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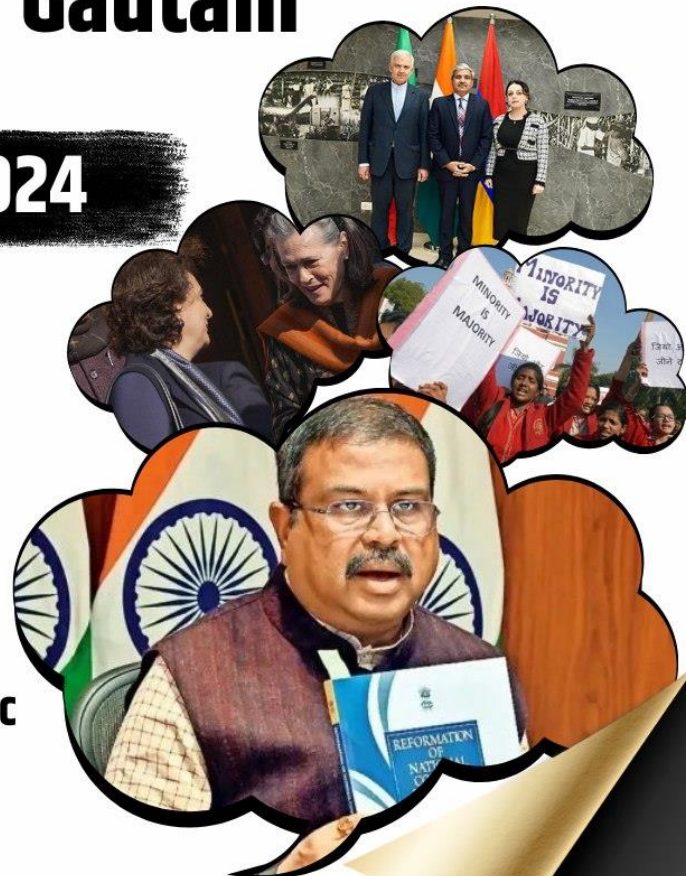
# Daily Current Affairs

## To The Point

### by Dhananjay Gautam

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# 1 One Candidate, Multiple Constituencies: A Democratic Dilemma

**Context:** Amid the heated debates surrounding Indian politics, one critical issue often goes unnoticed: the practice of **One Candidate Contesting from Multiple Constituencies (OCMC)** for the same office. This longstanding tradition raises significant questions about its implications for democracy, taxpayers, and political fairness.

**Background:**
The Indian Constitution entrusts **Parliament** with the responsibility of regulating elections. The **Representation of the People Act (RPA), 1951**, governs electoral practices and has evolved over time:

- **Pre-1996:** Candidates could contest from any number of constituencies.
- **Post-1996 Amendment:** The law was revised to limit candidates to a maximum of **two constituencies** per election.

Despite these changes, OCMC remains prevalent, especially in **State Legislative Assembly elections**. For instance, November 2024 saw **44 by-elections** due to legislators vacating seats after winning in multiple constituencies.

**Arguments Against OCMC:**

1. **Increased Burden on Taxpayers:** The administrative cost of elections is significant, and **by-elections** triggered by seat vacancies add unnecessary expenses, ultimately borne by the **taxpayers**.
2. **Advantage for the Ruling Party:** By-elections held within six months often favor the ruling party, which can leverage **state machinery**, resources, and patronage, creating an uneven playing field for the opposition.
3. **Financial Strain on Opponents:** By-elections compel defeated candidates and their parties to spend additional resources on repeated contests, intensifying their financial strain.
4. **Erosion of Democratic Values:** OCMC allows leaders to hedge their bets, prioritizing **political gains** over genuine public service, undermining the essence of democratic representation.
5. **Voter Discontent:** Winning candidates vacating seats disrupt voter expectations of representation, causing **dissatisfaction** and eroding trust in the electoral process.
6. **Constitutional Concerns:** A petition in **Ashwini Kumar Upadhyay vs Union of India (2023)** argued that vacating a seat after winning violates voters' trust and contradicts the **fundamental right to freedom of speech and expression** under **Article 19(1)(a)**.

**Arguments in Favor of OCMC:**

1. **Safety Net for Candidates:** In closely contested elections, OCMC provides candidates with a **backup option**, reducing the risks associated with uncertain outcomes.
2. **International Precedents:** Countries like **Pakistan** and **Bangladesh** permit candidates to contest multiple constituencies, albeit with the condition of relinquishing all but one seat after the election.

**Proposed Reforms by the Election Commission of India (ECI):**

1. **Ban OCMC:** Amend **Section 33(7)** of the RPA, 1951, to prohibit candidates from contesting multiple constituencies.
   - This recommendation aligns with the **255th Law Commission Report (2015)**.
2. **Recover By-Election Costs:** Hold candidates who vacate seats responsible for the **entire cost** of conducting by-elections.

**Conclusion:**
The practice of OCMC imposes **financial and administrative burdens** that could be better utilized for developmental priorities. Adopting the principle of **One Candidate, One Constituency (OCOC)** aligns with the democratic ideals of **"one person, one vote."** However, its successful implementation demands **political consensus** and active support from major political parties.

Addressing this issue is essential for strengthening **democratic accountability** and ensuring fairer electoral practices in India.

**GS Paper 2 – International Relation**

**2** | **India-Iran-Armenia Trilateral Consultations: Strengthening Regional Ties**

**Context:** The **second India-Iran-Armenia Trilateral Consultations** were successfully conducted in **New Delhi**, showcasing the growing partnership between the three nations.

**Key Highlights of the Discussions:**
1. **Boosting Connectivity:**
   - The discussions emphasized the critical role of **connectivity initiatives**, particularly through the **International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC)**.
   - The importance of **Chabahar Port** in advancing regional connectivity and trade was underscored.
2. **Strengthening Multilateral Engagement:**
   - The three nations deliberated on enhancing their **collective influence** in global multilateral platforms by fostering deeper collaboration.
3. **Addressing Regional Developments:**
   - The consultations focused on promoting **peace and stability** across the region, emphasizing the significance of joint efforts in mitigating regional challenges.
4. **Expanding Trade, Tourism, and Cultural Exchange:**
   - Strategies to strengthen **trade**, **tourism**, and **cultural exchanges** were explored, with an aim to foster **people-to-people connections**.
5. **Armenia's Connectivity Vision:**
   - **Armenia** presented its initiative, **"The Crossroads of Peace,"** aimed at enhancing transportation links to connect the **Caspian Sea** with the **Mediterranean Sea** and the **Persian Gulf** with the **Black Sea**, promoting efficient regional connectivity.

**Did You Know?**
   - The **International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC)** is a **7,200-km-long multi-modal transportation network** connecting India, Iran, Afghanistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Russia, Central Asia, and Europe for seamless freight movement.
   - The **Chabahar Port**, located in Iran's **Sistan-Balochistan province**, is being jointly developed by India and Iran. It plays a pivotal role in enhancing **regional trade**, particularly facilitating India's connectivity with **Afghanistan**.

**Importance of the Trilateral Meeting:**
The **second India-Iran-Armenia consultations** underline the growing commitment to fostering **regional cooperation and development**. By focusing on shared goals, these discussions pave the way for enhanced collaboration in various fields, contributing to **regional stability** and **economic prosperity**.
Looking Ahead
   - The three nations reaffirmed their dedication to continued cooperation under this **trilateral framework**.
   - It was agreed that the **next round of consultations** would be hosted by **Iran** at a mutually convenient date, further strengthening the alliance.
This meeting highlights the shared vision of India, Iran, and Armenia in driving growth, stability, and connectivity across the region, setting a strong foundation for future collaboration.

# 3 Minority Rights in India: A Pillar of Democracy

**Context: Minority rights** are vital for preserving cultural, linguistic, and religious diversity in any democracy. The **Indian Constitution**, along with global frameworks like the **United Nations' 1992 Declaration on Minority Rights**, underscores the need to protect minority communities.

Franklin Roosevelt once remarked, **"No democracy can long survive which does not accept as fundamental to its very existence the recognition of the rights of minorities."**

**Historical Context:**

The idea of **minority rights** emerged from 19th-century European constitutional reforms:

- **Austria (1867):** Recognized the rights of ethnic minorities to preserve their languages and identities.
- **Hungary (1868):** Enacted similar protections.
- **Post-World War I Treaties:** Nations like Poland and Czechoslovakia included minority protections in their agreements.

**India's Constitution** drew inspiration from these principles, emphasizing inclusivity and diversity.

**Constitutional Provisions for Minorities:**

**Article 29: Right to Cultural Preservation:**

- Empowers citizens to protect their **culture, language, and script**.
- Ensures **equality and dignity** for all cultural identities.

**Article 30: Right to Educational Institutions:**

- Allows **religious and linguistic minorities** to establish and manage their own institutions.
- **Judicial View:** The **Supreme Court** sees this as crucial for equality and non-discrimination.
  - Recent Verdict: **Aligarh Muslim University (2024)** upheld the institution's minority character.

Article 350 A: Ensures primary education in one's mother tongue.

Article 350 B: Provides for a Special Officer to address linguistic minorities' concerns.

The Constitution also accommodates **personal laws**, such as the **customary laws of the Nagas**, promoting legal diversity.

**Understanding 'Minority'**

The term **'minority'** isn't explicitly defined in the Constitution. However:

- **Judicial Clarifications:** The Supreme Court, in cases like **TMA Pai Foundation (2002)**, defined minorities at the **state level** (e.g., Hindus are minorities in Punjab and northeastern states).
- **Criteria for Minority Institutions:**
  - **Founder's Intent**: The institution must primarily serve minority communities.
  - **Operational Factors**: Includes funding sources, administration, and objectives.

**Judicial Safeguards for Minority Institutions:**

Though autonomous, minority institutions are subject to:

- **Regulation:** Governments can intervene to prevent **maladministration** and ensure quality.
- **Fair Aid: Article 30(2)** prohibits discrimination in granting aid to minority institutions.

**Why Are Minority Rights Essential?**

**Preservation of Diversity:**

Minority rights ensure that cultural identities flourish within a supportive environment.

Balancing Individual and Group Rights

- While **individual equality** (Articles 14-18, 19, 25) is critical, it must be complemented by **group rights** for minorities.
- **Judicial Insight:** Courts emphasize that **special protections** are necessary for substantive equality.

**Relevance in Contemporary India:**

- **Legacy of Pluralism:** Articles 25-30 highlight India's commitment to its **multicultural fabric**.

- **Global Standards:** Aligns with international benchmarks like the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights**.

**Conclusion:**

India's Constitution strikes a fine balance between **individual equality** and **group recognition**, making **minority rights** a cornerstone of its democratic ethos.

As socio-political landscapes evolve, it's imperative to remain vigilant and adapt policies to protect the rights of minorities. In doing so, India reaffirms its vision of an **inclusive and harmonious society**.

## 4 Reforming National Entrance Exams: Towards Transparency and Efficiency

**Context:** A high-level committee, chaired by former ISRO chief **K. Radhakrishnan**, has proposed transformative reforms to enhance transparency and efficiency in national entrance examinations like **NEET, CUET**, and **UGC-NET**.

Drawing inspiration from the **election framework**, these reforms aim to fortify the integrity of the examination system and eliminate malpractices.

**What is the National Testing Agency (NTA)?**
**Overview:**
The **NTA** was established in **2017** as an autonomous and self-sustaining body under the **Ministry of Education**.

- Registered under the **Societies Registration Act, 1860**.
- Functions under the **Right to Information (RTI) Act**.
- Led by a Director General and a governing body appointed by the Union Government.

**Background:**
- In **2010**, a committee comprising IIT directors recommended creating a transparent, autonomous agency modeled after the **Educational Testing Service (ETS)** of the USA.
- Before the NTA's inception, various entities like **CBSE, UGC**, and universities conducted their own entrance tests.

**Objectives:**
**The NTA aims to:**
- Conduct **transparent, efficient, and globally standardized** tests for admissions and recruitment.
- Undertake research on educational and testing systems to address **knowledge gaps**.
- Identify experts and institutions for setting exam papers.
- Disseminate research on education standards and professional development.

**Key Exams Conducted by the NTA:**
- **JEE (Main)**, **NEET-UG, UGC-NET, CMAT, GPAT**, etc.
- The **National Education Policy 2020** envisions a broader role for the NTA to conduct entrance tests for all universities across India.

**Challenges Faced by the NTA:**
**1. Accountability Issues:**
- While **computer-based tests** ensure efficiency, outsourcing to third-party technical partners reduces government accountability.
- This reliance on external agencies creates **vulnerabilities** in the system.

**2. Manpower Shortages:** The NTA operates with only **25 permanent staff**, relying heavily on outsourced functions.

**3. Weak Security Mechanisms:**
- Large-scale pen-and-paper exams require robust measures to secure:
  o Question paper preparation and encryption.
  o Printing, transportation, and storage processes.
  o Exam center operations and answer sheet collection.
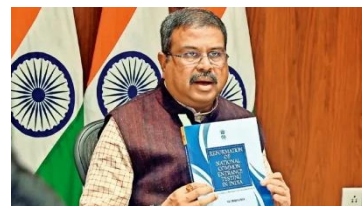
**4. Incidents of Irregularities:**
- **NEET-UG:** Alleged question paper leaks compromised the exam's credibility.
- **UGC-NET:** Reports of integrity breaches led to exam cancellations.

**Recommendations by the High-Level Committee:**
**1. Election-Style Framework:**
- **State Collaboration:** States to assist in administering exams, akin to the **general election model**.
- **Presiding Officers:** Each exam center to have an NTA-appointed officer overseeing operations.

2. **Sealing and Securing Centers:** Exam centers to be sealed before the tests and unsealed in the presence of **district administration** and **NTA officials**.

3. **State and District Committees:**
   - **State-Level Committees:** Led by a nodal officer appointed by the Chief Secretary, with representatives from **state police, NTA, IB**, and **NIC**.
   - **District-Level Committees:** Headed by district magistrates to identify secure exam centers and manage question paper transportation.

4. **Background Checks for Centers:** Vet exam centers based on ownership, past records, and intelligence inputs to mitigate security risks.

5. **Reduced Dependency on Private Agencies:** Gradually replace private test delivery agencies with **Kendriya Vidyalayas** and **Navodaya Vidyalayas**, which will develop digital infrastructure.

6. **Technology Integration:**
   - **Digi-Exam System:** Inspired by **DigiYatra**, this system will use biometric data for candidate verification.
   - **CCTV Monitoring:** Continuous surveillance of candidates during exams with district-level monitoring centers.

7. **Role Redefinition for NTA:** Focus solely on **entrance exams** for higher education, leaving recruitment exams to other entities.

8. **Flexibility in Exam Modes:** The decision on whether **NEET** will be computer-based or pen-and-paper rests with the **Health Ministry**, while the NTA serves as the service provider.

**Conclusion:**

The proposed reforms signify a paradigm shift in managing **national entrance exams**, emphasizing fairness, efficiency, and security.

By adopting an **election-style approach** and leveraging advanced technology, these measures aim to rebuild trust in the system, ensuring that examinations are conducted with integrity and transparency.

**5** **Moldova Joins the International Solar Alliance (ISA): A Step Toward Renewable Energy**

**Context:** Moldova has recently signed the **International Solar Alliance (ISA) Framework Agreement**, marking a significant step in its journey toward embracing **renewable energy solutions** and combating climate change.

**About the International Solar Alliance (ISA):**

**Background:**

- The **ISA Framework Agreement** came into force in **2017**, opening membership to all **United Nations member states** following its amendment in **2020**.
- Headquartered in **Gurugram, India**, the ISA was launched during **COP21 in Paris, 2015**, as a joint initiative by **India and France**.
- The ISA's mission centers on uniting global efforts to address **climate change** by advancing solar energy solutions.

**Mission and Goals:**

The ISA's strategy, known as **'Towards 1000,'** focuses on three ambitious goals:

1. **Mobilizing USD 1,000 billion** in investments for solar energy by 2030.
2. Ensuring **energy access for 1,000 million people** worldwide.
3. Facilitating the installation of **1,000 GW of solar energy capacity** globally.

**Governance:**

- The **ISA Assembly** serves as the apex decision-making body, shaping policies and overseeing the implementation of the Framework Agreement.
- As of now, the ISA has a membership base of **104 countries** with **16 signatory nations**.

**Key Initiatives of the International Solar Alliance (ISA):**

**1. Scaling Solar Applications for Agricultural Use (SSAAU):**

- This initiative focuses on meeting the rising demand for **solar-powered water pumps** to enhance agricultural productivity and sustainability.

**2. ISA CARES:**

- Aims to provide **innovative solar energy solutions** for **healthcare systems** in low- and middle-income nations, strengthening medical infrastructure.

**3. Solarizing Heating and Cooling Systems:**

- Addresses the growing need for sustainable **heating and cooling** solutions across **residential, commercial, and industrial sectors** by promoting solar technologies.

**4. Global Solar Facility:**

- Launched during **COP27**, this initiative is dedicated to **boosting solar investments** in underserved regions, particularly in **Africa** and other vulnerable geographies.

**Significance of Moldova's Membership:**

Moldova's decision to join the ISA highlights its dedication to expanding **renewable energy adoption**, reducing dependence on fossil fuels, and contributing to global efforts against **climate change**.

By signing the ISA Framework Agreement, Moldova stands to benefit from:

- Access to **advanced solar technologies**.
- Opportunities for **collaborative projects** with member nations.
- Support in achieving its **sustainability goals** and fostering **energy security**.

**Conclusion:**

Moldova's alignment with the **International Solar Alliance** not only reinforces its commitment to a greener future but also strengthens global cooperation in harnessing **solar energy** for sustainable development.

The ISA continues to lead the charge in transforming the world's energy landscape, paving the way for a **renewable energy revolution**.

## 6 BJP Seeks Return of Jawaharlal Nehru's Historic Letters as National Heritage

**Context:** The **Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)** has demanded the return of a valuable collection of letters written by **Jawaharlal Nehru**, India's first Prime Minister. These letters, which hold immense historical significance, were reportedly relocated to the residence of **former Congress president Sonia Gandhi** in 2008. Originally part of the **Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (NMML)**, now renamed the **Prime Ministers' Museum and Library (PMML)**, these documents are deemed an integral part of India's **national heritage**.

**Background:**
- **Significance of the Letters:** These documents, penned by **Jawaharlal Nehru**, were addressed to prominent personalities like **Lady Edwina Mountbatten**, **Babu Jagjivan Ram**, and **Jayaprakash Narayan**, offering insights into the socio-political landscape of his time.
- **Historical Context:**
  o The letters were donated to the **Nehru Memorial Museum and Library** in **1971**.
  o In **2008**, 51 cartons of these letters were reportedly moved to Sonia Gandhi's residence with the approval of the then NMML director.
- **Communication of the Era:** These letters reflect the **traditional correspondence practices** that were vital in shaping India's post-independence era.

**BJP's Allegations:**
- **Ownership and Access:** The BJP argues that these letters are **not personal property** but part of India's **national historical record**, emphasizing the need for **public access**.
- **Suppression Concerns:** A planned **digitization project** in **2010** was halted due to the relocation of the documents, raising fears of potential attempts to conceal their content.

**Prime Ministers' Museum and Library (PMML):**
- **History:** Formerly known as the **Nehru Memorial Museum and Library**, the institution was established in **1966** to honor Jawaharlal Nehru. It is located at the historic **Teen Murti House**, Nehru's official residence.
- **Renaming:** In **2023**, the institution was renamed to reflect a broader focus, honoring all of India's Prime Ministers.
- **Key Components:**
  o **Memorial Museum:** Showcases Nehru's life and contributions.
  o **Modern India Library:** Houses an extensive collection of historical resources.
  o **Centre for Contemporary Studies:** Facilitates research on current issues.
  o **Nehru Planetarium:** Promotes scientific knowledge and curiosity.
- **Digitization Initiatives:** Efforts to make archival content accessible globally for researchers and historians.

**Jawaharlal Nehru: A Visionary Leader:**
- **Early Life:** Born on **November 14, 1889**, in **Allahabad**, Uttar Pradesh, he was the son of **Motilal Nehru**, a prominent Congress leader, and **Swaroop Rani**.
- **Education:** Studied at **Harrow School**, **Trinity College, Cambridge**, and the **Inner Temple, London**.
- **Role in Freedom Movement:** Inspired by **Mahatma Gandhi**, Nehru joined the struggle for India's independence, participating in movements like the **Non-Cooperation Movement** and the **Quit India Movement**.
- **Prime Minister:** Served as India's first Prime Minister from **1947 to 1964**, steering the nation through its formative years.
  o **Economic Policies:** Advocated a **mixed economy** and initiated the **Five-Year Plans**, focusing on agriculture and industry.

- o **Foreign Relations:**
  - ▪ Co-founded the **Non-Aligned Movement (NAM)** with leaders from Egypt and Yugoslavia.
  - ▪ Promoted **Panchsheel**, the five principles of peaceful coexistence, with China.
- o **Education and Science:** Established institutions like **IITs**, **AIIMS**, and **ISRO**, cementing India's focus on education and research.

**Significance of Nehru's Letters:**

These letters are not just personal correspondences but a **window into India's history**, providing valuable insights into its political, social, and cultural evolution. Their preservation as **public heritage** is essential for understanding the legacy of one of India's most influential leaders.

**Conclusion:**

The BJP's demand for the return of Jawaharlal Nehru's letters underscores the broader need to preserve and make accessible India's **historical artifacts**. Safeguarding such documents ensures that future generations can learn from the legacy of the nation's founding leaders, fostering a deeper connection to India's rich history.