

Editorial of the Day – 31.03.2026

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1. Ensuring federalism within delimitation (TH)

GS Paper II – Indian Constitution & Governance

Topic – Issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure; Separation of powers.

Sub-Topic – Delimitation Commission, Article 81, Demographic Performance (DemPer), and North-South regional disparities.

1. Introduction

With the freeze on seat allocation set to expire in 2026, India faces a critical constitutional juncture. Delimitation—the process of redrawing boundaries for representative bodies—is mandatory under Article 81. However, the uneven demographic transition between different states has created a fear that states which successfully implemented population control policies will be "penalized" with reduced political representation. The current discourse emphasizes a balanced approach – incorporating Demographic Performance (DemPer) alongside population size to safeguard federal fairness.

2. Constitutional Basis and Delimitation Context

Mandate of Article 81 – It requires that the ratio between the number of Lok Sabha seats and the population of a state remain, as far as practicable, the same across all states.

Historical Equilibrium – Between 1951 and 1971, population growth across Indian states was relatively uniform, making the seat-to-population ratio balanced and uncontroversial.

The Divergence – In the decades following 1971, states began to show significant demographic variation, leading to the current structural imbalance.

Resumption of Process – The delimitation of constituencies is expected to resume shortly after the upcoming Census (projected for 2028).

3. The 'Freeze' on Seats – A Strategic Delay

84th Amendment Act, 2002 – This amendment froze the total number of seats in the Lok Sabha based on the 1971 Census until the first Census after the year 2026.

Rationale for the Freeze – The goal was to provide a "governance incentive" for states to pursue population control without the fear of losing political influence in Parliament.

Current Timeline – Lok Sabha seats will remain unchanged until the results of the post-2026 Census are published. The revised allocation is likely to define the 2029 General Elections.

4. Population Trends and the Fertility Gap

TFR Achievement – Several states reached the Replacement Level Fertility (TFR 2.1) early, while others (primarily in the Northern heartland like Bihar and U.P.) took longer.

Growth Disparity – Even as more states reach replacement levels, the historical momentum means that high-fertility states still show significantly larger population growth.

The 45% Gap – There remains an approximate 45% growth gap between high-fertility and low-fertility states, which would drastically alter the political map if population is the sole criterion for seat allocation.

5. The 'DemPer' Proposal – Rewarding Governance

A significant proposal to prevent a "federal shock" is the inclusion of Demographic Performance (DemPer) in the allocation formula, similar to the criteria used by the Finance Commission.

Structure of DemPer –

Early Achievement (10% weight) – Rewarding states that achieved population control targets ahead of others.

Rate of Fertility Decline (90% weight) – Measuring the efficiency and speed of the decline in fertility rates.

Impact – This formula ensures that while all states may gain seats due to absolute population growth, those with better demographic management do not lose their *relative share* of representation.

6. Safeguarding the Federal Balance

To ensure national unity and mitigate the North–South divide, the following strategies are proposed –

States as Political Units – Moving away from treating states merely as "collections of individuals" and recognizing them as distinct political and federal units.

Limiting House Size – Suggesting a Lok Sabha size of approximately 700 seats to balance the need for more representatives with the necessity for effective legislative functioning.

Equity over Numbers – Ensuring that governance quality—specifically in health and family planning—is not sacrificed at the altar of raw population numbers.

Dispelling Myths – Emphasizing that population control was a cross-regional effort; it was not limited to the South, but achieved by many states across India through varied governance efforts.

Conclusion

The post-2026 delimitation is more than an administrative exercise; it is a test of India's democratic and federal resilience. By incorporating demographic performance into the seat allocation formula, the Union can honor its constitutional commitment to equal representation while rewarding the states that have contributed to national stability through effective population management. A balanced approach will prevent regional resentment, incentivize good governance, and ensure that India's democratic future is both representative and equitable.

Source – <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/ensuring-federalism-within-delimitation/article70804377.ece>

Question

"The freeze on Lok Sabha seats since 1971 was a strategic pause to prevent the penalization of states for successful population control. Evaluate the proposal to incorporate 'Demographic Performance' into the post-2026 delimitation framework as a means to uphold federal equity." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

Under Article 81, the allocation of Lok Sabha seats must be proportional to a state's population. To ensure that states were not "penalized" for pursuing national family planning goals, the 84th Amendment (2002) froze seat allocation until the first Census after 2026. As this deadline approaches, the sharp demographic divergence between the North and South has made the incorporation of Demographic Performance (DemPer) a central pillar for maintaining federal stability.

2. The Rationale for the 'DemPer' Proposal

The proposal suggests that seat allocation should not rely solely on absolute population but should include a weighted metric for "Demographic Performance," similar to the 15th and 16th Finance Commissions.

Rewarding Governance – It recognizes that population control is a result of long-term investments in education, healthcare, and women's empowerment.

Maintaining Relative Weight – Without DemPer, states that achieved Replacement Level Fertility (TFR 2.1) early could see their political influence diluted by nearly 15–20% relative to high-growth states.

Federal Harmony – By ensuring that all states gain seats while maintaining a fair relative share, it mitigates the "North-South" political friction.

3. Evaluating the Benefits of the Proposal

Strengthens Cooperative Federalism – It treats states as strategic partners in national goals rather than just administrative units of population.

Prevents 'Majoritarianism' of Geography – It ensures that a handful of high-growth states do not gain a "veto power" over national legislation, preserving the voice of states with higher human development indicators.

Incentivizes Future Policy – It signals that good governance in any sector (not just population) will be protected and rewarded at the federal level.

4. Evaluating the Challenges and Limitations

Constitutional Conflict – Article 81 is grounded in the principle of "One Person, One Vote." Incorporating DemPer may be challenged as a violation of the equal weight of a citizen's vote across different states.

Implementation Complexity – Deciding the weightage (e.g., 10% for early achievement vs. 90% for rate of decline) is a politically sensitive task that requires broad consensus.

Size of the House – Even with DemPer, a massive increase in the Lok Sabha size (potentially to 700+ seats) is necessary to ensure no state sees an absolute reduction in seats, leading to concerns about legislative efficiency.

5. Way Forward

The transition must be balanced and gradual.

Institutional Buffering – Enhancing the powers of the Rajya Sabha to act as a stronger "House of States" can provide a federal safety net.

Holistic Metrics – Using the 1971 population as a "base floor" and allocating "bonus seats" based on Demographic Performance could be a viable middle path.

6. Conclusion

The post-2026 delimitation is not merely an exercise in redrawing lines; it is an exercise in reaffirming the Indian Social Contract. While numerical democracy is the heart of the Republic, federal equity is its soul. Evaluating the DemPer proposal suggests it is a necessary corrective to ensure that developmental excellence is not met with political marginalization. A balanced approach will ensure that India's growth remains inclusive and its Union remains indissoluble.

Source – <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/ensuring-federalism-within-delimitation/article70804377.ece>

2. Fractured bones to amputations – How Kuno's now-thriving cheetah programme was kept alive (IE)

GS Paper III – Environment, Ecology, and Science & Technology.

Topic – Conservation, Environmental Impact Assessment, and Species Reintroduction.

Sub-Topic – Project Cheetah, Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972, and Ecosystem Restoration.

1. Introduction

Project Cheetah is the world's first intercontinental translocation of a large carnivore, aimed at reviving a species declared extinct in India in 1952. In 2026, the program has reached a critical milestone with the population crossing the 50-mark, including second-generation cheetahs born on Indian soil. This success is underpinned by a robust governance model that integrates cutting-edge veterinary science with strategic ecological restoration.

2. Project Cheetah – A Global Reintroduction Milestone

Transcontinental Strategy – The project involves the translocation of cheetahs from Namibia, South Africa, and Botswana (added in early 2026) to establish a self-sustaining metapopulation.

Ecological Restoration – The primary objective is the restoration of neglected grassland ecosystems. By reintroducing an apex predator, the project initiates a trophic cascade, regulating prey populations like Chital and Nilgai.

Strategic Site Selection – Kuno National Park (Madhya Pradesh) was chosen for its high prey density and suitable "open forest" habitat. Gandhi Sagar Sanctuary has recently been operationalized as a second site to manage "density pressure."

3. Veterinary Excellence and Advanced Wildlife Management

The project has become a showcase for specialized wildlife medicine –

Clinical Success Stories – Mukhi's Recovery – Advanced treatment for a humerus fracture demonstrated the ability to perform complex surgeries on wild carnivores.

Nirva's Case – Management of severe bone infections (osteomyelitis) using long-term antibiotics and surgical debridement proved the resilience of the veterinary response.

High-Speed Injury Management – Specialized protocols handle injuries resulting from the cheetah's unique physiology, where speeds of 100 km/h lead to high-impact fractures during hunts.

Self-Reliance-Indian Forest and veterinary staff have developed independent expertise, reducing the reliance on foreign specialists and institutionalizing global best practices within the Wildlife Institute of India (WII).

4. Conservation Biology and Ecosystem Perspectives

Flagship Species Concept – The cheetah acts as an "umbrella species," where its protection ensures the survival of other grassland-dependent species like the Blackbuck and Chinkara.

Genetic Diversity – To avoid "inbreeding depression," India continues to import genetically diverse individuals from multiple African nations to ensure long-term population viability.

Human-Wildlife Interface – The "Cheetah Mitra" initiative and community compensation schemes have been vital in minimizing conflict and fostering local support in the Sheopur and Morena districts.

5. Policy, Legal, and Institutional Framework

Statutory Backing – The project operates under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, and is monitored by the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA).

International Alignment – It fulfills India's commitments under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), positioning the nation as a leader in innovative "rewilding."

Technological Integration – The use of high-tech tools has revolutionized monitoring –

1. GPS/Satellite Collars – For real-time movement tracking.
2. Digital Radiography – For on-site health assessments.
3. Surveillance Drones – For habitat and prey monitoring.

6. Critical Challenges and Strategic Hurdles

Despite successes, the project faces ongoing scrutiny –

Adaptation Stress – Initial mortalities highlighted the challenges of climate differences (Indian monsoon vs. African savanna) and the "winter coat" issue leading to infections.

Habitat Size Constraints – Experts debate if the 748 sq. km core of Kuno is sufficient for a population that naturally requires vast territories.

Resource Prioritization – The "Cheetah vs. Lion" debate persists, with some conservationists arguing for the relocation of Asiatic Lions to Kuno as originally planned by the Supreme Court.

7. Success Indicators and Emerging Outcomes

Birth of Native Cubs – The birth of multiple litters—specifically the survival of Mukhi's offspring (the first second-generation Indian-born cheetahs)—is a definitive indicator of biological adaptation.

100% Medical Recovery – The ability of Indian teams to achieve a 100% recovery rate in recent injury cases highlights matured clinical governance.

Economic Impact – The project has boosted local eco-tourism and generated direct employment for hundreds of residents around the Kuno-Gandhi Sagar landscape.

Conclusion

Project Cheetah in 2026 is no longer an experiment; it is a holistic conservation model. By blending ecological ambition with surgical precision and institutional governance, India has proven that extinct species can be brought back to play their vital role in the environment. Sustaining this momentum will require continued adaptive management, genetic vigilance, and the expansion of protected grasslands across the subcontinent.

Source - <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/fractured-bones-amputations-kuno-cheetah-programme-alive-10609525/lite/>

Question

"Project Cheetah represents a transition from 'species-centric' conservation to 'ecosystem-centric' restoration. Critically analyze the ecological significance of this initiative and the structural challenges involved in establishing a self-sustaining cheetah population in India." (250 Words, 15 Marks)

1. Introduction

Project Cheetah, launched in 2022, is the world's first intercontinental translocation of a large carnivore. Aimed at reviving a species declared extinct in India in 1952, the project seeks to restore the ecological functional role of the cheetah as an apex predator. By 2026, the project has moved into a consolidation phase, highlighting the synergy between advanced veterinary science and institutional governance.

2. Ecological Significance of the Initiative

Apex Predator and Trophic Cascade - As an apex predator, the cheetah regulates the population of herbivores (like Chital and Nilgai), preventing overgrazing and promoting the health of the vegetation layer—a process known as a trophic cascade.

Restoration of Grassland Ecosystems - Grasslands are often neglected in Indian conservation compared to dense forests. Project Cheetah acts as a "flagship" for grassland restoration, protecting the habitat of other endangered species like the Chinkara and Blackbuck.

Flagship for Biodiversity - The protection of the cheetah's vast home range ensures the conservation of the entire biological community within that landscape, fulfilling India's commitments under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).

3. Structural and Operational Challenges

Adaptation and Mortality - Initial setbacks, including mortalities due to climate differences (monsoon-induced infections and adaptation stress), raised concerns about the suitability of Indian conditions compared to African savannas.

Habitat Size and Fragmentation - Cheetahs naturally require vast, unfragmented territories. Kuno National Park, despite its suitability, faces challenges of "density pressure," necessitating the expansion into satellite sites like Gandhi Sagar Sanctuary.

Genetic Management - Maintaining a viable breeding population requires continuous genetic monitoring and periodic "infusion" of new individuals from Africa to prevent inbreeding depression.

Human-Wildlife Interface - Ensuring the safety of the animals while maintaining the livelihoods of local communities in the buffer zones requires constant engagement through initiatives like "Cheetah Mitras."

4. Role of Advanced Governance and Science

Veterinary Innovation - 2026 has seen 100% recovery rates in complex clinical cases (e.g., Mukhi's humerus fracture), proving the maturity of Indian wildlife medical protocols.

Technological Integration - The use of satellite-linked GPS collars and digital radiography has transformed wildlife monitoring into a data-driven science.

Legal and Institutional Framework - The project is anchored in the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, and is managed by the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA), ensuring high-level statutory and financial backing.

5. Conclusion

Project Cheetah is not merely about bringing back a charismatic animal; it is about restoring the lost balance of India's scrub and grassland biomes. While adaptation challenges and resource allocation debates persist, the birth of native-born cubs and the success of medical interventions indicate a stabilizing trajectory. Long-term success will depend on adaptive management, habitat expansion beyond Kuno, and sustained community participation, eventually making India a global leader in innovative rewilding strategies.

Source - <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/fractured-bones-amputations-kuno-cheetah-programme-alive-10609525/lite/>

3. The global economy's many chokepoints (BL)

General Studies Paper III – Indian Economy & International Relations

Topic – Globalisation and its effects

Sub-Topic – Energy security and trade routes

Introduction

The global economy today is highly interconnected, but this integration has created critical chokepoints—geographical, technological, and financial nodes where disruptions can trigger widespread systemic risks. These chokepoints expose the tension between efficiency-driven globalisation and the need for resilience in an era of geopolitical uncertainty.

1. Concept of Economic Chokepoints

1. Refers to critical nodes in global economic networks where disruption causes cascading effects.
2. Includes trade routes, supply chains, financial systems, and technological hubs.
3. Represents single points of failure in an interconnected system.

2. Types of Chokepoints

Geographical Chokepoints

1. Strategic maritime routes (e.g., Hormuz, Malacca, Suez).
2. Critical for global trade and energy flows.

Technological Chokepoints

1. Concentration in sectors like semiconductors and rare earths.
2. Dominance of a few firms/countries creates dependency.

Financial Chokepoints

1. Systems like SWIFT control global financial transactions.
2. Can be used for sanctions and economic coercion.

3. Structural Drivers

Efficiency-Oriented Globalisation

1. Just-in-time supply chains minimise costs but reduce buffers.

Technological Concentration

1. High entry barriers lead to production clustering.

Network Centralisation

1. Hub-and-spoke systems increase systemic vulnerability.

4. Key Risks and Challenges

Single-Point Failure

1. Disruptions (wars, accidents) can affect entire global systems.

Weaponisation of Interdependence

1. Use of trade and finance as geopolitical tools.

Economic Volatility

1. Price shocks in energy, commodities, and technology.

Systemic Fragility

1. Lack of redundancy increases vulnerability.

5. Efficiency vs Resilience Trade-off

Efficiency Advantages

1. Lower costs and higher productivity.
2. Global specialisation enhances growth.

Resilience Advantages

1. Diversification reduces risks.
2. Improves economic security.

Trade-off

1. Resilience increases costs and may fragment trade.
2. Efficiency increases vulnerability to shocks.

6. Global Responses

Diversification Strategies

1. Friend-shoring, near-shoring, China+1 strategy.

Domestic Capacity Building

1. Investments in critical sectors like semiconductors.

Strategic Stockpiling

1. Energy, food, and critical minerals reserves.

Infrastructure Strengthening

1. Redundant logistics and digital systems.

7. Implications for India

Opportunities

1. Alternative manufacturing hub in global supply chains.

Challenges

1. High import dependence in energy and technology.

Policy Imperatives

1. Strengthen domestic manufacturing and logistics.
2. Balance strategic autonomy with global integration.

Conclusion

Economic chokepoints highlight the vulnerabilities of globalisation. A balanced approach combining efficiency with resilience is essential to ensure stable and secure economic systems in a geopolitically uncertain world.

Source - <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/the-global-economys-many-chokepoints/article70803999.ece>

Question

Q. Economic chokepoints have transformed global interdependence into both an opportunity and a vulnerability. Examine the nature of these chokepoints and analyse the efficiency–resilience trade-off in managing them. (250 words)

Introduction

1. Globalisation has created highly integrated economic networks.
2. However, it has also led to economic chokepoints that act as critical vulnerabilities and tools of geopolitical leverage.

Nature of Economic Chokepoints

1. Geographical Chokepoints

1. Strategic trade routes concentrate global flows of energy and goods.
2. Disruptions can trigger global supply shocks.

2. Technological Chokepoints

1. Advanced sectors (e.g., semiconductors) dominated by few players.
2. Creates dependence and supply insecurity.

3. Financial Chokepoints

1. Centralised systems enable global transactions.
2. Can be weaponised through sanctions and restrictions.

Efficiency vs Resilience Trade-off

Efficiency (Benefits)

1. Minimises costs through global specialisation.
2. Enhances productivity via lean supply chains.

Efficiency (Limitations)

1. Reduces redundancy and buffers.
2. Increases vulnerability to shocks and disruptions.

Resilience (Benefits)

1. Diversification reduces dependency risks.
2. Strengthens economic security and stability.

Resilience (Limitations)

1. Higher costs due to duplication of systems.
2. Risk of global fragmentation and reduced cooperation.

Way Forward

1. Selective Diversification

1. Focus on critical sectors rather than blanket decoupling.

2. Domestic Capacity Building

1. Invest in strategic industries and technologies.

3. Strengthening Multilateralism

1. Promote rules-based global trade systems.

4. Infrastructure Resilience

1. Develop alternative routes and digital systems.

Conclusion

Managing economic chokepoints requires a calibrated balance between efficiency and resilience. While efficiency drives growth, resilience ensures stability in times of crisis. A strategic approach combining diversification, domestic capacity, and global cooperation is essential to build a secure and sustainable economic system in an increasingly uncertain world.

Source - <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/the-global-economys-many-chokepoints/article70803999.ece>

4. process reforms REVIVE IEPFA (FE)

General Studies Paper III – Indian Economy & International Relations

Topic – Financial sector reforms

Sub-Topic – Digital governance and process reforms

Introduction

The Investor Education and Protection Fund Authority (IEPFA) was established to safeguard investor interests by facilitating the recovery of unclaimed dividends and shares. However, procedural inefficiencies historically limited its effectiveness. Recent reforms aimed at process simplification and digital integration highlight how governance improvements can enhance efficiency and citizen outcomes.

1. Background of IEPFA

1. Established in 2016 under the Companies Act.

2. Manages unclaimed dividends, shares, and financial assets.
3. Aims to return these assets to rightful owners.

2. Pre-Reform Challenges

Complex Procedures

1. Claim process involved multiple steps and approvals.

Fragmented Systems

1. Separate portals for application, share transfer, and payment.

Manual Intervention

1. Repeated data entry and verification increased errors.

Delays and Backlogs

1. Claims took years; backlog exceeded tens of thousands.

3. Nature of Reforms

Process Mapping

1. Identification of inefficiencies across stages.

System Integration

1. Merging multiple portals into a unified system.

Reduction in Steps

1. Steps reduced significantly (from ~25 to ~15).

Automation and Digitisation

1. Faster approvals and reduced manual intervention.

4. Outcomes of Reforms

Increased Efficiency

1. Processing time reduced from years to months/days.

Higher Throughput

1. Monthly approvals increased significantly.

Backlog Reduction

1. Pending cases expected to be cleared rapidly.

Improved User Experience

1. Easier navigation and reduced reliance on intermediaries.

5. Governance Lessons

Process Reforms vs Structural Reforms

1. Small administrative changes can yield high impact.

Digital Governance

1. Integration and automation improve service delivery.

Citizen-Centric Approach

1. Simplification reduces transaction costs for citizens.

Data-Driven Policy

1. Process mapping helps identify bottlenecks.

6. Challenges Ahead

Sustaining Efficiency

1. Need continuous monitoring and upgrades.

Digital Inclusion

1. Ensuring accessibility for all users.

System Integration Risks

1. Managing data security and interoperability.

7. Way Forward

Further Simplification

1. Reduce documentation and improve interfaces.

Awareness Campaigns

1. Inform citizens about claim processes.

Replication of Model

1. Apply similar reforms in other governance sectors.

Conclusion

IEPFA reforms demonstrate that targeted process improvements and digital integration can significantly enhance governance outcomes. Such reforms, though incremental, play a crucial role in improving efficiency, transparency, and citizen trust in public institutions.

Source - <https://www.financialexpress.com/opinion/process-reforms-revive-iepfa/4189734/>

Question

Q. Administrative process reforms and digital integration can significantly improve governance outcomes. Discuss with reference to investor protection mechanisms in India. (250 words)

Introduction

Efficient governance requires not only policy formulation but also effective implementation. In investor protection mechanisms, procedural inefficiencies often hinder outcomes despite robust institutional frameworks.

Key Issues

1. Procedural Complexity

1. Multiple steps and approvals delay service delivery.

2. Fragmented Systems

1. Lack of integration leads to inefficiencies and duplication.

Role of Reforms

1. Process Simplification

1. Reduction in steps improves efficiency.

2. Digital Integration

1. Unified platforms enhance transparency and speed.

3. Automation

1. Reduces manual errors and delays.

Way Forward

1. Continuous Process Evaluation

1. Regular audits to identify bottlenecks.

2. Citizen-Centric Design

1. Simplify procedures and improve accessibility.

Conclusion

Administrative and digital reforms are essential for improving governance efficiency. Strengthening implementation mechanisms will enhance investor confidence and overall economic performance.

Source - <https://www.financialexpress.com/opinion/process-reforms-revive-iepfa/4189734/>