

25th Jan, 2025

1. Strengthening India-Indonesia Ties Beyond China Factor GS 2 (International Relations)

• Why in News:

- **The Republic Day visit** of Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto to India marks a pivotal moment in the bilateral relationship between the two nations.
- **The evolving dynamics** reflect aspirations for a broader and deeper strategic partnership, emphasizing mutual goals and regional collaboration.
- India and Indonesia must also identify areas of collaboration beyond the China factor - **The Indo-Pacific is one such domain.**

• Growing Engagement Between India-Indonesia:

- **Past diplomatic framework:**
 - During the 2nd terms of Indonesian President Joko Widodo (Jokowi) and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, foreign ministers Retno Marsudi and S. Jaishankar established a solid diplomatic rapport through **regular consultations**.
 - Strengthened ties were further highlighted during their **respective presidencies of the G20** in 2022 and 2023.
- **Shared global aspirations:** Both Prabowo and Modi seek to **elevate their countries' global stature**, showcasing ambitions that align on fostering **strategic autonomy**.

• Key Opportunities for Collaboration Between India-Indonesia:

- **BRICS and beyond:**
 - Indonesia's BRICS membership, granted in 2023, offers avenues for cooperation.
 - Leveraging the platform, the two nations **can bring strategic weight to the bloc**, focusing on common interests while **navigating Indonesia's economic ties with China**.
- **Indo-Pacific focus:**
 - Indonesia's evolution in embracing the Indo-Pacific concept, particularly its alignment with India's Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI), offers potential for maritime collaboration
 - Joint efforts under the IPOI's maritime resources pillar can further regional objectives.
- **Integrating IPOI and AOIP:**
 - Under Jokowi, Indonesia played a leading role in crafting ASEAN's Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP).
 - Indonesia has committed to **supporting the maritime resources pillar** under the IPOI.
 - By collaborating on projects within this pillar, the two nations can promote a pro-regional agenda beyond ASEAN, aligning with Prabowo's vision of creating an "ASEAN Plus" policy.
- **Trilateral partnerships:**
 - Existing frameworks like the **India-Indonesia-Australia trilateral** offer opportunities for enhanced cooperation.
 - Prabowo's visit opens the possibility of **integrating Japan** into this dynamic, creating a robust trilateral partnership for **regional security and development**.
- **Regional architecture engagement:**
 - India and Indonesia can collaborate more effectively in ASEAN-led mechanisms like the East Asia Summit (EAS) and ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF).
 - Expanding prior consultations can address divergent views, particularly on issues like **Myanmar**.
- **BIMSTEC integration:** Inviting Indonesia to join the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) can bolster its **integration with India's eastern neighborhood**, enhancing regional cooperation.



GURJIT SINGH

A KEY OBJECTIVE of Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto's visit to India is likely to be the reinforcement of a broader and more strategic partnership between the two nations. This is expected to encompass greater depth and diversity reflecting Indonesia's aspirations to position Indonesia as a significant player on the global stage. Beyond the corridors of G20, Prabowo's visit suggests an emphasis on greater strategic autonomy while navigating the complexities of the international order in the hyper-competitive era.

BEYOND THE CHINA FACTOR

Indonesian President's visit could be a new turning point for an old partnership

Indonesian membership of BRICS, granted in 2023, presents another avenue for collaboration. Much like the India and South Asia (BRICS) platform, India and Indonesia can leverage their partnership to bring strategic weight to the bloc. While Indonesia is unlikely to deviate significantly from its deep economic ties with China, Prabowo's visit suggests an openness to exploring avenues for cooperation beyond the China factor. This is evident in his recent endorsement of the "Indo-Pacific" concept, a move that aligns with India's strategic vision. This shared global aspiration to elevate their countries' global stature, showcasing ambitions that align on fostering strategic autonomy, is a key theme of the visit.

- **Challenges and Strategic Considerations:**
 - **Navigating the China factor:** While Indonesia's deep economic ties with China may influence its policies, Prabowo's **independent policy making** offers space for cooperation with India beyond Beijing's influence.
 - **New foreign minister dynamics:** Building a rapport between India's Jaishankar and Indonesia's new foreign minister Sugiono is crucial to realizing a strong Modi-Prabowo partnership.
- **Conclusion:**
 - Prabowo Subianto's visit to India presents an opportunity to redefine and strengthen India-Indonesia relations.
 - **Leveraging platforms** like BRICS, IPOI, and trilateral partnerships, both nations can enhance strategic collaboration.
 - Despite challenges, **focusing on convergence areas** can significantly impact the Indo-Pacific and global order, positioning both nations as key regional players.

2. At 75, constitutional justice and personal liberty **GS 2 (Governance)**

- **Why in News:** As India celebrates 75 years of its Constitution, the focus shifts to how the core values, particularly personal liberty and human dignity, have faced challenges in modern India. A recent reinstatement of dissent as a constitutional ethic, through a Supreme Court ruling, highlights the ethical and moral dilemmas surrounding personal liberty today.

• **Reinstating Dissent in Constitutional Ethics**

- **Puttaswamy vs Union of India (2017):** The Supreme Court reinstated Justice S. Fazl Ali's dissent in the A.K. Gopalan case (1950), which upheld Gopalan's right to political dissent, marking a shift in understanding personal liberty in constitutional ethics.
- **K. Gopalan's Detention:** Gopalan's preventive detention in 1950, sanctioned by the Supreme Court's majority judgment, was later declared a judicial error, reinforcing personal liberty and questioning previous interpretations of constitutional rights.
- **Broader Ethical Framing:** The revision of constitutional ethics calls for integrating personal liberty and human dignity into a comprehensive justice framework, moving beyond mechanical readings of law to ensure constitutional values are respected.

• **Historical Context and Modern Challenges**

- **Preventive Detention and Political Dissent:** Preventive detention laws, which allowed for indefinite custody without trial, have grown in use, particularly under anti-terror laws, echoing the challenges faced by political dissenters today.
- **Continuity of Political Persecution:** The continued detention of anti-CAA activists, including young dissenters, parallels the experiences of historical figures like A.K. Gopalan, underscoring the need to critically assess constitutional integrity in contemporary India.
- **Judicial Inaction on Liberty:** Despite the constitutional commitment to personal liberty, the Indian judiciary has faced criticism for its delayed action in upholding the rights of detainees, particularly dissenters under laws like the Preventive Detention Act.
- **Dissent, Colonial Legacies, and Judicial Responsibility**
 - **Colonial Legal Influence:** The Preventive Detention Act of 1950, rooted in colonial law, continues to be used in post-independence India, which raises concerns about the legacy of these laws in modern judicial practices.

At 75, constitutional justice and personal liberty

As we mark 75 years of the Constitution of India, I urge everyone to remember the ways in which the core values of the Constitution founder in a deep ethical and moral crisis, trapped as we are in reductionist, mechanical readings of the constitutional value of personal liberty and human dignity. In the midst of the celebration, we need to step back and take a sober look at the right to personal liberty, which is a core constituent of an idea of justice.

Reinstating dissent as constitutional ethic

The Supreme Court of India reinstated Justice S. Fazl Ali's dissenting opinion in A.K. Gopalan vs State of Madras, unanimously in Puttaswamy vs Union of India (2017), a case about the fundamental right to privacy. The preventive detention of the communist leader, A.K. Gopalan, by the government of independent India and the Supreme Court's majority ruling on constitutional interpretation in that case, in the inaugural year of the Constitution, (1950), have now been effectively declared as a judicial wrong. The resurrection of this dissent (which, in effect, upheld Gopalan's right to political dissent) and two later ones (all three on the question of personal liberty), saw the majority judgments truncating liberty as being flawed from the standpoint of constitutional ethics. Within a broader framing of justice, the technicalities of the interpretation of a fundamental right were seen as inseparable from the centrality of personal liberty to constitutional ethics.

It can scarcely be forgotten that Article 21 (the right to life and personal liberty) is designed to assure the dignity of the individual as a most cherished human value which ensures the means of full development and evolution of a human being (Justice R.J. Nariman in Puttaswamy, paragraph 42). How and on what basis might we piece together memories that render the Constitution 'workable', 'flexible' and 'strong' (in the words of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar)? How may we discover pathways through which the Preamble lights up ways to 'hold the country together' at a time when the dominant political discourse reduces and degrades politics to the fractured brutality of shards – such as the 'take no prisoners' narrative?

Preventive detention, arbitrary arrests, denial of fair trial through the impunity that is guaranteed statutorily in anti-terror laws, and demagogic-domicidal violence enact 'rituals of



Kalpana Kamath
is a sociologist based in Hyderabad

'humiliating' – to use Sunder Bogdan's words – and impose indescribable wrongs on conscientious resisters in India today. I posit a juxtaposition that is instructive – there is the case of A.K. Gopalan (1950) challenging the inauguration of constitutional contradictions and being detained at one end, and Umar Khalid, Sharpeel Inam, Gulfiya Fatima and several other anti-Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) resisters in prison (2023) challenging the CAA 2019 and living with bulldozers, dispossession and the partisan prison complex, at the other end.

By 2017, when the Puttaswamy judgment came, preventive detention and prolonged custody without bail had proliferated under the aegis of constitutional courts; there was an escalation in arrests and the prolonged detention of dissenters under the spiralling list of laws (State and central) that, by now, authorised detention and custody with scant regulations. Over the years, the process has become the punishment. We witness young and spirited dissenters who courageously challenged the CAA 2019, now trapped in the talons of anti-terror laws. There is an impenetrable opacity of procedure and an endless deferral of decisions on the vital issue of personal liberty.

Dissent is criminalised even while dissent is reinstated; this is the deep paradox of our times that courts must reflect on in the 75th year of the Constitution.

A.K. Gopalan and today's resisters

In his memoir, *In the Cause of the People* (Routledge, 1973), A.K. Gopalan gives us a fine-grained account of his imprisonment along with several others 'by Indians', and of the numerous trials he faced and the petitions he filed to secure liberty from British courts and Indian courts thereafter, but to no avail. Deciding to celebrate Independence day in jail on August 15, 1947, he led a mass procession in jail and hoisted the national flag. He was arrested for this 'crime' on a treason charge for stirring enmity against the emperor under Section 124A, and produced before the ADM Calcutta in independent India (p.224).

He filed affidavits and wrote letters to the court as a matter of course and was unwilling to 'remain quiet'. Gopalan himself argued in another writ petition filed in Madras, in a hearing that saw large crowds: 'The court set me free on

the last day of the hearing. I was re-arrested after release at the door of the court and escorted once more to Cuddalore jail. I filed another writ petition which was heard two days after my re-arrest. The court released me again. The judges specially ordered the police not to touch me. The police did not dare to disregard this injunction. I had been imprisoned in December 1947 and released in 1950. Four years in jail!'

This account has a familiar contemporary ring to it. The anti-CAA resisters have spent roughly four years in custody, but the difference is that the courts have not yet moved with a sense of urgency to set them free. The Preventive Detention Act, 1950, belonged to free India's 'rule of law' regime.

K.G. Kamath, while reflecting on the travails of civil libertarian lawyers and their petitioners in courts over five decades, observed that the Gopalan judgment 'is our own. It is the first 'Indian-made foreign judgement' which upheld an Indian-made colonial law. To this, 75 years later, we have now added more Indian-made colonial laws. But will the courts hold the Puttaswamy view of dissent and dignity in place and extend their reach as constitutional values that further the cause of personal liberty as the ultimate expression of justice under the Constitution?

No room for retrospective regret

The case of the 19 arrests made in the Bhima Koregaon case (writers, intellectuals, cultural activists, poets, performers, teachers), the 19 arrests made in the Delhi riots case of anti-CAA protesters (most of them community leaders and student leaders and activists, of whom 17 are Muslims), and the anticipation of violence, arrest and domicile as a 'clear and present danger' confronted especially by Muslims who dare to challenge unlawful state action, must make us pause. They call for a slew of interventions by constitutional courts in the exercise of 'creative constitutionalism' (to use Professor Pendra Baxi's phrase) in the cause of the right to personal liberty as justice. This is needed so that India does not end up waiting 'another seven decades and four generations' to discover that we were again on the wrong side of the Constitution. Or that we understood and worked the Constitution in its seventh decade in ways that negated its ethical spirit, instead of upholding and furthering the idea of justice embedded within.

- **Evolving Constitutional Interpretation:** As reflected in the Puttaswamy case, the challenge is to extend the values of dissent, dignity, and liberty enshrined in the Constitution, ensuring that the courts evolve with the changing societal and political realities.
- **Future of Constitutional Values:** The judicial system is urged to protect the ethical spirit of the Constitution and not undermine it through outdated or politically motivated interpretations, as this would defeat the core mission of justice.

3. Foundational Values, the Journey of the Indian State GS 2 (Governance)

• Why in News:

- **As India celebrates the 75th anniversary of the enforcement of its Constitution, it is a pivotal moment to reflect on the nation's journey while reaffirming its foundational values.**
- **This transformative document laid the groundwork for a sovereign democratic republic, aspiring to uphold liberty, equality, and fraternity.**
- **However, as B.R. Ambedkar's prophetic remarks during his closing address to the Constituent Assembly in November 1949 remind us, this journey has been fraught with challenges.**

• Indian Federalism: Features, Contemporary Challenges and Resilience Shown

- **The Unique Nature of Indian Federalism**
 - India's federal structure is **distinct, designed to accommodate its diverse socio-cultural and historical realities.**
 - Unlike classical federations, **India operates on a 'quasi-federal' model that blends unitary and federal characteristics.**
 - This **flexibility has enabled the country to address regional aspirations while maintaining national unity**, but the relationship between the Union and States has often been fraught with challenges.
- **The Role of State Governors: A Source of Tension**
 - **State Governors**, expected to act as neutral arbiters, **have often been perceived as partisan agents of the Union government.**
 - This has led to **legal disputes and strained centre-state relations**, particularly in politically sensitive contexts.
 - **Recent Supreme Court rulings have sought to reaffirm the constitutional mandate of neutrality**, strengthening the federal character of the Indian system.
- **Simultaneous Elections: A Contentious Proposal**
 - The **idea of holding simultaneous elections for the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies has sparked significant debate.**
 - Proponents argue that it would **reduce costs and administrative disruptions**, while **critics caution that it could centralise power and overshadow state-specific issues.**
 - This proposal underscores the tension between efficiency and the preservation of regional autonomy.
- **Linguistic Diversity and Federal Challenges**
 - India's linguistic diversity poses unique challenges to its federal structure.
 - **The marginalisation of regional languages like Tamil, Kannada, Bengali, and Marathi has fuelled demands for greater linguistic equality.**
 - **Perceptions of Hindi imposition have led to protests**, emphasising the need for policies that respect multilingualism while fostering national unity.

Foundational values, the journey of the Indian state

In the 75th anniversary of the coming into effect of the Constitution of India, it is imperative to evaluate the journey of the Indian state from the perspective of its foundational values before we plan the course ahead. After nearly three years of debate and deliberation, the Constituent Assembly of the newly independent India adopted its founding document, the Constitution of India. Two months thereafter, the Republic officially came into being with the Constitution being given effect. When B.R. Ambedkar delivered the closing address to the Constituent Assembly on November 26, 1949, he characterised the complex challenges ahead. It is also worth wondering whether India would place "the country above their creed". India, we realise that the work from the closing address carry meaningful lessons for the next 75 years and beyond to guard the Constitution.

The federal republic: Many of the constitutional issues that have been loudly debated in recent times have been around the interpretation of India's federal structure. Tensions between state governments and centre of the State Governments have made their way to the Supreme Court of India. Political leaders are being fought within and outside Parliament on the issue of simultaneous elections. The neglect of regional languages such as Tamil, Kannada, Bengali, Marathi and even Hindi being argued from the vanguard of multilingual equality and State autonomy. Field elections have been a major sticking point for States that are suffering under the shadow of the Panchayati Raj movement and the Goods and Services Tax Act. The next delimitation exercise, which will determine the democratic future of India, is set to result in a showdown between the Union and States that have cornered their population. It is strange that given how integral federalism has been to the constitutional discourse over the last 75 years or so, the word "federal" is nowhere to be found in the text of the Constitution.



B.R. Ambedkar, President of the Constituent Assembly and the first Vice-President of India

Critics of the Constitution in the early days, and one that was well anticipated by Dr. Ambedkar, was that the document is anti-federal and tilts the balance in favour of the Union. Addressing this complaint while speaking in 1949, Dr. Ambedkar explained that the "Centre and the States are co-equal" in matters of legislative and executive authority. He clarified to the Constituent Assembly that the overriding power for the Union are only placed "in the event of an emergency". In such, the regular conduct of democratic business in India is within a federal framework, and not to be mistaken for a unitary one. On this count, constitutional courts have confirmed the propriety by enshrining federalism to be a part of the basic structure of the Constitution, beginning with the judgment in *S.R. Bommai v Union of India* (1994) and continuing in the *Government of NCT of Delhi v Union of India* (2018).

An unequal democracy: Another question of contemporary interest is on whether and how India has achieved over the 75 years, a true social democracy that is guided by the constitutional values of liberty, equality and fraternity. The argument put forth by many critics of the government is that it has become a police state. The office of section along with stringent special statutes such as the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act and the Prevention of Terrorism Act have been used to suppress the position. Similarly, whether the country has been able to achieve a degree of equality among various castes, tribes and religions is a question that remains unanswered. With tremendous progress, Dr. Ambedkar explained that the country must strive to remove social and economic inequality before they become a "great democracy" itself. It is worth noting the importance of fraternity for the fledgling republic. Treating the idea of an Indian nation as a debate, Dr. Ambedkar asked how

people divided into several thousands of castes can be a nation. Seventy-five years hence, can we fairly claim to have fostered fraternal feelings through social and political movements? Have we succeeded to some degree in neutralising the significance of caste in determining merit and success in society? The answers must be in the negative, but, that does not necessarily imply that the Constitution has failed. It is an indication of how much further the country must travel.

The need for constitutional guardrails: Of late, there has been some noise about revisiting the Constitution, as the accusation is that it has evolved from an European colonial perspective. It has become a common trope among the social right to suggest replacement of the present day Constitution with an "Indian" constitutional document drawing from Hindu dharma scriptures. There can be no greater truth to the combined intellect of the Constituent Assembly than this. There can be no greater democracy than this. The 75 years of the Constituent Assembly and the 75 years of the Indian nation have made India what it is today.

Rather than revisiting the whole of the Constitution, the country must respond to Dr. Ambedkar's call to define our constitutional principles and preserve the Constitution. For it is not the document that makes the nation but the people who are called to govern. What is required today is that we heed guidance on the future of our constitutional philosophy. India today needs guardrails, who can place the country above their creed more than ever. They need to be guardians in the form of judges, bureaucrats, politicians, actors, journalists and citizens. Only then can we truly aspire to fulfil the promise of the Constitution.

- **Fiscal Federalism: Balancing Resource Distribution**
 - **Fiscal arrangements** under the Finance Commission and GST regime **have been a contentious issue**, with States often arguing that the system disproportionately favours the Union
 - **Delayed GST compensation payments**, especially during crises like the COVID-19 pandemic, have highlighted the vulnerabilities of the current fiscal framework and the need for reforms to ensure equitable resource distribution.
- **Delimitation Exercise: A Test of Federal Harmony**
 - The **upcoming delimitation exercise to redraw parliamentary constituencies based on population data poses a significant challenge.**
 - **States with successful population control measures fear losing political representation**, creating a conflict between policy success and equitable representation.
 - This **issue exemplifies the complexities of India's federal system.**
- **The Resilience of Indian Federalism**
 - Despite these challenges, **federalism remains a cornerstone of India's democracy.**
 - B.R. Ambedkar's vision of co-equal powers between the Union and States emphasises the need for mutual respect and cooperation.
 - **Judicial interpretations, such as the S.R. Bommai vs Union of India case, have reinforced federalism as part of the Constitution's basic structure**, ensuring its continued relevance in India's governance.
- **The Issue of Unequal Democracy: The Challenge of Social and Economic Justice**
 - **Legal and Institutional Challenges to Liberty**
 - Critics argue that India is increasingly veering towards becoming a police state, with stringent laws and practices that stifle dissent and **curtail individual freedoms.**
 - **Laws such as the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) and the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) have been criticised for their overreach**, vague definitions, and potential for misuse.
 - **These statutes, alongside the retention of colonial-era laws like sedition, are seen as tools to suppress political opposition and curtail freedom of speech.**
 - While these measures are often justified in the name of national security, **their application has raised concerns about eroding democratic liberties** and violating constitutional guarantees.
 - **Caste and Social Inequalities: A Persistent Challenge**
 - One of the most enduring social issues in India is **caste-based inequality, which continues to dominate the social and economic landscape.**
 - Despite constitutional safeguards such as the abolition of untouchability and affirmative action policies, **caste still plays a significant role in determining access to education, employment, and social mobility.**
 - The **intersections of caste, class, and gender exacerbate inequalities, leaving marginalised communities with limited opportunities** to break free from systemic oppression.
 - The **persistence of caste-based discrimination and violence indicates that India is far from achieving the vision of an egalitarian society.**
 - **Economic Inequalities: The Growing Divide**
 - India's economic growth over the past few decades has been remarkable, **but the benefits of this growth have not been evenly distributed.**
 - The **gap between the rich and poor has widened**, with wealth concentrated in the hands of a few. Rural-urban disparities, **unequal access to quality education and healthcare, and limited opportunities for upward mobility further deepen economic inequalities.**

- **Gender Inequality: A Barrier to Social Justice**
 - Another critical dimension of inequality is **gender disparity**, which continues to limit women's participation in political, economic, and social spheres.
 - Despite constitutional provisions ensuring equal rights, **women in India face systemic challenges such as wage gaps, underrepresentation in leadership roles, and gender-based violence.**
 - The **struggle for gender equality is further complicated by cultural and social norms that perpetuate patriarchal attitudes**, often rendering progressive legal frameworks ineffective in practice.
- **The Way Forward: Preserving the Constitution**
 - Of late, **there has been some noise about revamping the Constitution**, as the accusation is that it has evolved from a European colonial perspective.
 - It has become a common trope to suggest replacement of the present-day Constitution with an 'Indic' constitutional
 - Rather than dismantling the existing framework, **the need of the hour is to protect and strengthen the constitution.**
 - Ambedkar's call to defend democratic principles and preserve the Constitution is more relevant than ever.
 - **India requires a new generation of constitutional guardians**, judges, bureaucrats, politicians, activists, journalists, and citizens, **who prioritise the nation over personal or sectarian interests.**
 - **These guardians must uphold the Constitution's vision**, ensuring that governance reflects the ideals of justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity.
- **Conclusion**
 - **The 75th anniversary of India's Constitution is a moment to celebrate its achievements and confront its challenges.**
 - The **Constitution has provided a robust framework for India's democratic evolution, but its promise remains incomplete** without addressing the deep-seated inequalities that persist in society.
 - **As the nation looks to the future, it must heed Ambedkar's vision**, creating a sense of fraternity and safeguarding democratic principles.

4. **NITI Aayog's Fiscal Health Index (FHI) Report** **GS 2 (Governance)**

- **Why in News:** The **Fiscal Health Index (FHI)**, released by NITI Aayog provides a comprehensive evaluation of the fiscal health of India's states. This report for the financial year 2022-23 covers **18 major states** that contribute significantly to India's economy, focusing on their **public expenditure, revenues, debt sustainability, and overall fiscal stability**. The initiative aims to assess and benchmark fiscal performance across states, helping to identify areas for improvement and best practices that can be adopted for better fiscal management.

● **Key Highlights of the FHI Report**

- **Top Performers:** **Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Goa, and Jharkhand** were ranked as the **best-performing states**, with Odisha topping the list due to its high **capital outlay, effective revenue mobilization, and low interest payments**. These states have a **revenue surplus** and strong fiscal management.
- **Aspirational States:** States like **Punjab, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, and Kerala** are struggling with **fiscal challenges**. These states face issues such as **low revenue mobilization, high debt burden, and difficulties in meeting fiscal and revenue deficit targets.**

Odisha tops NITI fiscal health index, Chhattisgarh next best

Punjab, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, Kerala were the worst-performing States, as per the NITI Aayog report, while Maharashtra, U.P., Telangana, M.P., Karnataka were in front-runners' category

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

Mineral-rich Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Goa, and Jharkhand have emerged as top-performing 'achievers' among the States listed in NITI Aayog's first Fiscal Health Index (FHI) report released on Friday.

The report titled "Fiscal Health Index 2022" ranked 18 major States that drive the Indian economy in terms of their contribution to India's GDP, demography, total public expenditure, revenues, and overall fiscal stability.

According to the report, Punjab, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, and Kerala were the worst-performing States in the Fiscal Health Index (FHI), each facing significant fiscal challenges, and listed under "aspirational" category.

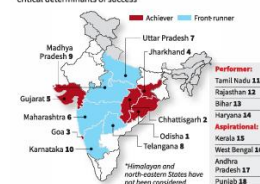
The report aims to evolve an understanding of the fiscal health of States and it has listed Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Telangana, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka under the "front-runners" category. Tamil Nadu, Bihar, Rajasthan, and Haryana were classified as performers.

As per the report, released by 16th Finance Commission Chairman Arvind Panagariya, Odisha excelled in fiscal health, with the highest overall index score of 67.8.

Referring to top five achiever States, NITI Aayog said these States have higher capital outlay of up to 4% of Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP), effective mobilisation of non-tax revenue, are revenue sur-

Fine balance

Analysis in the NITI Aayog's report on the fiscal health index for FY23 highlights that strong revenue mobilisation, effective expenditure management, and prudent fiscal practices are critical determinants of success



plus, and have low interest payments which is up to 7% of revenue receipts.

The government think tank said the front-runner States reported high total developmental expenditure up to 73%, witnessed consistent growth in own tax revenue, had balanced fiscal management and improved debt sustainability with debt-to-GSDP ratio of 24%.

The report noted that the aspirational States of Kerala, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh and Punjab are struggling to meet the fiscal and revenue deficit targets, have low revenue mobilisation, witnessing a growing debt burden with debt sustainability a concern in these States.

As per the report, Odisha tops the debt index (99.0) and debt sustainability (64.0) rankings with better than average scores under quality of expenditure and revenue mobilisation. Odisha has maintained low fiscal deficits, a good debt profile, and an above average capital outlay/GSDP ratio.

While Kerala and Punjab struggle with low quality of expenditure and debt sustainability, the report said, West Bengal faces revenue mobilisation and debt index issues. Andhra Pradesh has high fiscal deficit and Haryana has a poor debt profile, it said.

According to the report, Odisha, Goa, Karnataka, Maharashtra, and Chhattisgarh scored the highest average FHI score for 2014-15 to 2021-22 period. The data used to calculate the Fiscal Health Index were sourced from the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG).

- **Front-Runners:** Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Telangana, Madhya Pradesh, and Karnataka were categorized as **front-runners** for fiscal health. These states demonstrated **high developmental expenditure, consistent revenue growth, and improved debt sustainability**.
- **Fiscal Indicators:** States like Odisha, Goa, Karnataka, Maharashtra, and Chhattisgarh scored highest in the FHI over the **2014-15 to 2021-22** period, showcasing stable fiscal management and strong debt profiles.
- **Debt Sustainability:** Odisha was recognized for its **excellent debt sustainability** with the highest scores in **Debt Index (99.0)** and **Debt Sustainability (64.0)**.
- **Fiscal Health Index**
 - NITI Aayog's "Fiscal Health Index 2025" evaluates the fiscal health of Indian states.
 - **Sub-Indices Used:** The FHI report evaluates 18 major states based on five critical sub-indices:
 - **Quality of Expenditure**
 - **Revenue Mobilization**
 - **Fiscal Prudence**
 - **Debt Index**
 - **Debt Sustainability**
 - These sub-indices together provide a detailed, multi-dimensional view of a state's fiscal health.
 - Data for the Fiscal Health Index was sourced from the **Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG)**.
 - The FHI is designed to assist policymakers by offe

5. Renaming Controversy of the Jaffna Cultural Centre GS 1 (Art and Culture)

- **Why in News:** The **Indian High Commission** in Sri Lanka announced the renaming of the **Jaffna Cultural Centre** to the '**Thiruvalluvar Cultural Centre**'. The renaming was done to honor the Tamil poet-philosopher **Thiruvalluvar**, a respected figure in Tamil culture.
- **Why the name change?**
 - The **Thiruvalluvar Cultural Centre** was renamed to recognize the cultural significance of Thiruvalluvar to Tamils worldwide.
 - This decision was part of India's ongoing efforts to celebrate and promote Tamil culture globally.
 - The renaming of the **Jaffna Cultural Centre** to **Thiruvalluvar Cultural Centre** caused controversy due to the removal of '**Jaffna**' from the name.
 - Many in the Tamil community felt the change was disrespectful to their identity.
 - After backlash, India compromised by reinstating the word '**Jaffna**' in the name.
- **Tamil Saint-Poet Thiruvalluvar**
 - Thiruvalluvar, also known as **Valluvar**, is a revered figure in Tamil literature and culture of the Indian subcontinent during the **Sangam period**.
 - He is known primarily for his work, the **Tirukkural**.
 - The '**Tirukkural**', a collection of 1,330 couplets ('kural' in Tamil), are an essential part of every Tamil household — in the same way as, say, the Bhagavad Gita or the Ramayana/Ramcharitmanas are in traditional North Indian Hindu households.
 - The collection is divided into 3 books: **Aram (virtue)**, **Porul (government and society)**, and **Kamam (love)**.
 - Thiruvalluvar contributed the Tirukkural or "Kural" to **Sangam literature**.
 - His teachings advocate for virtuous living and are celebrated for their universal relevance, transcending regional and cultural boundaries.
 - **Origin:** Valluvar is believed to have lived in Madurai and later in town of Mayilapuram or Thirumayilai (present-day Mylapore in Chennai), although there is no real proof.

'Jaffna' restored in India-built cultural centre's name in Lanka

Meera Srinivasan
COLOMBO

A strong backlash from politicians and intellectuals in Jaffna, over renaming the India-built Jaffna Cultural Centre as Thiruvalluvar Cultural Centre, has prompted Indian authorities to put up yet another name board, now calling the facility "Jaffna Thiruvalluvar Cultural Centre".

On January 18, the Indian High Commission announced the renaming of the Jaffna Cultural Centre as "Thiruvalluvar Cultural Centre", "in honour of the great Tamil poet-philosopher Thiruvalluvar". High Commissioner Santosh Jha and Sri Lanka's Minister of Buddhasasana, Religious and Cultural Affairs Himiduma Sumil Senevi jointly unveiled the new name at a special event held in Jaffna.

Following the ceremony, which coincided with Pongal celebrations marked by Tamils that week, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar posted on X, welcoming the renaming. Tamil Nadu Governor R.N. Ravi termed it "another milestone" in Mr. Modi's "continued efforts to celebrate and propagate the pride of Tamil language and culture worldwide". Mr. Modi laid the foundation stone for the Jaffna Cultural Centre in 2015, while marking an Indian Premier's maiden visit to Sri Lanka's northern Jaffna city. The Cultural Centre was built with a \$12 million grant from India. Following its construction, Mr. Jaishankar virtually inaugurated the building during his visit to Colombo in 2022. It was dedicated to the people of Jaffna in February 2023, in the presence of former President Ranil Wickremesinghe.

The 11-floor structure has been promoted as a state-of-the-art facility, with a 600-seating capacity auditorium, a conference hall, an amphitheatre and a digital library. It was constructed on land belonging to



Contentious issue: The newly installed name board at the cultural centre reads 'Jaffna Thiruvalluvar Cultural Centre. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

the Jaffna Municipal Council, near the iconic Jaffna Public Library.

Administrative support

Amid concerns over the municipality lacking funds to run the facility, India offered additional financial and administrative support for five years. The Centre has been periodically hosting shows of local artistes, as well as cultural performances and talk shows of artistes and scholars from India. All this while, New Delhi has used the original name and its abbreviation "JCC" in its official statements.

While neither the Indian nor Sri Lankan government has officially clarified who decided to change the name, or what prompted it now, enquiries with multiple sources — they requested anonymity citing "sensitivities" — pointed to New Delhi. According to diplomatic sources, the name of Thiruvalluvar, "the great Tamil philosopher, poet and thinker" celebrated and respected by Tamils all over the world, was considered for naming the facility, "in view of the nature of the project". The Government of Sri Lanka "had no objection", a diplomatic source told *The Hindu*.

All the same, Sri Lanka's Minister of Fisheries Ramalingam Chandrasekar, who represents the northern Jaffna district in the legislature, told Jaffna-based media that he was unaware of

the name change until the day of the event, in which his Cabinet colleague Mr. Senevi shared the date with the Indian High Commissioner.

Observing that he had no objection celebrating Thiruvalluvar, Mr. Chandrasekar said omission of the word "Jaffna" from the name was a cause of concern, as was giving the Tamil language the "third place" on the display board, after English and Sinhala. He was echoing a position many senior Sri Lankan Tamil politicians, across party lines, have since voiced.

As the controversy spiralled in Tamil media in Sri Lanka and social media platforms, with many attacking India for the omission of the name 'Jaffna', acting president of the Hanka Tamil Arasa Katchi (ITAK) handed over a letter to the Indian Consul General in Jaffna, expressing the party's surprise and anguish at the sudden name change, without consulting Tamil political representatives or the people.

"We revere the saint poet Thiruvalluvar here (in Sri Lanka), we have installed several statues of his. We do not oppose him. But the removal of the word 'Jaffna' [from the Cultural Centre's earlier name] amounts to insulting us," the letter signed by acting president C.V.K. Sivagnanam said, underscoring the "pride" and "identity" that "Jaffna" symbolises for Sri Lanka's Tamils.

- ## 6. Research Identifies Tamil Nadu as the Birthplace of the Iron Age

- [illegible]

- **Urbanization and Agriculture**
 - Iron tools, like axes and ploughs, were pivotal in clearing forests and expanding agriculture, contributing to the second urbanization in the Ganga valley (800–500 BCE).
- **Social and Economic Impact**
 - Iron technology facilitated forest clearance, agricultural growth, and urbanization, leading to increased socio-economic stratification.
 - The period also witnessed the emergence of chiefdoms, states, and trading networks, culminating in the Mauryan Empire's integration of diverse regions.
 - The Iron Age laid the foundation for India's agrarian and urban transformations, influencing subsequent socio-political developments.
- **Key Findings of the Study**
 - The report, '**Antiquity of Iron: Recent Radiometric Dates from Tamil Nadu**', provides evidence that iron technology in Tamil Nadu existed as early as 3345 BCE.
 - The findings are supported by **Accelerator Mass Spectrometry (AMS)** and **Optically Stimulated Luminescence (OSL)**
 - **Archaeological Sites Studied**
 - Iron-age samples were examined from key sites such as Sivagalai, Adichanallur, Mayiladumparai, and Kilnamandi, confirming Tamil Nadu's advanced metallurgical history.
 - **Key Archaeological Discoveries**
 - **Sivagalai:** Evidence from charcoal and potsherds dates iron technology to 2953–3345 BCE, with a paddy sample dated to 1155 BCE.
 - **Mayiladumparai:** Samples dated to 2172 BCE surpassed previous benchmarks for the region.
 - **Kilnamandi:** A sarcophagus burial dated to 1692 BCE is the earliest of its kind in Tamil Nadu.
 - **Tamil Nadu: A Pioneer in Metallurgy**
 - The findings establish Tamil Nadu as an innovator in early metallurgy.
 - Smelted iron, dated to the middle of the 3rd millennium BCE, shows the region's technological sophistication.
 - The Study hypothesise that the **Copper Age of North India and the Iron Age of South India were contemporaneous, reflecting unique cultural trajectories.**
 - **Advanced Iron-Smelting Techniques**
 - Three distinct iron-smelting furnaces were identified at:
 - **Kodumanal:** Circular furnaces capable of reaching 1,300°C, sufficient for sponge iron production.
 - **Chettipalayam and Perungalur:** Showcased other innovative smelting techniques.
 - These discoveries highlight Tamil Nadu's advanced understanding of pyro-technology and its ability to produce durable tools and weapons.
- **Significance of this study**
 - **Iron Age Timeline in India Revised**
 - Previously believed to have emerged between 1500 and 2000 BCE, the Iron Age in India has been pushed back by new data from Tamil Nadu.
 - Radiometric dating of a paddy sample from a burial urn in Sivagalai places iron usage as far back as 3345 BCE, marking the earliest recorded evidence of iron technology globally.
 - **Global Implications**
 - Globally, the Iron Age has been attributed to the Hittite Empire (1300 BCE), but Tamil Nadu's findings challenge this timeline.
 - **Turning point in Indian archaeology**
 - These findings represent a turning point in Indian archaeology, rewriting the history of the Iron Age and positioning Tamil Nadu as a key player in global metallurgical innovation.

7. Use of loudspeakers not essential part of religion GS 2 (Governance)

- **Why in news:** Observing that the use of loudspeakers is not an essential part of any religion, Bombay high court directed the state to curb noise pollution by places of worship, irrespective of religion.

• **Essential Religious Practices (ERP) Doctrine**

- It governs which religious practices are protected under Arts. 25 & 26 of the Constitution.
- **Overview**
 - The doctrine is a legal framework created by the Supreme Court to balance the competing interests of freedom of religion and the state's ability to regulate practices.
 - It protects only those religious practices that are deemed essential to a particular religion.
- **Key Features**
 - **Freedom of Religion:** The doctrine protects practices that are essential to a religion, under the freedom of religion provisions in the Indian Constitution.
 - **State's Role in Social Reforms:** The doctrine allows the state to implement social reforms without infringing on essential religious practices.
 - **Bifurcation of Practices:** It distinguishes between essential and non-essential religious practices, offering protection only to those considered essential.
- **Historical Context**
 - **First Articulation:** The doctrine was first articulated in the 1954 case *The Commissioner Hindu Religious Endowments, Madras v. Sri Lakshmindra Thirtha Swamiar of Sri Shirur Mutt*.
 - **Criticism:** The application of the doctrine has been criticized for being inconsistent and incoherent.
- **Notable Examples**
 - **The Durgah Committee, Ajmer v. Syed Hussain Ali (1961):** The court ruled that only practices that are essential and integral to a religion are protected.
 - **Ismail Faruqui v. Union of India (1994):** The court ruled that a mosque is not an essential practice for the religion of Islam.
- **Bombay HC on Loudspeaker Use**
 - In a significant ruling, the Bombay High Court has declared that the use of loudspeakers is not an essential practice of any religion.
 - **Court Observations**
 - Loudspeaker use is not an essential part of any religion and is not protected under Article 25 (freedom of religion).
 - Noise pollution is a public health hazard and should be strictly controlled to safeguard citizens' rights.
 - Law enforcement must ensure compliance with noise regulations and avoid being passive in such cases.
 - **Case Background**
 - Residents of Nehru Nagar, Kurla East, filed a plea citing noise pollution by religious places beyond permissible decibel limits and hours.
 - **Permissible limits: 55 decibels (daytime) and 45 decibels (nighttime) in residential areas.**
 - Complaints to local police stations were ignored, leading to the petition in the Bombay High Court.

Why Bombay HC said use of loudspeakers is not essential to religion

OMKAR GOKHALE
MUMBAI, JANUARY 24

NONE can claim that their right to practice religion has been violated when permission to use a loudspeaker is denied, the Bombay High Court held on Thursday.

The use of loudspeakers and public address systems (PAS) cannot be deemed an essential religious practice that ought to be protected by law, the court said.

The bench of Justice Ajay S. Gadgil and Shyam C. Chaudhary prescribed a graded penalty system when regulations of noise pollution are flouted by citizens.

The HC was hearing a writ petition filed by two residents' associations in Mumbai's suburban Vihar Nagar, Kurla East and Chembur, against the use of loudspeakers by mosques and madrasas beyond

permissible decibel limits and during prohibited hours.

Law on noise pollution

Under the Noise Pollution (Regulation and Control) Rules, 2000, noise levels in residential areas during the day must not exceed 55 decibels and, at night, 45 decibels.

Section 31 of the Maharashtra Police Act allows police to stop music, sound, or noise, and to restrict, modify, or alter the permission to use loudspeakers.

In their affidavit of November 2023, the police submitted that noise levels at two mosques in the Kurla area were 70 dB and 80 dB decibels. The HC observed that in case several religious places in the vicinity were using loudspeakers, the cumulative sound levels of all loudspeakers' voice amplifiers in use at a particular point of time – and not the individual ambient noise limit of 55 or 45



The court has suggested automatic calibration of sound output. Advice

decibels – should be considered.

Directions by HC
Since the petitioners had pleaded that the police were not taking action on their complaints, the court issued directions to the government and police on how to deal

with complaints relating to noise pollution.

Since the plea was about noise pollution from places of worship, the court cautioned the police to act without identifying the complainant, "more so to avoid such complainants being targeted of ill will and devastating hatred".

■ The state should have an inbuilt mechanism to control decibel levels in loudspeakers and other sound-emitting gadgets used at any religious place. One way to do this would be to carry out "calibration or auto-fixation" of the decibel limit in these speakers, the court said.

■ The Mumbai Police Commissioner should ensure that police officers use a decibel level measuring mobile application to check the violations.

■ The HC laid down a four-step graded penalty system for the police to initiate. While first-time offenders could be let off after a "caution", in case of repeat violations fines must be imposed on the concerned

trusts or organisations, and they must be warned of strict action in case of further violations. Thereafter, if violations continue, police shall seize the loudspeakers, and can also cancel the licence for their use and initiate a complaint against those using them.

In a separate contempt plea, the HC on January 14 sought to know what action the government had taken in respect of 2,641 loudspeakers that were being used without permission. The next hearings on March 18.

Previous ruling
The HC ruling referred to the 2016 verdict in *Dr. Mohan Vijay Reddy v. Maharashtra*, which had directed strict implementation of the Noise Pollution (Regulation and Control) Rules.

The 2016 ruling by the HC said that places of worship could not escape being penalised for noise pollution, and that the "use of loudspeakers is not an essential part of any religion". The use of loudspeakers

could not be claimed as a fundamental right under Article 25 (freedom of religion) and Article 18 (1A) (freedom of speech and expression) of the Constitution, the ruling said.

The 2016 ruling referred to case SC judgments and directed that loudspeakers cannot be used between 10 pm and 6 am. It also prohibited the use of horns in silence zones and during night hours in residential areas.

The ruling said the state government could permit the use of loudspeakers between 10 pm and midnight during cultural or religious occasions for 15 days in the calendar year, except in silence zones.

At a radius of 100 metres around schools, colleges, hospitals, religious places, and courts are silence zones.

The 2016 ruling also allowed exceptions in time limits in closed premises for communication in auditoriums, conference rooms, community halls, and banquet halls during night hours, and in cases of public emergency.

- **Key Directive**

- Police must measure decibel levels using mobile applications and seize equipment violating noise norms.
- Initial violations should result in warnings; repeated offenses may lead to fines, equipment seizure, and license cancellation.
- Police must ensure complainant anonymity to prevent retaliation.

