

06 JULY 2024

TOPICS COVERED

- 1. A.P. in crisis, needs more than special category status: CM**
- 2. Kashmir reels under rare heatwave; rain likely soon (GS Paper-III Heatwave)**
- 3. Kerala-born Sojan Joseph wins British Parliament seat (PCS)**
- 4. Trinamool MLAs sworn in by Speaker; Governor cries foul (GS Paper-II)**
- 5. Spiritual orientation, religious practices and courts (GS Paper-II: Article 25)**
- 6. Walk the talk (GS Paper-II Internal Security)**
- 7. The spectre of neo-fascism that is haunting Europe (GS Paper-I: World History)**
- 8. Laboured change (GS Paper-II: UK)**

Maharashtra tables Bill to prevent unfair means in competitive exams

The proposed legislation classifies offences as **cognisable, non-bailable, and non-compoundable**; those caught engaging in illegal practices could face a **minimum of three years in prison**

Abhinav Deshpande
MUMBAI

The Maharashtra government on Friday introduced a new Bill aimed at curbing malpractices in the competitive examinations. The Bill – Maharashtra Competitive Examination (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024 – was presented in the Legislative Assembly by Minister and Shiv Sena leader Shambhuraj Desai.

The proposed legislation classifies offences related to competitive exams as cognisable, non-bailable, and non-compoundable.

Those caught engaging in illegal practices during these exams could face a minimum of three years in prison, extendable up to five years, and fines up to ₹10 lakh.

According to the Bill, failure to pay the fine would result in additional imprisonment as outlined in the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023.

The Union government on June 21 enacted the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act,



Ek Nath Shinde with Indian cricketers Rohit Sharma, Yashasvi Jaiswal, Shivam Dube and Suryakumar Yadav at Vidhan Bhavan on Friday. EMMANUAL YOGINI

2024, which targets malpractices in competitive exams, imposing a maximum jail term of 10 years and fines of up to ₹1 crore for those found guilty.

The Bill, introduced in the Lower House of the State Legislature, also stipulates that service providers facilitating the exams could be fined up to ₹1 crore and held accountable for the costs associated with the examination.

Key provisions of the Act include measures to

prevent disruptions during exams, defining the responsibilities of paper setters, and granting investigative authority to high-ranking police officers of at least the rank of deputy superintendent of police or assistant commissioner of police.

Cricketers feted

Meanwhile, Chief Minister Ek Nath Shinde felicitated Indian cricket team captain Rohit Sharma and three other players and an-

nounced a cash reward of ₹11 crore for the team that won the T20 World Cup. He announced this in the Central Hall of the Assembly, where four Mumbai players from the India team – Mr. Sharma, Suryakumar Yadav, Yashasvi Jaiswal, and Shivam Dube – were honoured.

Mr. Shinde also recognised the contributions of support team members Paras Mhambre and Arun Kanade by felicitating them.

Maharashtra tables Bill to prevent unfair means in competitive exams (06 July)

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- The Bill aims to curb malpractices in competitive exams.
- Presented by Minister and Shiv Sena leader Shambhuraj Desai in the Legislative Assembly.
- Offences related to competitive exams are classified as cognisable, non-bailable, and non-compoundable.
- Penalties include a minimum of three years in prison, extendable up to five years, and fines up to ₹10 lakh.
- Failure to pay the fine results in additional imprisonment as per the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023.
- The Union government's Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024, imposes a maximum jail term of 10 years and fines up to ₹1 crore.
- The Bill stipulates that service providers facilitating exams could be fined up to ₹1 crore and held accountable for examination costs.
- Key provisions include measures to prevent disruptions, responsibilities of paper setters, and investigative authority to high-ranking police officers of at least the rank of deputy superintendent or assistant commissioner of police.

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- Chief Minister Eknath Shinde felicitated Indian cricket team captain Rohit Sharma and three other players.
- Announced a cash reward of ₹11 crore for the team that won the T20 World Cup.
- The announcement was made in the Central Hall of the Assembly.
- Four Mumbai players from the India team—Rohit Sharma, Suryakumar Yadav, Yashasvi Jaiswal, and Shivam Dube—were honoured.
- Support team members Paras Mhambre and Arun Kanade were also felicitated for their contributions.

Kerala-born Sojan Joseph wins British Parliament seat

PCS

The Hindu Bureau
KOTTAYAM

As the Labour Party registers a landslide victory in the U.K. general elections, Onamthuruth – a quaint village nestled in the backwater landscape of Kottayam – has erupted in celebrations. The joyous occasion is in honour of Sojan Joseph, a 49-year-old man from the village, who has been elected to the British Parliament from Ashford, one of the constituencies in Kent.

Mr. Joseph's victory is historic as the Conservatives have been mostly dominant in Ashford since the seat was established 139 years ago. He emerged victorious defeating six candidates vying for the seat, which has an electorate of about 74,000 people.

His family members have gathered at the ancestral home to celebrate this momentous achievement. "We are so thrilled. He called us to inform about



Sojan Joseph

the election result," said Joseph Palaththinkal, Mr. Joseph's brother-in-law.

A nurse by profession, Mr. Joseph moved to the U.K. in November 2001 and joined William Harvey Hospital in Ashford. He has become a well-known figure within the Indian diaspora in Ashford and was elected Labour councillor for Aylesford and East Stour Ward last year.

Additionally, he serves as an elected official for BAME, representing the Black Asian Minority Ethnic communities.

Kerala-born Sojan Joseph wins British Parliament seat (06 July)

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- Celebrations in Onamthuruth village, Kottayam, for Sojan Joseph's election to the British Parliament from Ashford.
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- He defeated six candidates in Ashford, which has an electorate of about 74,000 people.

- His family is celebrating at their ancestral home.
- Joseph Palaththinkal, his brother-in-law, expressed their excitement.
- Sojan Joseph, a nurse by profession, moved to the U.K. in 2001 and works at William Harvey Hospital in Ashford.
- He is well-known within the Indian diaspora in Ashford and was elected Labour councillor for Aylesford and East Stour Ward last year.
- He also serves as an elected official for BAME, representing Black Asian Minority Ethnic communities.

Trinamool MLAs sworn in by Speaker; Governor cries foul

GS Paper II

KOLKATA

Over a month after getting elected, two MLAs of the Trinamool Congress were on Friday administered the oath of office during a special session of the West Bengal Legislative Assembly by Speaker Biman Banerjee. The development triggered a fresh controversy with Governor C. V. Ananda Bose accusing the Speaker of constitutional impropriety.

“A report is being sent to the Hon’ble President about the Constitutional impropriety of the Speaker in administering the oath of affirmation to the newly elected MLAs,” a statement from the Raj Bhavan read.

On Thursday, Mr. Biman Banerjee announced that a special Assembly session would begin on Friday, indicating that the MLAs –



Syantika Banerjee and Reyat Hussain. DEBASISH BHADURI

Syantika Banerjee and Reyat Hussain Sarkar – would be sworn in then. The same evening, the Governor nominated Deputy Speaker Asish Banerjee to administer the oath. On Friday, Deputy Speaker Asish Banerjee said that it would amount to disrespecting the Chair of the Speaker if he were to administer the oath.

While Raj Bhavan sources said that the Speaker could not administer the

oath as he had not been appointed for the task, Mr. Biman Banerjee on Thursday had said that the Assembly was not helpless and everything was not in the hands of the Governor.

These developments come at a time when the relationship between the Raj Bhavan and the West Bengal government has hit its nadir with the Governor filing a defamation suit against Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee.

Trinamool MLAs sworn in by Speaker; Governor cries foul (06 July)

- Two MLAs of the Trinamool Congress were administered the oath of office by Speaker Biman Banerjee in a special session of the West Bengal Legislative Assembly.
- This led to controversy with Governor C. V. Ananda Bose accusing the Speaker of constitutional impropriety.
- A report about the alleged constitutional impropriety is being sent to the President.
- Speaker Biman Banerjee announced a special Assembly session for Friday, during which the MLAs Sayantika Banerjee and Reyat Hussain Sarkar were sworn in.
- The Governor nominated Deputy Speaker Asish Banerjee to administer the oath.
- Deputy Speaker Asish Banerjee refused to administer the oath, stating it would disrespect the Speaker's Chair.
- Raj Bhavan sources claimed the Speaker could not administer the oath without appointment.
- Speaker Biman Banerjee asserted that the Assembly was not entirely under the Governor's control.
- This issue arises amidst deteriorating relations between the Raj Bhavan and the West Bengal government, with the Governor filing a defamation suit against Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee.

Kashmir reels under rare heatwave; rain likely soon

GS Paper III:
Heatwave

SRINAGAR

Kashmir is grappling with a rare heatwave with day temperatures running six degrees Celsius above normal. However, the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) has predicted showers in parts of J&K, which is likely to bring some relief on Saturday.

According to the IMD, the maximum temperature on Thursday stood at 35.7 degrees Celsius in Srinagar, much higher than the 35.5 degrees Celsius recorded in 2006 and Srinagar recorded the highest maximum temperature of 38.3 degrees Celsius in 1946.

The day temperature in Srinagar has remained five to six degrees Celsius above normal this week.

North Kashmir's Kupwara recorded 35.2 degrees Celsius and south Kashmir's Qazigund recorded 32.8 degrees Celsius on Thursday while Bandipora, nestled in a thick forest cover, recorded 34.7 degrees Celsius.

According to the IMD, north Kashmir's Kokernag recorded 33 degrees Celsius on July 4, "which is the highest ever temperature since 1993."

Spiritual orientation, religious practices and courts

GS Paper II: Article 25

“Religion to one is superstition to another,” said Chief Justice Latham of Australia in *Adelaide Company of Jehovah's Witnesses Inc vs Commonwealth* (1943). Religion has been at the centre of human societal existence since time immemorial. Man is incurably religious; Indians more so. Right now, we are in a rush hour of god with religiosity on the rise and spirituality on the decline.

In a significant yet controversial order in *P. Navin Kumar* (2024), by Justice G.R. Swaminathan of the Madras High Court, the religious practice of *angapradakshinam* has been allowed. The practice involves rolling over the banana leaves on which other devotees (in this instance) of Sri Sadasiva Brahmendral of Nerur village in Tamil Nadu had partaken food. The order overruled the 2015 order of Justice S. Manikumar.

In 2015, the petitioner had argued that the practice involved Dalits and non-Brahmins rolling over on left-over plantain leaves even though the district administration had disputed the allegation of caste discrimination. Justice Manikumar had relied on the *Supreme Court of India's* order, in *State of Karnataka and others vs Adivasi Budakattu Hitarakshana Vedike Karnataka and others* (in Special Leave Petition (C) No.33137 of 2014), where the top court had stayed a 500-year-old ritual on similar lines where mainly Dalits used to roll over the leaves. Justice Swaminathan refused to follow the 2015 order as temple trustees which used to organise the event were not made parties, and thus not heard. Moreover, not only Dalits but even others too rolled over the leaves and thus no caste discrimination was there.

Revival of a debate

The order has revived the debate on issues such as what is religion; how essential practices of any religion are to be determined, and how far the judiciary has been consistent in such determination. Justice Swaminathan, in a well-researched order, has cited all the important judgments of the Supreme Court to reach the conclusion that the petitioner, P. Navin Kumar – who has taken the vow of *angapradakshinam*, and is entitled to execute it as part of his freedom of religion under Article 25 and right to privacy under Article 21 and human dignity – is in no way undermined in such a practice. He even held that rolling over on used banana leaves is part of the freedom of movement under Article 19(1)(d).

Without any evidence being strictly examined, as was done in similar cases, Justice Swaminathan took judicial notice of the fact that *angapradakshinam* is an established religious practice. Thus, like other cases, no questions were being asked whether it is an essential and integral practice of the Hindu religion. Or whether it is a mandatory practice and not a mere superstitious practice. He has quoted the *Krishna Yajur Veda* and *Bhavishyapurana* which



Faizan Mustafa

the Vice-Chancellor of the Chanakya National Law University, Patna, Bihar

describe this practice as a noble act, but every noble act cannot get the high status of a mandatory act.

The subject of essential practices

The framers of the Indian Constitution had subordinated the freedom of religion to all other fundamental rights. It has further been subjected to public order, health and morality, with additional powers being given to the state to bring in social reforms. The courts have further restricted the freedom to only the 'essential religious practices'. Accordingly such a plea was accepted in just seven out over 47 cases and that is why the latest pronouncement, by Justice Swaminathan needs critical evaluation. Is not the rolling over on used banana leaves with leftover food an unhygienic practice with the danger of health hazards? Can the right to privacy be claimed in respect of a public event such as an *angapradakshinam*?

Justice Swaminathan observed that privacy is not lost if an individual is in a public place. In an interesting analogy, the learned judge, in paragraph 21 of his judgment, held that 'If the right to privacy includes sexual and gender orientation, it certainly includes one's spiritual orientation also.' It is open to a person to express this orientation in the manner he deems fit subject to rights of others.

The leading Supreme Court judgment on the freedom of religion was *Sri Shirur Mutt* (1954) where the Court had observed that Article 25 guarantees freedom not only to entertain such religious belief as may be approved of by one's judgment and conscience, but also to exhibit his belief in such outward acts as he thinks proper.

The Court further held that religion does prescribe rituals, ceremonies and modes of worship which are regarded as an integral part of religion. The Court was categorical in saying that 'what constitutes the essential part of religion is primarily to be ascertained with reference to the doctrines of that religion itself'. In subsequent years, the Court became inconsistent in its determination of essential religious practices and moved away from looking at a particular religion to decide its essential practices and brought in its own rationality. Thus, a five-judge Bench in *The Durgah Committee, Ajmer* (1961) said that freedom of religion protects only essential and integral practices of a religion and does not extend to practices, though religious in character may have sprung from merely superstitious beliefs and be extraneous and unessential accretions to religion itself. Why was *angapradakshinam* not tested on this touchstone?

In *Gramsabha of Village Battis Shirala* (2014), a particular sect claimed the capturing and worship of a live cobra during *nagpanchnami* to be an essential part of its religion. They placed reliance on the text of *Shrinath Lilamrut* which prescribed such a practice. The court relied on the more general *Dharmashastra* text to rule that since there was no mention of capturing a live

cobra, it could not be an essential practice of the petitioners' religion.

In *Mohammed Fasi* (1985), a Muslim police officer challenged a regulation in the Kerala High Court which did not permit him to grow a beard. It is disgusting to note that rather than looking at the question of the essentiality of a beard in Islam, the court rejected the petitioner's argument simply by relying on the irrelevant fact that certain Muslim dignitaries do not sport a beard and that the petitioner did not have a beard in previous years. Therefore, the court looked at empirical evidence of practice rather than religious texts. The court refused to permit the keeping of a beard by a policeman as it was merely a noble and pious act because it was based on sayings of Prophet (Hadith) and not made mandatory in the *Koran*. The *hijab* was similarly not found mandatory.

In *Acharya Jagdishwarananda Avadhuta* (2004), where the Calcutta High Court found that the *tandava* dance was an essential practice of the Ananda Margi faith, the Supreme Court overruled the High Court by looking at earlier judicial verdicts and not religious texts. Another strange reason provided was that the Ananda Margi faith had come into existence in 1955 and that the *tandava* dance was adopted only in 1966. Therefore, as the faith had existed without the practice, it could not be accepted as an essential feature of the faith. The approach seems to identify a religious practice as only an integral practice if it existed when the religion was founded. This logic would lead to an approach to religious practices that are frozen in time. By this logic no Jewish, Christian and Islamic practice can be protected if it was not considered integral by Moses, Jesus Christ and Muhammad, respectively, in their lifetime.

The 'essentiality test' reached absurd levels in *M. Ismail Faruqui* (1995) where the top court was dealing with the issue of the state acquiring the land over which the Babri Masjid once stood. The court held that while offering of prayers is an essential practice, the offering of such prayers in the mosque is not unless the place has a particular religious significance in itself. Everyone knows congregational prayer is central to Islam and that mosques are an essential means to achieve this objective. Yet, the mosque was not held essential.

The Constitution is supreme

This writer has consistently held the view in his articles that judges should not become the clergy to determine purely theological issues and that a progressive nation such as India should not allow even an essential religious practice if the same is contrary to constitutional ethos and values. It is the Constitution of India and not religions that should govern us. Only that much religious freedom can be granted as is permitted by the Constitution.

The views expressed are personal

Spiritual orientation, religious practices and courts
(06 July)

- Chief Justice Latham of Australia remarked that what is religion to one is superstition to another in the 1943 case *Adelaide Company of Jehovah's Witnesses Inc vs Commonwealth*.
- Religion has been central to human society, with a rise in religiosity and a decline in spirituality.
- In the controversial 2024 case *P. Navin Kumar*, Justice G.R. Swaminathan of the Madras High Court allowed the religious practice of *angapradakshinam*, involving rolling over banana leaves with leftover food.
- This order overruled Justice S. Manikumar's 2015 order, which had prohibited the practice due to allegations of caste discrimination involving Dalits and non-Brahmins.
- Justice Manikumar had based his decision on a Supreme Court order that stayed a similar 500-year-old ritual involving Dalits in Karnataka.
- Justice Swaminathan noted that temple trustees were not heard in the 2015 case, and since people from all castes participated, there was no caste discrimination.

Revival of a debate

- The order has sparked debate on defining religion, determining essential religious practices, and judicial consistency in such determinations.
- Justice Swaminathan cited important Supreme Court judgments to support that *P. Navin Kumar's* practice of *angapradakshinam* is protected under Article 25 (freedom of religion), Article 21 (right to privacy), and Article 19(1)(d) (freedom of movement).
- Justice Swaminathan recognized *angapradakshinam* as an established religious practice without strict evidence examination, unlike similar cases.
- He did not question whether it is an essential and integral part of Hinduism or merely a superstitious practice.
- The practice was described as noble in the *Krishna Yajur Veda* and *Bhavishyapurana*, but not all noble acts are mandatory religious practices.

The subject of essential practices

- The Indian Constitution prioritizes other fundamental rights over freedom of religion, subjecting it to public order, health, and morality, and allowing the state to enact social reforms.
- Courts have limited religious freedom to essential religious practices, accepting such pleas in only 7 out of 47 cases.
- Justice Swaminathan's decision allowing *angapradakshinam* needs critical evaluation, particularly regarding potential health hazards and the applicability of the right to privacy in a public event.
- Justice Swaminathan argued that privacy is not lost in public and linked spiritual orientation to privacy rights.

- In Sri Shirur Mutt (1954), the Supreme Court ruled that Article 25 protects religious beliefs and their outward expression, and essential parts of religion should be determined by the religion's doctrines.
- Over time, the Court became inconsistent in defining essential religious practices, introducing its own rationality, as seen in The Durgah Committee, Ajmer (1961) case, which limited protection to essential practices and excluded superstitious beliefs.
- The question arises why angapradakshinam was not evaluated against these criteria.
- In Gramsabha of Village Battis Shirala (2014), the court ruled that capturing and worshiping a live cobra during Nagpanchami was not an essential religious practice because it was not mentioned in the general Dharmashastra text.
- In Mohammed Fasi (1985), the Kerala High Court rejected a Muslim policeman's plea to grow a beard, focusing on empirical evidence rather than religious texts, and noting that it was a noble act but not mandatory in Islam.
- In Acharya Jagdishwarananda Avadhuta (2004), the Supreme Court overruled the Calcutta High Court, stating that the tandava dance was not essential to the Ananda Margi faith since the practice was adopted after the religion's founding.
- The court's logic in Acharya Jagdishwarananda Avadhuta implies that religious practices must have existed when the religion was founded, which would freeze religious practices in time.
- In M. Ismail Faruqui (1995), the Supreme Court held that offering prayers is essential in Islam, but offering them in a mosque is not, unless the mosque has particular religious significance, despite the centrality of congregational prayer in Islam.

The Constitution is supreme

- The writer believes judges should not decide theological issues.
- In a progressive nation like India, even essential religious practices should not be allowed if they contradict constitutional values.
- The Constitution of India, not religions, should govern the country.
- Only religious freedom permitted by the Constitution should be granted.
- The views expressed are personal.
- The writer is Faizan Mustafa, Vice-Chancellor of Chanakya National Law University, Patna, Bihar.

The spectre of neo-fascism that is haunting Europe

GS Paper I: World History

Prior to their opening game at the ongoing UEFA Euro 2024, Kylian Mbappé made news for his comments regarding the French elections. In his pre-match press conference, the France captain issued a warning: "Extremes are at the gates of power." He also stated, "I don't want to represent a country that doesn't correspond to my values or our values." Marcus Thuram, his teammate, went one step further and urged the French people to stop Marine Le Pen's National Rally (RN) party from becoming powerful.

At inflection point

About 175 years after the Communist Manifesto was first published, a spectre is again haunting Europe. But it is the spectre of the ultra-right and neo-fascism. Europe is at an inflection point. The ultra-right gained ground in Europe during the European Union (EU) elections that just finished. Wrote Timothy Garton Ash in *The Guardian*, "A Europe that just celebrated on the beaches of Normandy the 80-year-old D-day beginning of its liberation from war, nationalism and fascism now again faces fascism, nationalism and war." And, Paris is unquestionably the epicentre of the earthquake. Emmanuel Macron, the President of France, promptly announced a snap parliamentary election after being humiliated by Le Pen's party by a 32%-15% vote margin in the European elections.

Why did Mr. Macron take such a reckless gamble? He justified the surprise snap-election call as the "most responsible solution". But a columnist for the popular French newspaper, *Le Monde*, even described Mr. Macron's decision as a "choice to play France at poker". However, was Mr. Macron hoping that moderate and progressive voters would use their strategic voting to counter the ultra-right and maybe undo some of the damage to his party, at least in the second round? Nonetheless, in the first round of



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Paris is the epicentre of the storm where July 7 could be the change-point in French and European history

France's snap two-round general election on June 30, the RN raised its vote share to 34% from its historic high in the EU elections. In third place, well behind the 28% vote share of the New Popular Front (NPF), an alliance of left-wing and progressive parties, lies Mr. Macron's centrist "Ensemble" or "Together" alliance with 21%.

Thus, has Mr. Macron allowed the far-right to capitalise on the momentum created by the European elections? Did he incur an unwarranted and hazardous risk by assuming that the latent political turmoil that has been hurting France and Europe for years will explode into a major crisis? It is possible that France may soon find itself in uncharted territory, where far-right political groups not only become more mainstream but also become the most powerful political force in the country.

Growth of the far-right

The far-right is becoming more influential in resistance to the immigrants from Africa and Asia who are expanding their foothold throughout Europe, which is partly a carry-over effect of their colonising legacy. Although this has been going on for decades, it has gained momentum recently. This long-standing issue in French society was portrayed in the novel *Soumission* (*Submission*, in English), by French poet and author Michel Houellebecq in 2015. In the novel, the Socialist Party teams up with the recently established Muslim Brotherhood Party in the 2022 French presidential elections to oppose Le Pen, with additional backing from the right-wing Union for a Popular Movement. Following the election of Mohammed Ben-Abbes as president, Islamic law was instituted in France. Although some real-life politicians, such as Le Pen and François Hollande, are the characters in *Soumission*, there is nobody like Emmanuel Macron in the novel. In fact, Mr. Macron would launch his party "En Marche" in 2016 and run for

the presidential election in 2017. Certainly, Houellebecq could not have imagined such a fairytale. Furthermore, Mr. Macron's centrist politics would effectively quell the far-right wave – at least temporarily. But for how long?

Houellebecq came up with another novel in 2022 titled *Anéantir* (Annihilate, Destroy, or Obliterate). It was written against the backdrop of the 2027 French presidential election, when the departing young President, who is similar to Mr. Macron, was finishing up his second term in office. In *Anéantir*, a youthful far-right contender is dangerously close behind the front-runner in the polls in 2027.

The far-right is undeniably riding on popularity throughout Europe. Italy elected Giorgia Meloni as its first far-right leader since Benito Mussolini in October 2022, precisely a century after Mussolini took power. From Sweden to Portugal, Germany to Spain, and the Netherlands to Austria, the far-right is spreading its tentacles. Furthermore, they undoubtedly share certain things in common in terms of their anti-immigration and euroscepticism.

Immigration, eh? French football's succession of megastars of African, Arab, or Antillean descent, including Kylian Mbappé, Thierry Henry and Zinedine Zidane, represents only one side of the story. However, what is their level of integration into French society? French footballer Karim Benzema effectively summarised this fact when he remarked, "If I score, I'm French... if I don't, I'm an Arab."

Needless to say, the two rounds of French elections could turn out to be a change-point in both French and European history if the far-right wins on July 7. This could lead to the emergence of neo-fascism throughout Europe. But as history has shown us, every storm eventually calms down, and this ultra-right wave in Europe will eventually normalise. However, the effects of this particular cyclone would last for a very long time.

The spectre of neo-fascism that is haunting Europe (06 July)

- Kylian Mbappé, France captain, warned about political extremes before UEFA Euro 2024.
- Mbappé expressed disapproval of representing a country that doesn't align with his values.
- Teammate Marcus Thuram urged the French to oppose Marine Le Pen's National Rally (RN) party.
- Europe is at an inflection point with the rise of the ultra-right and neo-fascism.
- Timothy Garton Ash noted the irony of Europe facing fascism again 80 years after D-day.
- President Emmanuel Macron called a snap parliamentary election after a significant defeat to Le Pen's party in the EU elections.
- Macron justified the snap election as the responsible solution but faced criticism.

- In the first round of the snap election, the RN increased its vote share to 34%, surpassing Macron's centrist alliance at 21%.
- The left-wing New Popular Front (NPF) came in second with 28%.
- Macron's gamble may have allowed the far-right to gain momentum, potentially making them the most powerful political force in France.

Growth of the far-right

- The far-right in Europe is gaining influence, partly due to resistance against immigrants from Africa and Asia.
- This issue was highlighted in Michel Houellebecq's 2015 novel "Soumission," where a fictional alliance opposes Marine Le Pen.
- Emmanuel Macron, not depicted in the novel, launched his centrist party "En Marche" in 2016, temporarily curbing the far-right wave.
- Houellebecq's 2022 novel "Anéantir" portrays a far-right contender rising in the 2027 French presidential election.
- Far-right popularity is increasing across Europe, with Giorgia Meloni becoming Italy's first far-right leader since Mussolini in 2022.
- The far-right shares common views on anti-immigration and euroscepticism across Europe.
- The integration of French football stars of diverse backgrounds highlights ongoing societal challenges.
- French elections on July 7 could significantly impact French and European history if the far-right wins, potentially leading to neo-fascism.
- Although the current ultra-right wave in Europe may eventually normalize, its effects could be long-lasting.

The main characteristics of fascism:

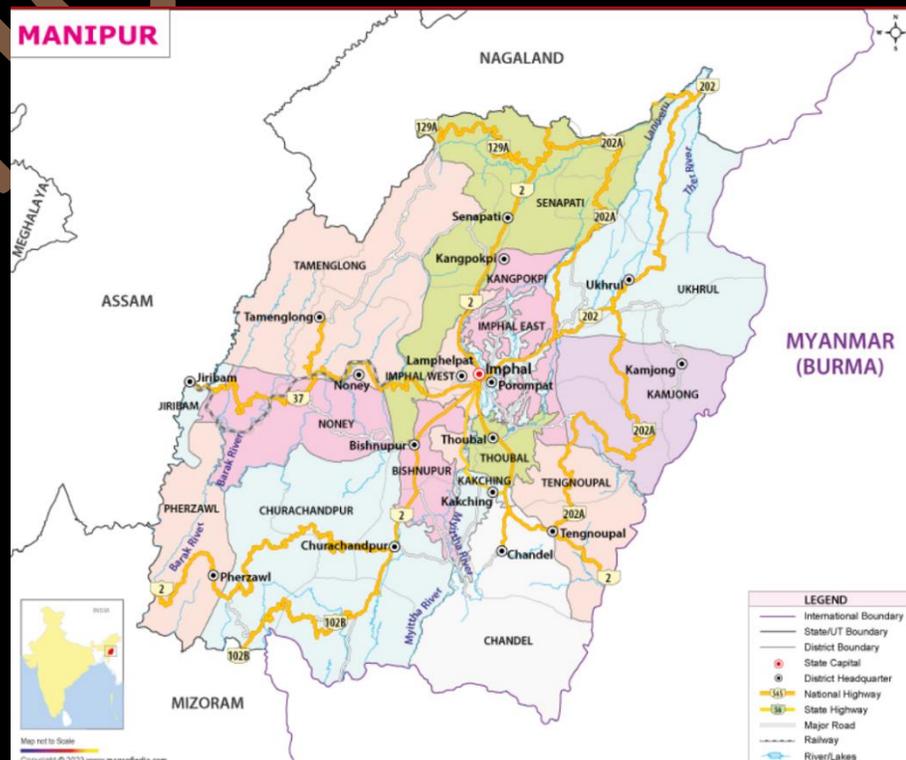
1. **Authoritarianism:** Fascism advocates for a centralized, autocratic government led by a dictatorial leader. It rejects democratic governance and emphasizes the need for strong leadership and strict control.
2. **Nationalism:** A core tenet of fascism is intense nationalism, often accompanied by a belief in the superiority of the nation or race. This includes a focus on national unity and the promotion of a homogeneous national culture.
3. **Militarism:** Fascism glorifies military strength, discipline, and the use of violence to achieve political goals. It often involves the expansion of military forces and aggressive foreign policies.
4. **Anti-Communism and Anti-Liberalism:** Fascism opposes both communism and liberal democracy. It rejects the principles of class struggle and egalitarianism associated with socialism, as well as the individual freedoms and parliamentary systems associated with liberalism.

5. **Propaganda and Censorship:** Fascist regimes use propaganda to control public opinion and maintain their grip on power. They often control the media, suppress dissent, and promote their ideology through state-sponsored messaging.
6. **Cult of Personality:** Fascist movements often center around a charismatic leader who is portrayed as a savior of the nation. This leader is venerated and often given unchecked power.
7. **Economic Control:** While fascism does not advocate for the complete abolition of private property or capitalism, it does promote state intervention in the economy. The state often controls key industries, enforces labor discipline, and directs economic activity to serve national interests.
8. **Opposition to Pluralism:** Fascism rejects political pluralism and seeks to eliminate all opposition. It promotes a single-party state and often uses violence and intimidation to suppress political rivals and minority groups.
9. **Social Darwinism:** Fascist ideology often incorporates Social Darwinist ideas, believing in the survival of the fittest and the need for a strong, pure nation to dominate weaker ones. This can lead to extreme xenophobia and racism.
10. **Myth of Rebirth:** Fascism typically promotes the idea of national rejuvenation or rebirth, often through a return to past glories. This involves a rejection of contemporary societal norms and a call for a radical transformation of society.
11. **Mass Mobilization:** Fascist regimes engage in mass mobilization of the population through rallies, parades, and other public displays of support for the regime. This creates a sense of unity and collective identity among the populace.

Walk the talk (06 July)

PM Modi finally acknowledges Manipur crisis; now he should push for peace

- Congress MP Bimol Akoijam criticized Prime Minister Modi's silence on the Manipur situation.
- Modi responded in Parliament, acknowledging the ethnic conflict and claiming steps had been taken to restore order.



- He emphasized the need for peace and stability, blaming Congress for past incidents and suggesting deep-rooted social tensions.
- Modi called for focusing on peace and avoiding the blame game.
- Modi often claims achievements but tends to remain silent on crises that reflect poorly on his regime.
- His late response to the Manipur crisis has worsened the situation, but his remarks may now help find a solution.
- Manipur is not close to normalcy despite Modi's claims.
- Many people remain displaced, with 67,000 out of 69,000 displaced in South Asia last year from Manipur.
- Kuki-Zo residents in Imphal and Meitei residents in Churachandpur are still unable to return home.
- Displaced government servants and legislators are affecting governance, welfare, schooling, and health services.
- Armed vigilantes still roam, and conflict has spread to previously peaceful districts like Jiribam.
- The state government's power has been supplanted by central agencies, implying de facto central rule without Article 355.
- Union Home Minister Amit Shah claims this is with the cooperation of the N. Biren Singh-led government.
- N. Biren Singh lacks confidence from minority community members of his party, hindering peace and reconciliation.
- Modi and Shah have shown no inclination to change leadership.
- Bluster and mere acknowledgment of the crisis won't solve Manipur's problems; proactive leadership is needed for peace and reconciliation.

GS Paper II: UK

Laboured change

After 14 years in power, the Tories were finally voted out

In his first speech after leading the Labour Party to its best ever performance in the U.K. general election, Prime Minister Keir Starmer was clear about the task before him: to “begin the work of change” for national renewal and rebuilding the country. With a more than generous mandate – 412 seats in the 650-member House, Mr. Starmer will be virtually unchallenged inside Parliament for his agenda on “wealth creation for the working classes”, taxing higher incomes, banning fossil fuel car sales by 2030 and building a new Border control agency. It should be equally clear that more than the Labour win, this is a Conservative loss. After its 14-year run in power, five Prime Ministers and considerable turmoil, the British voter clearly chose to punish the Conservatives led by Prime Minister Rishi Sunak for compounded errors: from the mishandling of Brexit and the economic crisis, a failure to support public services, especially health and schooling, to a series of scandals from ‘Partygate’, pornography in Parliament and the Post Office scandal. The rising cost of living was a major campaign issue, spurred by the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the impact of the Ukraine war and post-Brexit shortages, although Mr. Sunak said that the economy had turned a corner more recently. Immigration has been another big issue. While Mr. Starmer has disavowed Mr. Sunak’s plans to send “small boat arrivals” or illegal immigrants demanding asylum to countries such as Rwanda while they are processed, he will be under pressure to do more to cut down the numbers of migrants. The remarkable performance of ultra-right wing leader Nigel Farage, who won after losing seven times, and his party, Reform UK, that won more than 14% of the vote, albeit only four seats, will be a worry on this account, with its openly xenophobic rhetoric.

For many in India, the defeat of Mr. Sunak will feel somewhat personal, given their pride in his being the first British Prime Minister of Asian origin, with Indian ancestry – a bond he affirmed as well. Despite attempts by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Mr. Sunak, the India-U.K. FTA could not be taken across the finish line. All eyes will be on how quickly Mr. Starmer’s government, that criticised the delay, would be able to do so, as its priorities will be in shoring up the economy. The India-UK Roadmap 2030, signed in 2021, will no doubt be tweaked. An early visit to India by new U.K. Foreign Secretary David Lammy has already been outlooked by the Labour leadership, and it will be important for both countries which have completed their elections, to hit the floor running and frame their priorities for future ties.

Laboured change (06 July)

After 14 years in power, the Tories were finally voted out

- Keir Starmer, after leading the Labour Party to its best performance, aims to "begin the work of change" for national renewal and rebuilding.
- Labour Party won 412 out of 650 seats, giving Starmer a strong mandate for his agenda.
- Starmer's plans include wealth creation for the working classes, taxing higher incomes, banning fossil fuel car sales by 2030, and building a new Border control agency.
- The election was a significant loss for the Conservatives, who were punished for mishandling Brexit, economic crisis, public service failures, and scandals.
- Rising cost of living was a major campaign issue, influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic, Ukraine war, and post-Brexit shortages.
- Immigration was another big issue, with Starmer rejecting Sunak's plan to send illegal immigrants to Rwanda, but facing pressure to reduce migrant numbers.
- Nigel Farage and Reform UK, with more than 14% of the vote but only four seats, pose a concern with their xenophobic rhetoric.
- The defeat of Rishi Sunak, the first British Prime Minister of Asian origin with Indian ancestry, may feel personal to many in India.
- Efforts to finalize the India-U.K. Free Trade Agreement (FTA) under Sunak's leadership did not succeed despite attempts by Narendra Modi and Sunak.
- Keir Starmer's government, critical of the delay in the FTA, will prioritize shoring up the economy.
- The India-UK Roadmap 2030, signed in 2021, is likely to be reviewed and adjusted under Starmer's administration.
- Labour leadership anticipates an early visit to India by new U.K. Foreign Secretary David Lammy to strengthen bilateral ties.
- Both countries, having completed their elections, aim to quickly set priorities and strengthen future relations.

PRELIMS PRACTICE QUESTIONS:

Question 1: Consider the following statements regarding Article 27 of the Indian Constitution:

1. Article 27 prohibits the state from compelling any individual to pay any taxes for the promotion or maintenance of any particular religion or religious denomination.
2. Article 27 allows the state to use public funds for the promotion of activities associated with religious practices of state religion.

3. Article 27 applies only to the central government and not to the state governments.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 1 and 2 only
- c) 2 and 3 only
- d) 1, 2 and 3

Question 2: Under Article 27 of the Indian Constitution, which of the following activities can the state fund?

- 1) Construction of temples or mosques.
- 2) Religious education in private religious schools.
- 3) Secular activities associated with religious practices, such as pilgrim facilities.
- 4) Salaries of priests and imams.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) 3 only
- b) 1 and 2 only
- c) 2 and 3 only
- d) 1, 2 and 3

Question 3: Consider the following statements regarding Fascism:

- 1. Fascism advocates for a strong centralized government led by a dictatorial leader.
- 2. Fascism supports the abolition of private property and the establishment of a classless society.
- 3. Fascism places a strong emphasis on nationalism and often promotes the idea of national superiority.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 and 2 only
- b) 1 and 3 only
- c) 2 and 3 only
- d) 1, 2, and 3

Question 4: Which of the following characteristics is not associated with Fascism?

- 1) Militarism and glorification of war
- 2) Promotion of individual rights and liberties
- 3) Suppression of political opposition
- 4) Use of propaganda to control public opinion

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 and 2 only
- b) 2 only
- c) 2 and 3 only
- d) 1, 2, and 3

Question 5: Consider the following statements regarding Article 188 of the Indian Constitution:

- 1. Article 188 mandates that every member of the State Legislature must take an oath or affirmation before taking their seat.
- 2. The oath or affirmation under Article 188 is administered directly by the Governor of the state.
- 3. Article 188 applies to both the Legislative Assembly and the Legislative Council of a state.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 and 2 only
- b) 1 and 3 only

- c) 2 and 3 only
- d) 1, 2, and 3

Question 1: Consider the following statements regarding Article 27 of the Indian Constitution:

4. Article 27 prohibits the state from compelling any individual to pay any taxes for the promotion or maintenance of any particular religion or religious denomination.
5. Article 27 allows the state to use public funds for the promotion of activities associated with religious practices of state religion.
6. Article 27 applies only to the central government and not to the state governments.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 1 and 2 only
- c) 2 and 3 only
- d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: a) 1 only

Explanation:

- **Statement 1:** Article 27 prohibits the state from compelling any individual to pay any taxes for the promotion or maintenance of any particular religion or religious denomination. - **True.** This is the core principle enshrined in Article 27. It upholds the concept of a secular state where the government remains impartial towards all religions and does not use taxpayer money to support a specific faith.
- **Statement 2:** Article 27 allows the state to use public funds for the promotion of secular activities associated with religious practices. - **False.** Article 27 restricts the use of public funds for religious purposes. However, the government can allocate funds for secular activities or public welfare initiatives that may have some tangential connection to religious practices, as long as they are not discriminatory or aimed at promoting any particular religion.
- **Statement 3:** Article 27 applies only to the central government and not to the state governments. - **False.** Article 27 applies to both the central and state governments. It's a fundamental right guaranteed by the Constitution and applies throughout the territory of India.

Question 2: Under Article 27 of the Indian Constitution, which of the following activities can the state fund?

- 1) Construction of temples or mosques.
- 2) Religious education in private religious schools.
- 3) Secular activities associated with religious practices, such as pilgrim facilities.
- 4) Salaries of priests and imams.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) 3 only
- b) 1 and 2 only
- c) 2 and 3 only

Answer: a) Secular activities associated with religious practices, such as pilgrim facilities.

Explanation:

- **Option 1 is incorrect:** Funding the construction of temples or mosques would be promoting a particular religion, which is prohibited by Article 27.
- **Option 2 is incorrect:** Religious education in private religious schools would also amount to promoting a particular religion, which Article 27 seeks to prevent through state funds.

<p>d) 1, 2 and 3</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Option 3 is correct: Secular activities associated with religious practices, such as providing facilities for pilgrims, are permissible under Article 27 as they serve a broader public purpose without promoting any particular religion. • Option 4 is incorrect: Paying the salaries of priests and imams would be directly promoting a particular religion, which is prohibited by Article 27.
<p>Question 3: Consider the following statements regarding Fascism:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Fascism advocates for a strong centralized government led by a dictatorial leader. 5. Fascism supports the abolition of private property and the establishment of a classless society. 6. Fascism places a strong emphasis on nationalism and often promotes the idea of national superiority. <p>Which of the statements given above is/are correct?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) 1 and 2 only b) 1 and 3 only c) 2 and 3 only d) 1, 2, and 3 	<p>Answer: b) 1 and 3 only</p> <p>Explanation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statement 1 is correct. Fascism advocates for a strong centralized government led by a dictatorial leader who exercises absolute power. • Statement 2 is incorrect. Fascism does not support the abolition of private property; instead, it maintains private property but with strong state control and regulation. • Statement 3 is correct. Fascism places a strong emphasis on nationalism and often promotes the idea of national superiority, sometimes leading to xenophobia and racism.
<p>Question 4: Which of the following characteristics is not associated with Fascism?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Militarism and glorification of war 2) Promotion of individual rights and liberties 3) Suppression of political opposition 4) Use of propaganda to control public opinion <p>Which of the statements given above is/are correct?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) 1 and 2 only b) 2 only c) 2 and 3 only d) 1, 2, and 3 	<p>Answer: b) Promotion of individual rights and liberties</p> <p>Explanation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Option a is incorrect. Fascism often involves militarism and the glorification of war as a means of achieving national strength and unity. • Option b is correct. Fascism does not promote individual rights and liberties; instead, it suppresses individual freedoms in favor of state control and collective identity. • Option c is incorrect. Fascism typically suppresses political opposition through censorship, violence, and other means. • Option d is incorrect. Fascism heavily relies on propaganda to control public opinion and promote its ideology.
<p>Question 5: Consider the following statements regarding Article 188 of the Indian Constitution:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Article 188 mandates that every member of the State Legislature must take an oath or affirmation before taking their seat. 	<p>Answer: b) 1 and 3 only</p> <p>Explanation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statement 1 is correct. Article 188 mandates that every member of a State Legislature must take an oath or affirmation before taking their seat.

5. The oath or affirmation under Article 188 is administered directly by the Governor of the state.
6. Article 188 applies to both the Legislative Assembly and the Legislative Council of a state.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 and 2 only
- b) 1 and 3 only
- c) 2 and 3 only
- d) 1, 2, and 3

- **Statement 2 is incorrect.** The oath or affirmation under Article 188 is administered by the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly or a person appointed by the Governor for this purpose, not directly by the Governor.
- **Statement 3 is correct.** Article 188 applies to both the Legislative Assembly and the Legislative Council of a state.

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