



Daily Current Affairs



To The Point

by Dhananjay Gautam

Table Of Content **01 Jan 2025**

1. India's Diplomatic Engagements
2. Challenges of Ensuring Judicial Accountability in India
3. Two Years of India-Australia Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (Ind-Aus ECTA)
4. Overseas Indian Voters: High Registration, Low Turnout in Lok Sabha Elections 2024
5. Madhya Pradesh Begins Disposal of Toxic Waste from Union Carbide Site
6. From Gemini to Llama



Subscribe to our

You Tube *Freedom UPSC with Dhananjay Gautam*

1 India's Diplomatic Engagements: A Strategic Overview

Context: 2024 witnessed a flurry of **incoming and outgoing high-level visits**, with India focusing on addressing **global insecurity** and **regional shocks**, particularly in its neighborhood.

Key Highlights of External Relations:

1. China: Negotiating Peace at the Border

- The **disengagement negotiations** at the **Line of Actual Control (LAC)** were among the most challenging diplomatic efforts.
- A historic **Modi-Xi meeting**, the first in five years, marked a turning point in bilateral ties.

2. Strengthening Ties with France: French President Emmanuel Macron graced India's Republic Day celebrations, underscoring the robust Indo-French partnership.

3. Breakthrough in European Free Trade: India signed its first trade agreement with Europe through the India-European Free Trade Association deal, opening new avenues for economic collaboration.

4. Neighborhood Diplomacy:

- High-level visits from leaders of **Bhutan, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives** enhanced regional cooperation.
- External Affairs Minister **S. Jaishankar's visit to Pakistan** for the **SCO summit** was a pivotal moment in regional diplomacy.



Challenges India Faced in 2024:

- Strain with Bangladesh:** Political upheaval in Bangladesh following **Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's estrangement** posed significant challenges for India's neighborhood policy.
- Deteriorating Canada Relations:** Allegations of Indian involvement in the **Nijjar killing** soured ties with **Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's government**, creating diplomatic tensions.
- Complex U.S. Dynamics:** The **U.S. Department of Justice's indictments** against the Adani Group and an Indian official complicated the otherwise pro-India stance of the U.S. administration.

Navigating Global Conflicts:

- Russia-Ukraine Crisis:** **Prime Minister Modi's visits** to both **Russia** and **Ukraine** sparked speculation about India's potential role as a mediator.
- Balancing in the Israel-Palestine Conflict:** India adopted a balanced approach, calling for an end to **civilian casualties**, while taking a nuanced stance on **UN resolutions** addressing Israel's actions in Gaza.
- West Asian Relations:** Multilateral frameworks like **IMEC** and **I2U2** encountered obstacles, prompting India to engage bilaterally with **West Asian nations**.

Future Outlook: 2025 and Beyond:

1. U.S. Relations:

- External Affairs Minister **S. Jaishankar's visit to Washington** and interactions with the **Trump administration** highlight the focus on bolstering ties.
- President Trump** is expected to visit India for the upcoming **Quad Summit**.

2. Strengthening Ties with Iran: A ministerial visit from Iran is anticipated to mark the start of deeper engagements in 2025.

3. Russia's Renewed Focus: Russian President Vladimir Putin is scheduled to visit Delhi in early 2025, his first visit since the onset of the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

4. Republic Day 2025: Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto will be the chief guest, reflecting India's commitment to deepening ties with Southeast Asia.

Key Challenge Ahead: The main hurdle for India's foreign policy in **2025** will be to navigate an era of **global uncertainty** while adapting to the rapidly evolving geopolitical landscape. This dynamic and multifaceted approach underscores India's growing role as a pivotal player on the global stage.

2 Challenges of Ensuring Judicial Accountability in India

Context: The issue of **judicial accountability** in India is complex, deeply embedded in the country's **constitutional framework** and the existing oversight mechanisms. The recent controversy involving **Justice Shekhar Kumar Yadav** of the Allahabad High Court has reignited debates on the effectiveness of these mechanisms.



Current Framework for Judicial Accountability:

1. Governing Laws and Mechanisms:

- Judicial accountability is primarily governed by the **Judges (Inquiry) Act, 1968**, which stipulates that a judge can only be removed on grounds of '**proved misbehavior or incapacity.**'
- A three-member inquiry committee comprising:
 - A Supreme Court judge.
 - A Chief Justice of a High Court.
 - An eminent jurist.
- This committee, functioning akin to a trial court, is convened only after a successful impeachment motion is initiated in either House of Parliament.

2. Impeachment Process for Judges:

- Removal provisions are detailed under **Article 124(4)** and **Article 217** of the Constitution:
 - Initiation:** Requires a special majority—**one-third of the total membership and members present and voting**—in either House.
 - Presidential Order:** After the motion is passed, the President issues an order for the judge's removal.
 - Parliament is authorized to regulate the procedure for addressing judicial misconduct.

Instances of Judicial Misconduct:

Notable Cases of Accountability:

1. Justice V. Ramaswami:

- Found guilty of **extravagant spending and misuse of office** in the late 1980s.
- Despite the findings, the impeachment motion against him failed in Parliament.

2. Justice Soumitra Sen:

- Accused of misappropriating ₹33.23 lakh as a court-appointed receiver.
- This case underscored the limitations of the current system and prompted the adoption of the **Restatement of Values of Judicial Life** (1997), a code of conduct for judges.

Challenges in the Current System:

- Complex and Lengthy Impeachment Process:** The requirement of a **two-thirds majority** in the Lok Sabha or an **absolute majority** in the Rajya Sabha makes achieving consensus difficult, especially in politically polarized environments.



2. **Judicial Immunity:** Judges enjoy significant immunity, allowing them to **resign to evade formal proceedings**, a privilege greater than that of elected officials.
3. **Lack of Transparency:** The **opaque functioning of the collegium system** in appointing and transferring judges undermines public trust in the judiciary.
4. **Political Interference:** Political pressures sometimes influence judicial decisions, compromising the **independence and impartiality** of the judiciary.

Proposed Reforms:

1. **Reintroducing the Judicial Standards and Accountability Bill**

- The Bill, which lapsed in 2014, proposed mechanisms for:
 - **Asset declaration by judges.**
 - Establishing a **National Judicial Oversight Committee** to address misconduct.

2. **Reforming the Collegium System:**

- Introduce **greater transparency and accountability** by:
 - Publicizing the **criteria for appointments and transfers.**
 - Including external members in the selection process.

3. **Independent Oversight Bodies:** Create an independent body to investigate complaints against judges and ensure **unbiased oversight.**

4. **Enhanced Transparency:** Make judicial proceedings and decisions **more accessible** to the public to foster trust and confidence in the system.

Way Forward:

1. **Strengthening Internal Mechanisms:** Develop a robust internal oversight body within the judiciary to address complaints promptly.
2. **Transparent Appointment Processes:** Ensure **participatory and open procedures** in the appointment and transfer of judges.
3. **Public Disclosure:** Mandate judges to disclose their **assets and liabilities**, improving transparency and accountability.
4. **Judicial Reforms:** Address **delays in justice delivery** and enhance the judiciary's overall efficiency through structural reforms.

Conclusion:

Ensuring **judicial accountability** is crucial to preserving the integrity and trust in India's judiciary. While the existing framework offers a foundation, **comprehensive reforms** are essential to tackle challenges such as **opacity, political interference, and the cumbersome impeachment process**. By implementing these reforms, India can ensure its judiciary remains independent, impartial, and accountable to its citizens.

3

Two Years of India-Australia Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (Ind-Aus ECTA)

Context: The **India-Australia Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (Ind-Aus ECTA)** recently marked its **two-year milestone**, creating significant opportunities for **MSMEs, businesses, and employment** in both nations.

**India-Australia Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (Ind-Aus ECTA):****1. Overview:**

- The **Ind-Aus ECTA** was established to provide a robust **institutional mechanism** for fostering and enhancing trade between the two countries.
- It came into force on **29 December 2022**.

2. Core Features:

- **Australia's Preferential Access:**
 - Offers **100% tariff-free market access** on all lines, benefiting India's **labor-intensive export sectors** like **textiles, leather, and jewelry**.
- **India's Preferential Access:**
 - Provides preferential access to **over 70% tariff lines**, focusing on Australian exports such as **coal, mineral ores, and wine**.

Achievements under Ind-Aus ECTA:**1. Trade Growth:**

- **Bilateral merchandise trade** grew from **USD 12.2 billion (2020-21)** to **USD 24 billion (2023-24)**.
- India's **exports to Australia** rose by **14%**, showcasing strong performance in **textiles, chemicals, agriculture, and new exports** like **gold-studded diamonds and turbojets**.

2. Utilisation of Trade Benefits:

- **Export Utilisation Rate:** 79% after two years.
- **Import Utilisation Rate:** 84%.
- These rates highlight how effectively businesses have leveraged trade benefits, reflecting **procedural efficiency** and operational success.

3. Supporting Key Sectors:

- Indian industries benefited from the import of **raw materials** like **metalliferous ores, cotton, and wood**.
- Sectors like **electronics and engineering** remain untapped and hold significant potential for future growth.

India-Australia Economic Cooperation:**1. A Strategic Partnership:**

- Australia is a key **trade and strategic partner** for India.
- Both nations are members of multilateral initiatives like:

Download Our Application

Freedom UPSC with **Dhananjay Gautam**

Page No

5



- Indo-Pacific Economic Forum for Prosperity (IPEF).
- Trilateral Supply Chain Resilience Initiative (SCRI) with Japan.

2. Surge in FDI:

- FDI from Australia reached \$307.2 million during January-September 2023, a sevenfold increase from 2022.
- Notable growth in consultancy services, with investments rising from \$0.15 million to \$248 million.

3. Trade Rankings:

- India became Australia's 9th largest trading partner in FY23, while Australia ranked as India's 13th largest trading partner.
- Trade is projected to exceed \$45-50 billion by 2035.

Future Plans for Economic Integration:

1. Strengthening the Indo-Pacific Vision:

- Both nations are committed to a resilient, inclusive, and open Indo-Pacific region.
- Active collaboration in QUAD, IPEF, and SCRI initiatives enhances regional cooperation.

2. Advancing CECA Negotiations:

- Talks for a Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA) aim to build on ECTA outcomes and foster deeper economic integration in strategic sectors.
- The goal is to achieve AUD 100 billion bilateral trade by 2030.

Conclusion:

India and Australia have made remarkable progress in strengthening their economic partnership, leveraging the opportunities provided by the Ind-Aus ECTA.

- Investor-friendly policies and reforms have positioned India as a preferred destination for Australian businesses.
- Together, the two nations are set to elevate their partnership, contributing to mutual prosperity and a more dynamic global economy.

India and Australia's journey toward deeper cooperation marks a promising chapter in global trade and strategic collaboration.

4

Overseas Indian Voters: High Registration, Low Turnout in Lok Sabha Elections 2024

Context: The 2024 Lok Sabha elections witnessed a remarkable increase in **registration by overseas Indian voters**, showcasing their enthusiasm for electoral participation. However, this enthusiasm didn't translate into significant turnout, as only a fraction of these voters cast their votes.

**Why is This Newsworthy?**

The **Election Commission of India (ECI)** data revealed that **1.2 lakh overseas Indians** registered as voters for the 2024 elections, reflecting growing interest in contributing to the democratic process. Yet, only a small percentage managed to vote, underscoring the need for reforms in voting mechanisms for Non-Resident Indians (NRIs).

Current Voting Process for Overseas Indian Voters:**Eligibility and Procedure:**

- **Eligibility:** NRIs can register as voters as long as they have not acquired citizenship in another country.
- **Constituency:** They are eligible to vote in the constituency corresponding to their place of residence listed in their passport.
- **In-Person Voting:** Voting must be done in person, and voters must present their **original passport** for identity verification.
- **Introduction of Voting Rights:** NRIs were granted voting rights in **2011** through an amendment to the **Representation of the People Act, 1950**.

Challenges in Current Process:

- The requirement to **travel to India** to vote poses a significant barrier, leading to poor participation.
- **High travel costs, professional commitments**, and other logistical hurdles further deter many NRIs from voting.

Proposals for Reform:

1. **Proxy Voting Proposal:** In **2018**, a bill enabling **proxy voting** for NRIs passed in the Lok Sabha but was stalled in the Rajya Sabha.
2. **Postal Ballot Proposal**
 - The ECI proposed extending the **Electronically Transmitted Postal Ballot System (ETPBS)** to overseas voters.
 - **How It Works:**
 - NRIs notify the **Returning Officer (RO)** within five days of election notification.
 - The ballot paper is sent electronically to the voter, who marks their preference and mails it back.
 - The ballot must be accompanied by a declaration attested by a consular officer in the voter's country of residence.
 - Currently, ETPBS is available only to **service voters** like armed forces personnel and diplomatic staff.

Participation Trends in Lok Sabha Elections 2024:

1. Registration vs. Turnout:

- **Registration Surge:** 1,19,374 overseas Indians registered for 2024, up from **99,844** in 2019.
- **Low Turnout:** Only **2,958 overseas voters** cast their votes, with **Kerala leading** the numbers.

2. State-Wise Insights:

- **Kerala:** Highest participation with **2,670 voters** out of 89,839 registered.
- **Other States:**
 - **Zero turnout** in states like **Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Assam, Bihar, and Goa.**
 - **Gujarat:** Only **2 out of 885 electors** voted.
 - **Maharashtra:** 17 voters from 5,097 electors.
 - **Andhra Pradesh:** 195 voters from 7,927 electors.

Challenges Facing Overseas Voters:

- **Travel Costs:** Flying to India to vote is prohibitively expensive for many NRIs.
- **Time Constraints:** Employment and educational commitments deter participation.
- **Identity Verification:** Requirement of in-person voting with an **original passport** adds logistical difficulties.

Future Prospects and Reforms:

Postal Voting Demand:

The Indian diaspora continues to advocate for **postal voting**, emphasizing the need for electoral reforms to address low voter turnout among NRIs.

Electoral Reforms on the Horizon

- Expanding **ETPBS** to include overseas voters.
- Introducing **proxy voting** or other mechanisms to simplify voting for NRIs.

Conclusion:

While the increase in registration reflects growing awareness and enthusiasm among **overseas Indian voters**, the starkly low turnout underscores the need for immediate **electoral reforms**. Addressing the logistical challenges faced by NRIs can ensure that their voices are heard in shaping India's democratic future.

By adopting **modern voting mechanisms**, India can bridge the gap between voter registration and participation, empowering its global diaspora to contribute effectively to the country's governance.

5 Madhya Pradesh Begins Disposal of Toxic Waste from Union Carbide Site

Context: The Madhya Pradesh government has finally initiated the disposal of **337 tonnes of hazardous waste** from the **Union Carbide India Ltd. (UCIL)** site in **Bhopal**, marking a significant move towards environmental restoration. This comes almost **40 years after the tragic Bhopal Gas Disaster**, one of the world's worst industrial accidents.



Efforts for Environmental Cleanup:

For decades, there has been **mounting pressure** on authorities to implement a comprehensive cleanup of the **UCIL plant site**, which still harbors toxic residues. These residues have posed ongoing risks to both the **local ecosystem** and the **health of surrounding communities**.

- The **Madhya Pradesh High Court** had previously set a **four-week deadline** for the safe disposal of this hazardous waste.
- The waste is being transported to a **Treatment, Storage, and Disposal Facility (TSDF)** located in **Pithampur**, near **Indore**.
- The cleanup process is seen as a long-overdue measure to mitigate environmental damage and protect public health.

The Bhopal Gas Tragedy: A Grim Reminder:

On the night of **December 2, 1984**, the **Bhopal Gas Tragedy** shocked the world. A **leak of methyl isocyanate (MIC)** gas from the UCIL pesticide plant exposed thousands of people to a **deadly cloud of toxic fumes**.

Devastating Impact:

- **Over 15,000 deaths** were reported due to immediate and long-term effects, and thousands more suffered from **chronic illnesses**.
- MIC gas is **highly lethal**—at concentrations exceeding **21 ppm (parts per million)**, it can cause death within minutes of exposure.

Environmental Legacy:

- The toxic residues left behind have contaminated the **soil and water** in the surrounding area, creating an environmental hazard that has persisted for decades.

Additional Facts About the Disaster:

- The tragedy has often been referred to as the **Hiroshima of Chemical Industry**, highlighting the scale of devastation.
- **Union Carbide Corporation**, the parent company of UCIL, paid a settlement of **\$470 million** to the Indian government, but activists argue that this compensation was grossly inadequate.
- The site remains a **symbol of industrial negligence**, serving as a stark warning against the dangers of lax safety standards.

Significance of National Pollution Control Day:

Every year on **December 2**, **National Pollution Control Day** is observed in India to honor the victims of the tragedy and raise awareness about the importance of **environmental safety** and **industrial regulation**.



6 From Gemini to Llama: AI Titans Transforming the Industry in 2024

Context: Artificial Intelligence (AI) remains at the forefront of technological innovation in 2024, with industry leaders like **Google**, **OpenAI**, **Meta**, and others unveiling groundbreaking advancements. These developments are shaping the future of AI and revolutionizing industries worldwide.



AI Milestones in 2024:

1. Google's Gemini: A Leap Beyond Bard:

After the mixed reception of its earlier AI model, Bard, **Google** made a significant comeback with the launch of **Gemini**, establishing itself as a leader in the AI space.

- **Gemini 2.0 Flash Thinking Model:** Enhanced **reasoning abilities**, capable of outlining **thought processes** for more human-like interactions.
- **Trillium AI Accelerator Chip:** Boosted performance for AI applications, improving processing efficiency.
- **Willow Quantum Chip:** Pioneered advancements in **quantum computing**, enabling unprecedented computational power.

2. OpenAI's o3 Model: A New Standard in Intelligence:

Building on its earlier iterations, OpenAI introduced **o3**, a model that excelled in complex reasoning and real-world applications.

- Outperformed competitors in tasks like **coding** and **advanced mathematics**.
- Integrated seamlessly into **Microsoft's 365 Copilot**, enhancing productivity tools with **AI-driven assistance**.

3. Anthropic's Claude 3.5 Sonnet: AI with Autonomous Capabilities:

Anthropic raised the bar with **Claude 3.5**, an AI model capable of **autonomous task execution**.

- Introduced a "**Computer Use**" feature, allowing the AI to perform tasks like **typing** and **browsing**.
- Deployed **Clio**, a monitoring tool used during the **U.S. Presidential elections**, ensuring ethical and reliable AI usage.

4. Mistral AI: Open-Source Innovation:

French startup **Mistral AI** focused on **open-source** and **customizable large language models (LLMs)**, driving accessibility and innovation.

- **Mistral 7B** and **Mixtral 8x7B:** Lightweight, open-weight models designed for diverse applications.
- **Mistral Large 2:** Integrated into **IBM's Watsonx**, enabling advanced AI applications in healthcare, finance, and more.
- Partnered with **Qualcomm** to integrate generative AI into **Snapdragon-powered devices**.

5. Meta's Llama Models: Revolutionizing AI Accessibility:

Meta's **Llama series** continued to push the boundaries of **open-source AI** for both research and commercial use.

- **Llama 3 (April 2024):** Featured **8B** and **70B** parameters with support for **multilingual capabilities** and **coding**.

Download Our Application



Freedom UPSC with **Dhananjay Gautam**

Page No

10



- **Llama 3.1 and 3.2:** Expanded to **405B parameters**, supporting **multimodal inputs** (text and images) and optimized for **mobile devices**.
- Integrated across **Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp**, bringing AI to billions of users.

On-Device AI Integration: Smarter Everyday Tech:

2024 saw widespread **on-device AI integration**, making advanced AI accessible in consumer electronics.

- **AI Chips:** Apple's **Neural Engine**, Qualcomm's **Snapdragon AI Engine**, and Google's **Tensor Chipset** powered real-time features like **translation, photo enhancement, and augmented reality**.
- **PC AI Powerhouses:** NVIDIA, AMD, and Apple's AI chips supported **transcription, gaming, and video editing**, enhancing creative workflows and productivity.

Additional Insights: The Bigger Picture in AI:

- **AI Democratization:** Open-source models like **Mistral** and **Llama** are making AI development more accessible, enabling innovation across smaller enterprises and startups.
- **Quantum Computing Synergy:** Innovations like Google's **Willow Quantum Chip** are laying the groundwork for integrating quantum computing with AI, promising breakthroughs in fields like **drug discovery, climate modeling, and cryptography**.
- **AI in Governance:** Tools like **Anthropic's Clio** highlight the increasing role of AI in **monitoring elections** and ensuring ethical practices in governance.

Conclusion:

From **Google's Gemini** to **Meta's Llama**, 2024 is shaping up as a transformative year for **AI development**. With advancements in **reasoning capabilities, customizable models, and on-device integration**, these technologies are revolutionizing industries and making AI more accessible to individuals and businesses alike. The future of AI is here, and its impact is just beginning to unfold.