

The Hindu Important News Articles & Editorial For UPSC CSE

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Edition: International Table of Contents

Page 01 Syllabus : Prelims Fact	India 'protests' new Chinese counties in Ladakh
Page 01 Syllabus : Prelims Fact	Health Ministry monitoring HMPV outbreak in China
Page 06 Syllabus : GS 2 : Social Justice	This tribe prefers to live and let 'live-in'
In News	Data Localisation Returns: Draft Rules Aim to Tighten Digital Privacy and Sovereignty
Page 06 : Editorial Analysis: Syllabus : GS 2 : Indian Polity	The looming threat to federalism and democratic tenets

China's creation of counties in disputed Aksai Chin and its mega-dam on Yarlung Tsangpo escalates tensions with India.

India 'protests' new Chinese counties in Ladakh

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

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

MEA raises 'concerns' over announcement of mega dam project over Yarlung Tsangpo

Kallol Bhattacharjee
NEW DELHI

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

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

Concerns conveyed

He further stated categorically that India has also conveyed its "concerns" about the building a mega hydro power project in the upstream Yarlung Tsangpo, which is the Tibetan

name of Brahmaputra, that flows through Arunachal Pradesh and Assam.

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

The protest from the Indian side came after Chinese news agency Xinhua reported on December 27, 2024 that the authorities in northwest Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region had declared the formation of



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

He'an County and Hekang County, in the Hotan prefecture. The Hotan prefecture contains parts of Aksai Chin that India accuses China of occupying and formation of the two new counties appears like Beijing firming up administra-

tive measures in the region.

India-China meet

The protest from the Indian side is significant as it comes against the backdrop of the December 18, 2024 meeting between the

Special Representatives for the border mechanism – National Security Adviser Ajit Doval and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi.

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

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

over mega projects on rivers in their territory," said Mr. Jaiswal.

World's largest dam

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

The Chinese authorities have approved the construction of the hydel power project in the lower reaches of Yarlung Tsangpo. The mega dam is designed to be the largest infrastructure project in the world. Once constructed, the gigantic dam would dwarf even the Three Gorges Dam, which is now considered to be the largest. The MEA spokesperson hinted that the announce-

ment of the dam was not communicated to India through official channels as is the norm in the case of neighbours sharing major rivers and said the Ministry of External Affairs got to know the information through a news report by Xinhua on December 25, 2024. India's view, Mr. Jaiswal said, was "reiterated, along with need for transparency and consultation with downstream countries, following the latest report."

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

Places in Focus

Hotan Prefecture (Xinjiang, China)

- Located in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region of China.
- Includes parts of Aksai Chin, a disputed area claimed by India.
- Strategically important due to its location along the ancient Silk Road.
- Known for its jade production and historical significance in trade routes.

Aksai Chin (Ladakh, India)

- A high-altitude plateau in the northeastern part of the Indian Union Territory of Ladakh.
- Administered by China but claimed by India as part of Ladakh.
- A significant flashpoint in India-China territorial disputes, including during the 1962 war.
- Sparsely populated due to its harsh, arid climate.

Yarlung Tsangpo (Tibet, China)

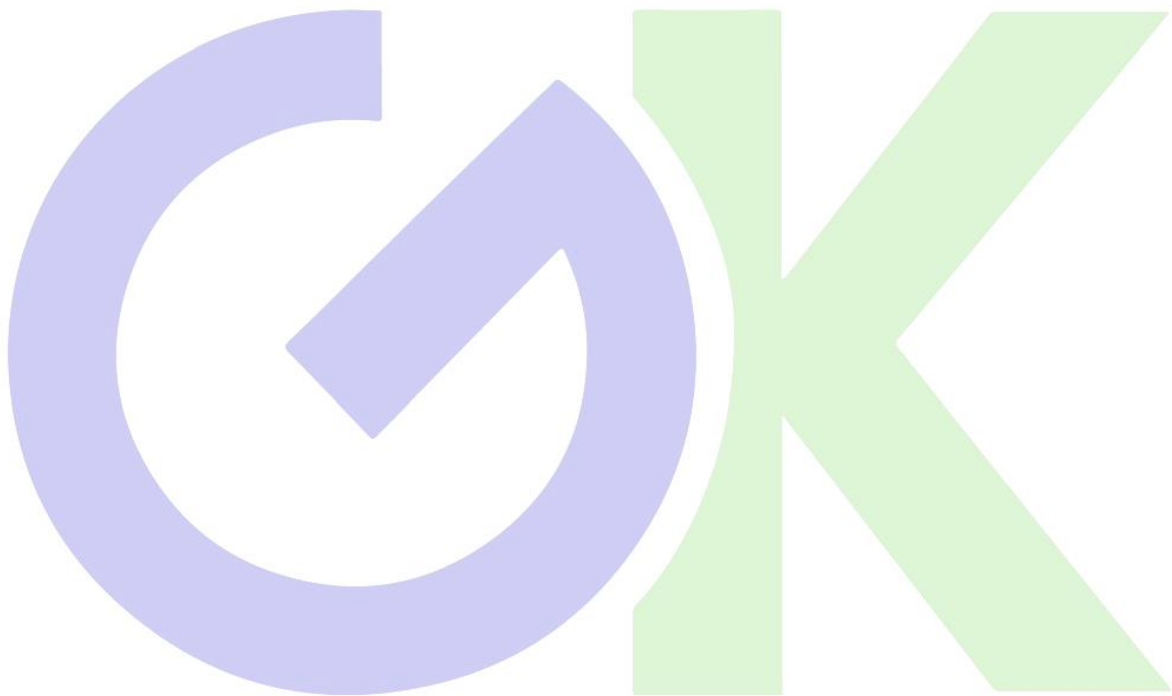
- The upper course of the Brahmaputra River, originating in Tibet.
- Flows through deep gorges in the Himalayas before entering India and Bangladesh.

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Daily News Analysis

- Site of China's proposed \$137 billion mega dam project.
- Critical for regional hydrology and ecosystems in downstream areas.



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India monitors China's surge in Human Metapneumovirus cases, a respiratory virus affecting children and elderly, with no cases reported domestically.

Health Ministry monitoring HMPV outbreak in China

Bindu Shajan Perappadan
NEW DELHI

The Union Health Ministry said on Friday that it was closely monitoring the alleged outbreak of Human Metapneumovirus (HMPV) in China. The Ministry maintained that while China had reported a rise in respiratory illness, particularly HMPV, India had not registered any unusual spike in winter respiratory diseases.

Five years after the COVID pandemic, China is experiencing a surge in HMPV cases, particularly in children under 14 years of age. Symptoms include cough, fever, and shortness of breath, with potential complications like bronchitis and pneumonia. The country has seen cases rise in its northern provinces, *Reuters* had re-

ported. Cases of HMPV had been reported in 2011-12 in the U.S., Canada, and Europe.

The Ministry's National Centre for Disease Control is closely monitoring respiratory and seasonal influenza cases in the country and is in touch with international agencies, noted a senior official.

No cause of alarm

Meanwhile, Director-General of Health Services Atul Goel told presspersons on Friday that no case of the respiratory illness – HMPV – has been reported in the country yet. Stating that the Union government was closely monitoring news about the possible HMPV outbreak in China, he added that as of now, there was no cause for alarm.

"HMPV is like any other respiratory virus that caus-



Under watch: The Ministry said it is closely monitoring respiratory and seasonal influenza cases in the country. FILE PHOTO

es flu-like symptoms, mostly in the elderly and children," said Dr. Goel, adding that respiratory illnesses are common during winters and that hospitals in India are equipped to deal with them. "Special

medicines are not needed because there are no antiviral drugs against this. There are no major cases, in hospitals or as per Indian Council of Medical Research data," he added.

According to the Cen-

ters for Disease Control and Prevention, the public health agency of the United States, HMPV can cause upper and lower respiratory disease in people of all ages, especially among young children, older adults, and people with weakened immune systems.

Discovered in 2001, the HMPV belongs to the Pneumoviridae family along with respiratory syncytial virus (RSV).

Broader use of molecular diagnostic testing has increased identification and awareness of HMPV as an important cause of upper and lower respiratory infection.

Symptoms commonly associated with the virus include cough, fever, nasal congestion, and shortness of breath. Clinical symptoms of HMPV infection

may progress to bronchitis or pneumonia and are similar to other viral infections that cause upper and lower respiratory infections. The estimated incubation period is three to six days, and the median duration of illness can vary depending upon severity but is like other respiratory infections caused by viruses.

The HMPV is most likely to spread from an infected person to others through secretions from coughing and sneezing, and close personal contact such as touching or shaking hands, touching objects or surfaces that have the viruses on them before touching the mouth, nose, or eyes.

In the U.S., the HMPV circulates in distinct annual seasons. HMPV circulation begins in winter and lasts until or through spring.

Human Metapneumovirus (HMPV) Overview:

- ➔ **Discovery:** Identified in 2001; belongs to the Pneumoviridae family, related to Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV).
- ➔ **Affected Groups:** Common among young children, older adults, and those with weakened immune systems.
- ➔ **Symptoms:** Causes cough, fever, nasal congestion, and shortness of breath. Severe cases may lead to bronchitis or pneumonia.
- ➔ **Transmission:** Spreads via respiratory secretions (coughing/sneezing), close personal contact, or contaminated surfaces.
- ➔ **Incubation:** Period of 3–6 days; illness duration varies based on severity.
- ➔ **Seasonality:** Active during winter and spring.
- ➔ **Treatment:** No specific antiviral drugs; supportive care is recommended.

The article explores Konda Reddi tribal traditions, focusing on live-in relationships, their cultural practices, and societal changes.



Partners for a Lifetime: Pr. Prapat Reddy and his partner Pandamma, in a live-in relationship since 2012, with their three children at Ukuluru village, in Alluri Sitharama Raju district, Andhra Pradesh. I APPALA NAIDU

This tribe prefers to live and let 'live-in'

Some youngsters of the tribal group living on the banks of the Godavari river in Andhra Pradesh, to avoid expensive traditional wedding rituals, now prefer live-in relationships with partners of their choice. With the elders of the tribe accepting the arrangement and offering the same community support that they give married couples, the live-in couples' families are thriving, writes T. Appala Naidu

Thirty-two-year-old Konda Reddi tribal woman Margela Pandamma, a mother of three girls, is pregnant with her fourth baby.

The first three deliveries were normal and uneventful. Now, in her third trimester, Ms. Pandamma says she had to abandon her sewing machine, which lies in a corner on the veranda of the house, upon her doctor's recommendation.

The woman from the Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG) manages all her household chores to prepare an early dinner for her family even as she engages her daughters in their play.

And bone-chilling cold on a stormy evening, she waits for her husband to return from work.

Mr. Prapat Reddy, her husband, is toiling to build their dream house adjacent to the house they live in, which his parents built.

Next summer, the couple will complete 12 years in their live-in relationship and they are eager to move into their new home with their fourth baby.

It all started with Mr. Prapat, a Jeep driver, falling in love with Ms. Pandamma. He managed to win her heart.

After deciding to enter into a live-in relationship, the couple convinced their parents first and then sought the tribe members' consent to their relationship.

"Our marriage was not solemnized under any tradition. We began to live together after our parents and community elders consented to our request to allow us to live as a couple," recalls Ms. Pandamma.

"Both of us preferred a live-in relationship to a traditional wedding, which involves huge expenditure. Neither of our families could bear that kind of expense," says Mr. Prapat, who discontinued education after falling Class X. He began earning a livelihood as a driver and rose to become the vice-sarpanch of Chaulwada gram panchayat of Mareduhilli mandal in Alluri Sitharama Raju (ASR) district.

Mr. Prapat's fortune turned as tourists from across India began thronging Goddus, Andhra Pradesh's only grassland destination. He owns a Jeep and operates it for tourists throughout the year.

The couple lives in Ukuluru village, 20 kilometres from the Mareduhilli headquarters, in the Mareduhilli forest. Deep inside the reserve

forest, the tiny village consists of 36 families, all of which are Konda Reddis.

Ten kilometres ahead of the village are naturally-grown Jamun (*Syzygium cumini*) orchards on both sides of the road in the reserve forest. Jamun is a sacred tree, without it, Konda Reddi's traditional wedding would not be solemnized. In the winter, the Amatto plantations in full bloom greet at the entry of Ukuluru.

The Amatto, locally known as Jappa, is used in lipstick-making. It is the prime commercial crop grown by the Konda Reddis of Mareduhilli forest. The red soil applied on their mud-walled houses is integral to the tribe's housing architecture.

Andela Sani Reddy, 26, Mr. Prapat's neighbour, claims, "In the past eight years, only five weddings were performed as per our tribal tradition. However, 21 couples, including my wife and me, have opted to live-in."

Mr. Sani Reddy, an auto-rickshaw driver and farmer, and Ms. Aruna Kumari, 20, entered into their live-in relationship last summer.

Elaborate wedding rituals

The traditional Konda Reddi tribal wedding ritual lasts four days and mandates a feast for the guests every day. Chicken and mutton are a must on the menu, and guests from across the gram panchayat and nearby Konda Reddi tribal villages must be invited, irrespective of the wedding budget.

Ms. Aruna Kumari belongs to Cherkavada village, 10 kilometres from Ukuluru. She dropped out of college in the first year of intermediate to help her parents in shifting cultivation-based agriculture. Ms. Kumari is the eldest child of her family and has three siblings, including one brother.

"I fell in love with Sani Reddy and decided to marry him. Since I was of marriageable age, I proposed to my parents about my plans for a live-in relationship with him. My family also could not afford a traditional wedding. We got a nod from both our parents," says Ms. Kumari. Now, this couple is preparing to build a new house by reaping profits from the Amatto farming.

"Vice-sarpanch Mr. Prapat says, "In any marriage or a live-in relationship, our tribe does not give or seek anything in dowry. It is an unwritten

practice that exists in our society. However, the man voluntarily helps his in-laws in agriculture work in their fields and receives a payment, which is considered a gift from the in-laws.

"I have brought nothing in dowry. I simply came with a bag of clothes to Mr. Prapat's house. Our property depends on the hard work we invest in any of their relatives house, where they need to stay together for a week. Later, they would return to the man's house to be accepted by the family and community to live as 'wife and husband'."

In union, the Prapats and Sani Reddis say that none of the couples who entered a live-in relationship in their village had been separated.

Bigger issues to worry

However, minor disputes that mostly arise between couples are resolved by village elders, a team which has an authority on the affairs of the village and cultural practices. The majority of the disputes between couples arise over men's drinking problem, they say.

Elaborating on the legal sanctity of live-in relationships among the Konda Reddi tribe, Rampachodavaram-based lawyer Venka Ram Prakash says, "Any Scheduled Tribe, including the Konda Reddi tribe (PVTG), does not come under the purview of the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955. However, they have their traditional system comprising community heads to deal with their issues of marriage."

SARLA LINGA REDDY
Former MP, Kandravada village

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"Our village does not have a history of visiting the police station in matters of live-in relationships. No couple have gone to such an extent. In fact, they live in harmony, leading a happy life," says Pallala Chamamma of Ukuluru.

A decade ago, Ms. Chamamma, 60, was widowed after her husband, Mangi Reddy, succumbed to alcoholism-related health complications.

The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 Sec.21 states, "Nothing contained in this Act shall apply to the members of any Scheduled tribe within the meaning of clause (25) of article 366 of the Constitution unless the Central Government, by notification in the Official Gazette, otherwise directs."

In the event of the death of the husband, the Public Distribution System ration card and birth certificates of the children would be submitted to establish the 'live-in relationship' to claim the benefits, including pensions under the 'widow/single woman' category.

Laugadu tradition

Ms. Chamamma was nostalgic about her wedding, which happened according to the Konda Reddi Laugadu, a tradition that existed before the emergence of live-in relationships.

In this tradition, the village elders and the groom's friends would 'abduct' the woman when she is alone at the stream, farm field, or carnival. She would be kept in a house alone with the groom for a day or until the wedding talks commence.

"I was abducted by the village elders and friends of my husband while I was attending a carnival of Gangamma. They put me in the room along with my husband. The next day, our wedding talks were held, and everything was set for the wedding ritual," recalls Ms. Chamamma.

"Our wedding was held as per Laugadu. It was a minimal affair. A branch of the Jamun tree was placed next to me, the bride. The groom then tied a yellow thread with a piece of turmeric tied to the branch," she says.

There was no waiting for an auspicious date and time. The next day of the abduction was the ideal time to tie the knot. It happens in every Konda Reddi village. The woman is freed from the abduction if she rejects the wedding proposal during the wedding talks attended by her parents.

Festivals are the most suitable time for Laugadu. The tribe had scheduled all the major festivals in the summer season as most of the crops grown by the tribe would be harvested by then. Night rituals and dances are integral to most of their festivals wherein it is common to see women of marriageable age getting abducted by men who are confident of winning their hearts.

"In the Laugadu, too, we never heard of any separated couples, and divorce is unheard of," says Ms. Chamamma, a firm supporter of the live-in relationship trend emerging in her tribe.

Her eldest daughter, Meena Kumari is in a live-in relationship while her son, Chitraprasad Kumar, had recently proposed to a woman to a live-in relationship and talks are in progress, she says.

The major festivals are the Gangamma festival, in which the village deity is worshipped for the peace in the village and the Bhadrakali festival, celebrated seeking blessings for the bountiful harvest. The uniqueness of the Pradi festival is the community feast, in which food prepared with millet is served.

"The decision of the elders during the wedding talk is final, and every couple should stick to it till their last breath. Nowadays, the same commitment is also seen among couples in the live-in relationship," says Pallala Rajamma. The 65-year-old woman wedded Mr. Sani Reddy under the Laugadu tradition, and their marriage is still intact.

Another wedding tradition, Thakkadu, exists among the Konda Reddis who live on the hills and are still hunter-gatherers, wherein the man can marry a woman of his choice if she is a relative and agrees to the marriage. If both families formally consented to the proposed wedding, the woman's family will be invited to the man's house during a community festival.

During the festival day, the wedding between the man and the woman is solemnized after the man touches the woman's feet with his feet at the entrance of the house.

In the Mogral tradition of the wedding which happens among the relatives, both man and woman who like each other voluntarily go to any of their relatives house, where they need to stay together for a week. Later, they would return to the man's house to be accepted by the family and community to live as 'wife and husband'."

"The aim of these live-in relationships or other marriage traditions that have evolved in our tribe was to avoid or minimize the financial burden on the families for wedding rituals. We have been accepting every tradition as long as that does not harm the relationship between man and woman," said 70-year-old Sarla Linga Reddy, former Mandal Parishad Territorial Constituency member.

He lives in Kandravada village under Pannuru Gram Panchayat in Mareduhilli mandal. Kandravada is one of the biggest villages where more than one hundred Konda Reddi families live.

Mr. Linga Reddy couple have been blessed with eight children: five boys and three girls. Seven of them were married. He had consented to his two sons to choose a 'live-in' relationship.

His 33-year-old daughter, Lalitha Kumari, is the Mareduhilli Mandal Parishad president (MPP). Ms. Lalitha Kumari is the youngest MPP and holds a bachelor's degree in Nursing.

"Over the past decade, less than ten weddings happened in the four-day rituals and lavish feasts in our village. Most of them are government employees. However, the number of couples who choose a live-in relationship is more than 40," said Mr. Linga Reddy, the former president (2000-01) of erstwhile East Godavari District Konda Reddi Tribe Society. Society strives to fight for the causes and rights of the tribe.

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'Inevitable change'

Ms. Lalitha Kumari, who meets the tribal elders and various political representatives, opines, "New challenges have emerged in our society. Some of us who cracked government jobs and live in nearby towns prefer to marry outside our tribe. Some disputes over property are reported among those couples."

"Change is inevitable in any tradition and society. The institution of marriage in our tribe may have encountered more challenges as a consequence of marriages with non-tribals, which are happening more often nowadays," she says.

Vice-sarpanch Mr. Prapat and Mr. Linga Reddy say that all disputes, including land disputes, are resolved at the village level. During a meeting, a three-member group of elders decides on a particular issue.

"The village elders are asked to decide if any problem arises in any family in the event of the death of any partner in the live-in relationship. However, disputes between couples over land or property are rare in our society," says Mr. Linga Reddy.

As the family of Ms. Pandamma prepares to go to bed, she remarks, "Within a few weeks, I will become the mother of four children born out of a bond called live-in. It had never betrayed any woman in our village. It never will."

Location and Population of the Konda Reddi Tribe:

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Daily News Analysis

- ➡ The Konda Reddi Tribe primarily resides in the hilly and forested regions of Andhra Pradesh.
- ➡ The tribe is primarily concentrated in the districts of East Godavari, West Godavari, Khammam, and Srikakulam.

Economic Activities:

- ➡ The tribe primarily practices shifting cultivation.
- ➡ **Key commercial crop:** Annatto, used in lipstick-making.
- ➡ Red soil from the region is used for constructing traditional mud-walled houses.

Marriage Traditions:

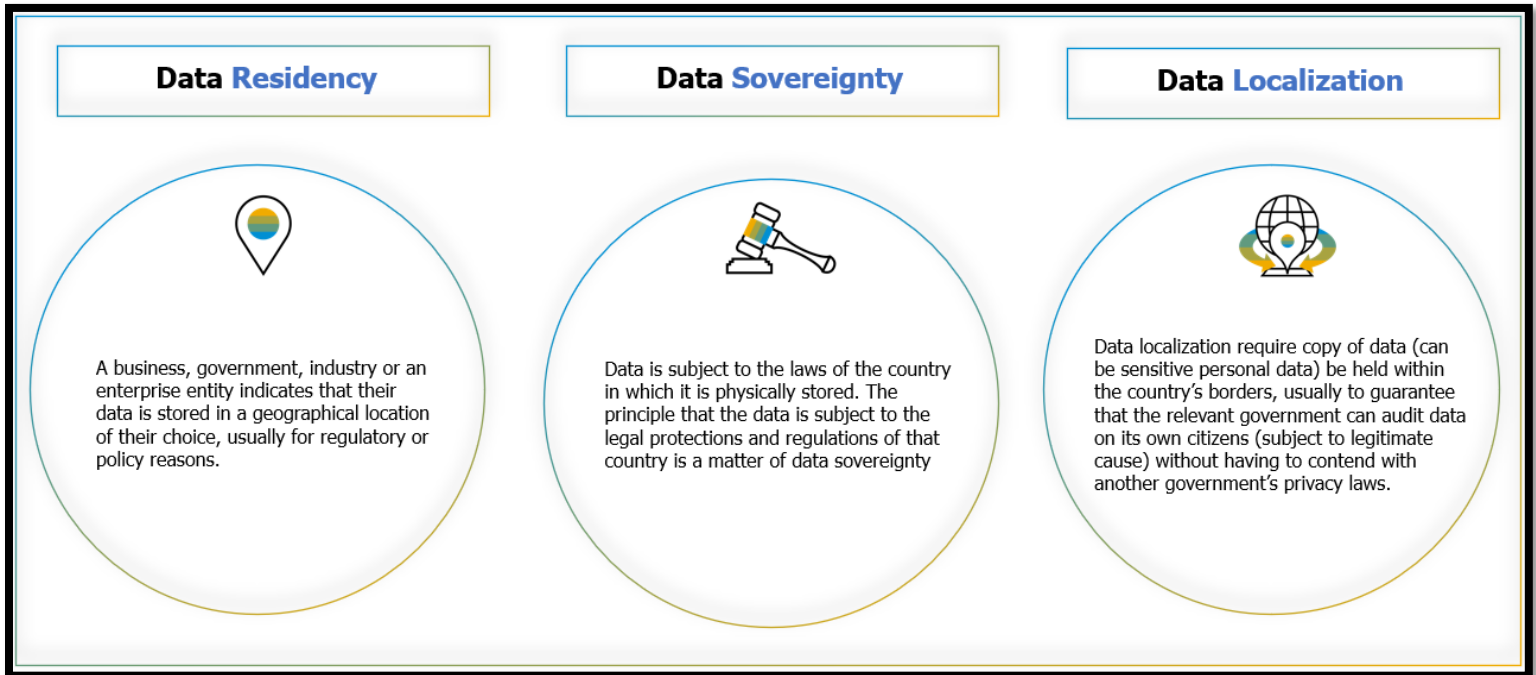
- ➡ **Live-in Relationships:** Increasingly preferred due to the financial burden of traditional weddings.
- ➡ **Traditional Weddings:** Ritualistic ceremonies lasting four days, involving feasts with mandatory chicken and mutton dishes.
- ➡ **Laagudu Tradition:** The bride is "abducted" by the groom's family, followed by wedding negotiations.

Community and Cultural Changes:

- ➡ The tribe is experiencing gradual cultural shifts, such as intermarriage with non-tribals.
- ➡ Disputes within the community are traditionally resolved by village elders.

In News : Data Localisation Returns: Draft Rules Aim to Tighten Digital Privacy and Sovereignty

The draft Digital Personal Data Protection Rules, 2025, reintroduce data localisation requirements, impacting tech companies and strengthening data sovereignty in India.



Analysis of the news:

➡ Data Localisation Reintroduced

- The draft Digital Personal Data Protection Rules, 2025, reintroduce data localisation requirements, mandating significant data fiduciaries to store and process specific personal and traffic data within India.
- This marks a shift from the 2023 Act, which allowed cross-border data transfer with notified restrictions.

➡ Significant Data Fiduciaries: Defined and Regulated

- Entities handling vast or sensitive data with implications for sovereignty, security, or public order, like Big Tech companies, are categorized as significant data fiduciaries.
- They will be subject to stringent data localisation norms and compliance requirements.

➡ Safeguards for Government Data Processing

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Daily News Analysis

- The draft rules propose “lawful” data processing by government entities but face scrutiny due to exemptions granted under the 2023 Act for national security and public order. Safeguards are expected to address these broad exemptions.
- ➔ **Parental Consent Mechanism for Children’s Data**
 - Tech companies must devise verifiable mechanisms for parental consent when processing children’s data, though this remains challenging.
 - Exceptions are made for health, education, and childcare-related establishments.
- ➔ **Data Breach Notification and Penalties**
 - Data fiduciaries must notify users promptly about breaches, detailing their nature, impact, and mitigation measures.
 - Non-compliance with safeguards can result in penalties of up to ₹250 crore.
- ➔ **Enhanced User Consent Requirements**
 - The draft mandates clear, specific, and standalone notices for data collection, ensuring transparency about the type of data collected and its intended purpose.
- ➔ **Implications for Big Tech**
 - While promoting data sovereignty, the reintroduction of localisation may increase operational costs for companies like Meta and Google, potentially impacting their services.
 - Industry resistance to localisation persists due to its broad implications for global operations.

The looming threat to federalism and democratic tenets

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

The historical context

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

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

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



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disqualification petitions and provisions for "group defections" has rendered the law ineffective. The result is that defections are still commonplace, leading to unconstitutional changes in regimes.

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

Federal structure under siege

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

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

In fact, if the ONOE had been in place, there would have been another election in 2001, which would add up to four elections in five years. The frequency of elections results in increased costs – financial, administrative, and in terms of human capital – which are not realised in the efficiency that the ONOE is touted to bring. On nominal and practical grounds, each government needs a realistic time period to analyse the existing

socio-political-economic state of affairs, frame adaptive policies and do course corrections. This artificially imposed reduction in the tenure of a government could disrupt governance, resulting in negative consequences that outweigh the usual policy paralysis caused by the enforcement of the Model Code of Conduct during elections.

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

Address the issues first

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

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

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

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

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

GS Paper 02 : Indian Polity

PYQ : (UPSC CSE (M) GS-2 2017) : 'Simultaneous election to the Lok Sabha and the State Assemblies will limit the amount of time and money spent in electioneering but it will reduce the government's accountability to the people' Discuss. **(150 words/10m)**

UPSC Mains Practice Question: Critically examine the proposal of 'One Nation, One Election' (ONOE) in the context of its potential impact on India's federal structure and democratic principles. Highlight the constitutional, logistical, and governance challenges associated with its implementation. **(250 Words /15 marks)**

Context :

- The ruling Bharatiya Janata Party-led government has proposed the ONOE framework to synchronize Lok Sabha and State Assembly elections.

Historical Context of Simultaneous Elections

- Simultaneous elections were common in India post-Independence but disrupted by the imposition of Article 356 (President's Rule).
- The first misuse of Article 356 occurred in Kerala in 1959, reflecting federal overreach and disrupting Union-State relations.
- B.R. Ambedkar termed Article 356 a "dead letter," but it has been invoked over 130 times, leading to the dismissal of several State governments.

Impact of Defection and Anti-Defection Law

- Defections destabilize State governments, leading to unconstitutional regime changes.
- The Anti-Defection Law, introduced through the 52nd Amendment in 1985, penalizes defectors but has loopholes, such as delays in Speaker decisions and allowance for group defections.

Challenges with ONOE Framework

- **Constitutional and Governance Implications**
 - ONOE requires amendments to Articles 83 and 172, which guarantee five-year terms for Parliament and State Assemblies.
 - Aligning State election cycles with national elections could curtail or extend State government tenures, undermining State autonomy.
- **Democratic Concerns**
 - Voters may struggle to evaluate State and national governments independently due to simultaneous elections.

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Daily News Analysis

- Abbreviated terms for State governments in midterm ONOE cycles dilute the principle of "one person, one vote, one value."
- Past political turbulence in the mid-1990s highlights that ONOE could lead to frequent elections in short periods, negating cost-efficiency arguments.

➡ **Logistical and Administrative Challenges**

- Managing elections for over 900 million voters across Lok Sabha, State Assemblies, and local bodies would strain resources and institutions.
- Voter fatigue and confusion could arise, diminishing electoral effectiveness.

Systemic Issues Requiring Attention

➡ **Misuse of Article 356**

- The misuse of Article 356 continues despite judicial efforts like the S.R. Bommai case judgment to restore State autonomy.

➡ **Anti-Defection Law Reforms**

- Loopholes in the anti-defection framework need addressing to ensure stability in State governments.

➡ **Strengthening Federalism**

- The federal structure recognizes India's diversity and plurality, requiring State autonomy to remain intact.
- ONOE, without systemic reforms, risks centralizing power and eroding the federal character of governance.

Conclusion

- ➡ ONOE, while promising fiscal and administrative efficiencies, poses significant risks to India's federal and democratic framework.
- ➡ Democratic governance must prioritize the principles of federalism and equitable partnership between the Centre and States to preserve the Constitution's essence.