicly disclosed?
5. Would similarly situated citizens receive comparable treatment?
6. Is there a less restrictive alternative?
7. Does the action uphold constitutional values?

This approach combines **rule-based ethics with consequential and virtue-oriented reasoning.**

Conclusion

Integrity is therefore neither blind obedience nor unconstrained compassion. It is the capacity to **exercise lawful authority according to principled judgment.** Ethical discretion is possible when it is transparent, reasoned, proportionate, consistent and directed towards public interest. The ideal administrator does not choose between rules and ethics; rather, the administrator interprets and applies rules in a manner that advances their legitimate public purpose while remaining within the boundaries of law.

Current Affairs — Chennai Declaration of BRICS

Q5. *The Chennai Declaration adopted at the BRICS Science, Technology and Innovation Ministerial Meeting reflects an attempt to move BRICS cooperation from declarations of intent towards institutionalised collaboration in research, infrastructure, talent mobility and emerging technologies. Examine its significance for India's science diplomacy and the Global South.*

Sample Answer

The **Chennai Declaration**, also referred to as the **Chennai Consensus**, was adopted at the 14th BRICS Science, Technology and Innovation Ministerial Meeting held under India's BRICS Chairship in 2026. It seeks to strengthen cooperation among BRICS members in **science, technology, research infrastructure and innovation**. The declaration places a people-centred and humanity-first approach at the centre of BRICS science and technology cooperation.

From political grouping to knowledge partnership

BRICS has traditionally attracted attention because of its economic and geopolitical dimensions. The Chennai Declaration adds another layer: **knowledge and technological cooperation**.

This is significant because technological capabilities are increasingly central to economic competitiveness, strategic autonomy and sustainable development. Cooperation in science and technology can therefore become a mechanism through which BRICS countries build collective capabilities rather than remaining primarily diplomatic partners.

Research infrastructure

One important component is the strengthening of **BRICS GRIN**, which seeks to facilitate access to major research facilities, joint research projects, researcher mobility and capacity building.

For developing countries, expensive scientific infrastructure represents a major constraint. Shared facilities can potentially reduce duplication and allow researchers from partner countries to access capabilities that individual countries may find difficult to establish independently.

Talent mobility

Research cooperation depends not only upon laboratories but also upon **scientific communities**. Researcher mobility, academic exchanges and collaborative projects can help create long-term networks between institutions.

For India, this creates opportunities to:

- strengthen scientific partnerships;
- connect Indian institutions with international research networks;
- attract collaborative research;
- improve access to specialised infrastructure;
- and develop human capital.

Frontier technologies

The declaration also places emphasis on responsible frontier technologies. This is important because emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, biotechnology, quantum technologies and advanced materials create both developmental opportunities and governance challenges.

The phrase **people-centred development** is therefore significant. Technological progress is not treated simply as an increase in computational or industrial capability; it is linked to accessibility, sustainability and human welfare.

Global South dimension

The Chennai Consensus places the **Global South, young innovators and collaborative research** at the centre of the BRICS STI agenda.

This has potential significance because developing countries face common challenges involving:

- food security;
- public health;
- climate change;
- water security;
- clean energy;
- digital inclusion;
- and disaster resilience.

Collaborative research can allow these problems to be approached through locally relevant technological solutions rather than relying exclusively on technologies developed for very different socioeconomic contexts.

Challenges

However, institutionalising scientific cooperation is difficult.

BRICS countries differ considerably in:

- research capacity;
- intellectual-property regimes;
- funding systems;
- regulatory structures;
- technological priorities;
- geopolitical interests.

Joint declarations therefore need implementation mechanisms, predictable financing, open research networks and clear intellectual-property arrangements.

There is also a risk that technological cooperation could remain concentrated among leading institutions while smaller universities and researchers remain marginalised.

India's opportunity

For India, the Chennai Declaration provides an opportunity to connect **science diplomacy with development diplomacy**. India can use its research institutions, digital public infrastructure experience,

space capabilities, biotechnology ecosystem and growing innovation sector to develop collaborative projects with fellow BRICS members.

Conclusion

The Chennai Declaration is significant because it seeks to transform BRICS science and technology cooperation from a largely declaratory exercise into a more **networked ecosystem of shared infrastructure, researchers, knowledge and innovation**. Its long-term value will ultimately depend not on the declaration itself but on whether its commitments generate sustained funding, institutional partnerships, researcher mobility and practical technologies addressing Global South priorities.

