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Headlines:

- India–US Relations: Legal Dispute over Alleged Assassination Plot
- FCRA Amendment Bill, 2026: Balancing Transparency with Institutional Autonomy
- OBC Reservation: Creamy Layer and Equitable Distribution of Benefits
- Centre–State Relations: Strengthening Cooperative Federalism
- Strategic Autonomy and India's Starlink Policy: Balancing Connectivity with National Security



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1. India–US Relations: Legal Dispute over Alleged Assassination Plot

GS Paper II – International Relations | GS Paper III – Internal Security

Context

- A US court permitted Khalistani separatist Gurpatwant Singh Pannun to serve a civil lawsuit on NSA Ajit Doval and former RAW chief Samant Goel through Indian judicial channels.
- The lawsuit is linked to an alleged assassination plot against Pannun in June 2023.
- India rejected the allegations as fabricated and the lawsuit as frivolous.
- The development raises concerns over diplomatic relations, national security, sovereignty and international judicial cooperation.

Key Legal Dimensions

- **Hague Service Convention, 1965:** Facilitates the service of judicial documents across international borders in civil and commercial matters.
- **India's position:** Judicial documents must be routed through India's designated Central Authority – Ministry of Law and Justice.
- **Extraterritorial jurisdiction:** Raises questions about the extent to which domestic courts can exercise jurisdiction over alleged acts involving foreign officials and events outside their territory.
- **Due process:** Permission to serve summons does not establish guilt or validate the allegations; it is a procedural step, not a final judicial finding.

Implications for India

- Diplomatic:
  - May create friction in India–US strategic relations.
  - Could affect mutual trust and cooperation in sensitive security matters.
- Internal Security:
  - Highlights challenges posed by transnational extremism and separatist networks.
  - Raises concerns over the alleged targeting of Indian interests abroad.
- Strategic and Diaspora Security:
  - Tests cooperation in intelligence-sharing and counterterrorism.
  - Highlights the need to protect Indian diplomatic personnel, diaspora communities and national interests abroad.
  - Requires balancing national sovereignty with international legal obligations.

Way Forward

- Strengthen India–US intelligence-sharing and counterterrorism cooperation.

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- Resolve disputes through diplomatic and established legal channels.
- Strengthen institutional mechanisms for mutual legal assistance and evidence-sharing while respecting sovereignty and due process.
- Ensure transparent, impartial and evidence-based investigations.
- Promote international cooperation against transnational terrorism and separatist networks.

India must safeguard its national sovereignty and security interests while upholding international legal principles. A balanced diplomatic and legal approach is essential to preserve the India–US strategic partnership and address emerging transnational security challenges.

2. FCRA Amendment Bill, 2026: Balancing Transparency with Institutional Autonomy

GS Paper II – Polity, Governance and Social Justice

Context

- Proposed amendments to the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA), 2010, have triggered debate among civil society organisations, minority institutions and political parties.
- The government aims to enhance financial transparency, accountability and prevent misuse of foreign funds.
- Critics fear excessive state control, restrictions on legitimate NGO activities and infringement of minority rights.
- The Bill has been referred to a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) for further scrutiny.
- **Role of NGOs:** NGOs act as partners in participatory governance, complementing government efforts in education, healthcare, poverty alleviation and welfare delivery.

Key Provisions and Objectives

- **Foreign fund regulation:** Ensuring proper receipt and utilisation of foreign contributions.
- **Asset management:** Proposes a framework for managing foreign-funded assets when an organisation ceases to hold FCRA registration.
- **Financial accountability:** Strengthening monitoring and preventing diversion of funds.
- **National security:** Preventing foreign funding from being used against national interests.

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Major Concerns

A. Governance

- Risk of excessive regulatory control and arbitrary enforcement.
- Compliance burden on smaller NGOs and charitable organisations.
- Effective regulation requires coordination between the Union Government, State Governments and civil society institutions, promoting cooperative federalism.

B. Constitutional

- **Article 14:** Ensures equality before law and guards against arbitrary or discriminatory enforcement.
- **Article 19(1)(c) and 19(4):** Protect freedom of association, subject to constitutionally permitted reasonable restrictions.
- **Article 25:** Guarantees freedom of conscience and the right to freely profess, practise and propagate religion, subject to constitutional limitations.
- **Article 26:** Protects the right of religious denominations to manage their religious affairs.
- **Article 30:** Protects the rights of religious and linguistic minorities to establish and administer educational institutions.
- Restrictions on foreign contributions must be reasonable, proportionate and consistent with constitutional principles.
- The challenge is to balance regulatory oversight with freedom of association and minority institutional autonomy.

C. Social Justice

- Possible disruption of NGO-led education, healthcare and welfare services.
- Raises concerns regarding the rights of marginalised communities, including Dalit Christians.
- Financial accountability is essential to maintain public trust in charitable and religious institutions.

D. International

- Excessive restrictions may affect India's global image as a democracy committed to freedom of association and a vibrant civil society.
- Need to balance national security with international democratic commitments.

Way Forward

- Ensure transparent, proportionate and non-discriminatory regulation.
- Introduce risk-based monitoring instead of a one-size-fits-all regulatory approach.
- Strengthen independent audits and voluntary financial disclosures.

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- Establish safeguards against arbitrary action and protect legitimate charitable activities.
- Ensure time-bound grievance redressal and transparent decision-making.
- Enhance parliamentary oversight, judicial remedies and stakeholder consultation.

India needs accountable autonomy, where institutional freedom is complemented by financial transparency. A balanced FCRA framework must protect national interests without undermining constitutional freedoms, minority rights and the developmental role of civil society.

3. OBC Reservation: Creamy Layer and Equitable Distribution of Benefits

GS Paper II – Social Justice and Polity | GS Paper I – Indian Society

Context

- The Supreme Court's 2026 ruling in the Rohith Nathan case addressed the exclusion of OBC candidates from reservation benefits based solely on their parents' salary.
- The Court emphasised that parental salary alone cannot determine creamy layer status under the applicable 1993 guidelines.
- The issue highlights the need to balance caste-based disadvantage with economic inequalities within OBC communities.

Creamy Layer Principle

- **Indra Sawhney Case (1992):** Supreme Court upheld 27% OBC reservation in central government employment while excluding the creamy layer.
- **Objective:** Prevent relatively advanced OBC sections from monopolising reservation benefits and ensure equitable opportunities.
- **1993 Guidelines:** Creamy layer identification considers parental status and occupation, not merely salary.
- **Constitutional basis:** Articles 15(4) and 16(4) enable affirmative action for socially and educationally backward classes and backward classes inadequately represented in public employment.

Major Challenges

- **Social Justice and Equality**
    - Unequal distribution of reservation benefits among OBC communities.
    - Economically and socially advanced sections may capture disproportionate benefits.

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  - Article 14 guarantees equality before law, requiring fair and non-arbitrary implementation of reservation policies.

- **Governance and Administrative Issues**
  - Inconsistent implementation of creamy layer criteria creates uncertainty and exclusion.
  - Lack of accessible grievance redressal affects deserving candidates.
  - Uniform application of guidelines across recruitment authorities is essential.

- **Representation and Sub-categorisation**
  - OBC representation declines at higher levels of Central Government employment.
  - The Justice G. Rohini Commission highlighted the unequal distribution of reservation benefits among OBC sub-groups.
  - Sub-categorisation can promote equitable representation among diverse OBC communities.

- **Data Deficit**
  - Lack of comprehensive caste-wise data on education, occupation, assets and landholdings limits evidence-based policymaking.
  - Article 340 provides for the appointment of a commission to investigate the conditions of socially and educationally backward classes.

Way Forward

- Implement creamy layer criteria consistently, considering social and occupational status.
- Promote OBC sub-categorisation for equitable distribution of reservation benefits.
- Make the Rohini Commission report publicly accessible.
- Use caste census data for evidence-based policy formulation.
- Periodically review creamy layer criteria using reliable socio-economic data.
- Ensure transparent selection procedures and effective grievance redressal.

Reservation must address both caste-based exclusion and inequalities within backward communities. A data-driven, transparent and equitable affirmative action framework is essential to achieve substantive equality, intergenerational equity and inclusive social justice.

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4. Centre–State Relations: Strengthening Cooperative Federalism

GS Paper II – Indian Polity and Governance (Federalism, Centre–State Relations and Constitutional Provisions)

Context

- Tamil Nadu's decision to disband the Justice Kurian Joseph Committee on Union–State Relations and transfer its mandate to the State Law Commission has raised concerns over institutional continuity and federalism reforms.
- The committee examined key issues, including State autonomy, the Governor's role and delimitation.

Significance of Strong Federal Relations

- **Constitutional foundation:** Article 1 establishes India as a Union of States; Articles 245–254 and the Seventh Schedule define legislative relations.
- **Democratic governance:** State autonomy enables region-specific policies and accommodates India's diversity.
- **National integration:** Cooperative federalism promotes trust, coordination and balanced development.
- **Federal representation:** Delimitation must balance population-based representation with the concerns of States that have successfully controlled population growth.

Major Challenges

- **Centralisation:** Greater Union control over legislative, administrative and financial decisions can constrain State autonomy.
- **Governor-related friction:** Delays in assent to State Bills under Article 200 and concerns over political neutrality undermine constitutional trust.
- **Fiscal imbalance:** States' dependence on Union transfers limits fiscal autonomy. Predictable tax devolution and timely fund transfers remain essential.
- **Constitutional tensions:** Disputes over Concurrent List legislation and the possible misuse of Article 356 can strain federal relations.
- **Institutional discontinuity:** Abrupt changes in expert committees can weaken long-term policy reform.

Way Forward

- Strengthen the Inter-State Council (Article 263) and Zonal Councils.
- Implement relevant recommendations of the Rajamannar Committee (1969), Sarkaria Commission (1983) and Punchhi Commission (2007).
- Ensure constitutional neutrality and time-bound action by Governors.
- Strengthen fiscal federalism through predictable devolution and greater financial autonomy.

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- Institutionalise State consultation on delimitation and legislation affecting the Concurrent List.
- Ensure continuity and independence of expert committees.

India must move towards cooperative and consultative federalism, balancing national unity with State autonomy. Institutional dialogue, fiscal fairness and constitutional morality are essential for effective and inclusive governance.

5. Strategic Autonomy and India's Starlink Policy: Balancing Connectivity with National Security

GS Paper III – Science & Technology, Internal Security and Infrastructure | GS Paper II – International Relations

Context

- Elon Musk's allegations regarding Starlink's entry into India have renewed debate over satellite internet regulation.
- The central concern is whether India can retain regulatory and strategic control over critical communication infrastructure operated by foreign companies.

Strategic Significance of Starlink

- **Digital inclusion:** LEO satellite networks can connect remote villages, islands and border regions.
- **Economic development:** Enables telemedicine, e-governance, financial inclusion, online education and disaster management.
- **Defence applications:** Supports communication between soldiers, drones, sensors and command centres in connectivity-deficient areas.
- **Complementary infrastructure:** Satellite internet can supplement fibre-optic and mobile networks, particularly in geographically inaccessible regions.

Major Challenges

- **National security:** Foreign control over satellites and software creates risks of service disruption during geopolitical crises.
- **Regulatory sovereignty:** DoT must ensure compliance with India's satellite communication licensing and security requirements.
- **Data security:** Domestic gateway requirements need independent technical verification to prevent unauthorised routing of Indian traffic.
- **Geopolitical vulnerability:** Experiences in Ukraine and Iran demonstrate how satellite connectivity can be influenced by foreign governments and private companies.

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- **Commercial–strategic trade-off:** Excessive restrictions may discourage investment and innovation, while weak regulation can compromise national security.

Way Forward

- Enforce transparent licensing, domestic gateway and security-monitoring requirements through DoT.
- Develop indigenous satellite constellations, launch vehicles and ground infrastructure through ISRO and private Indian space-sector companies.
- Encourage multiple satellite operators to reduce dependence on a single foreign provider.
- Ensure technological redundancy through backup communication networks for defence and emergency services.
- Expand BharatNet and integrate satellite, fibre and mobile networks to strengthen digital connectivity.

India must adopt a technology-neutral but security-conscious approach. Strategic autonomy in the digital age requires not merely access to technology, but the capacity to control, regulate and replace it when national interests demand.





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