Indian Secularism: Protecting Pluralism without Oppressing Faiths

Secularism means the state remains separate from religion to protect individual freedom and ensure equal citizenship without favoring any faith.

Features of Indian Secularism

- **Equal respect for all religions:** India does not favor any religion, unlike Iran and Pakistan which privilege specific sects.
- **Principled distance:** India engages with religion when required, unlike China, which suppressed religious practices.
- **Freedom of religion:** Preamble declares India to be a secular state where people can practice, profess, and propagate their faith **(Article 25 of Indian Constitution).**
- **Separation of clergy from politics:** Religious authorities cannot run the government, unlike Iran where clerics dominate key decisions.
- **Reformist approach:** The state can regulate harmful customs like untouchability or discrimination to protect weaker sections within religions.

Difference between the Indian and the western model of secularism

Basis	Indian Secularism	Western Secularism
Nature of Separation	**Maintains principled distance** — state can engage with religion when required for justice and reform	**Maintains strict separation** — religion is kept completely out of state affairs
Approach	**Positive concept of secularism:** i.e. Equal respect for all religions (Sarva Dharma Sambhava)	**Negative concept of secularism:** i.e. strict separation between religion & state
Public Role of Religion	Religion can exist and be expressed in public spaces	Religion confined largely to private sphere
State Intervention	State may regulate/reform religious practices that violate rights.	State generally avoids interference in religion.
Objective	Promote equality, protect diversity, and ensure social harmony	Prevent religious influence on politics and preserve individual liberty
Examples	India	France (Laïcité), USA etc.

Private member's Bill to amend the 10th schedule introduced in Lok Sabha

The Bill seeks **to allow parliamentarians to take an independent line in voting on Bills and Motions,** promoting good lawmaking and **freeing MPs from "whip-driven tyranny"** under 10th Schedule.

Need of enforcing whip under 10th schedule

- **To prevent unprincipled defections:** Before 1985, **legislators frequently switched parties for personal gain** (known as Aaya Ram–Gaya Ram politics).
  - ⊖ This practice of **alluring elected representatives with money, political office or other benefits** is called **"political horse trading."**
- **Ensure political stability:** Frequent defections can lead to **mid-term government collapse** without fresh elections, betraying the voters' mandate.
- **Promote party discipline:** Parties need to **function as cohesive units** especially on major legislations (budgets, confidence votes, important bills).

Criticism of Whip

- **Weakening of Representative Democracy:** Elected representatives cannot exercise their votes **according to their own conciseness or the sentiments of their electorates.**
- **Suppression of Dissent:** Critics argue this **effectively converts elected representatives into "rubber-stamps"** of the party leadership, **undermining the idea of deliberative debate.**
  - ⊖ Undermines the **Fundamental Right to Freedom of Speech and Expression** guaranteed under **Article 19(1)(a).**
- **Failure to Prevent Instability:** Whips have **failed to curb defections, horse-trading and government collapses** as seen in Maharashtra assembly (2022) for example.

About Whip

- **Whip:** It is a **direction by political parties** to compel their respective MPs/MLAs to vote in a particular manner.
- **One of the conditions for disqualification** in the **10th schedule** (introduced by **52nd Amendment Act, 1985**) is a vote against party directives in the legislature.
- The office of Whip has **neither a constitutional status nor in a Parliamentary Statute.**
- **The 170th Law Commission report:** Whips should be issued only on occasions "when the voting is likely to affect the existence of the government.

External Affairs Minister (EAM) Calls for Stronger Multilateralism in a Multipolar World

What is Multilateralism?

- Multilateralism is the practice of **three or more states coordinating national policies** to address common challenges.
  - ⊖ It differs from **unilateralism** (acting alone in national interest) and **bilateralism** (cooperation between just two countries).
- **Emergence:** After World War II through institutions like the **United Nations (UN), World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), and World Trade Organization (WTO).**

Significance of Multilateralism

- **Creates global standards** that make modern life possible (telecommunications, aviation, emerging AI governance).
- **Maintains peace and security:** Through **conflict prevention, peacekeeping, and arms control, e.g.** it is widely credited for preventing a third world war during the Cold War.
- **Provides the effective mechanism for global public goods** such as climate change, pandemics, unregulated AI, and economic stability.
- Underpins **successful globalization and poverty reduction** via open trade and monetary systems.

Crisis in Multilateralism

- **Great-power rivalry (U.S.–China–Russia)** has paralyzed bodies like the UN Security Council and risks **splitting global governance into competing blocs.**
- **Institutions remain outdated:** E.g. the **Security Council over-represents Europe** and under-represents the Global South, creating a **legitimacy deficit.**
- **Unilateralism and protectionism by USA:** E.g. **"America First"** policies, tariff wars, and **withdrawals from agreements like the Paris Accord,** etc. have eroded trust.
- **Alternative blocs (BRICS, Shanghai Cooperation Organisation) are emerging** to champion a **"fairer, more democratic multipolar order"** and amplify developing-world voices.

Way Forward

- **Networked multilateralism:** Closer **UN cooperation** with regional bodies (EU, African Union) and international financial institutions.
- **Multi-stakeholder approaches** that include **civil society, private sector,** and **transnational networks** (the Red Cross/Red Crescent model).
- **A "new Bretton Woods" moment:** Comprehensive reform to tackle 21st-century issues such as digital trade, AI safety, climate finance, instead of incremental patches.
- **Postcolonial rebalancing:** True multipolarity requires **"deeper multilateralism"** rooted in mutual respect and **cultural diversity,** completing the unfinished process of decolonisation.

Stablecoins may accelerate currency substitution, weaken central bank control: IMF

A new IMF Paper has analyzed the rapid growth of stablecoins, and its associated risks, and implications.

About Stablecoins

- These are **crypto assets** designed to maintain a **stable value** relative to a **specific peg (e.g. Fiat currency),** distinguishing them from volatile unbacked crypto assets like Bitcoin.
- **Issuers:** Generally issued and operated in a centralized manner by entities such as crypto firms or financial institutions.
- **Applications:**
  - ⊖ While originally designed as a bridge for crypto trading, use cases are expanding into **cross-border payments and remittances.**
  - ⊖ Stablecoins are part of a **broader trend toward asset tokenization** i.e. representing assets on a programmable ledger.
  - ⊖ They have the potential to **bring efficiencies to payments.**

Risks associated with stablecoins

- **Run Risk:** If users lose confidence, mass redemptions can trigger fire sales of reserve assets (such as US Treasury bills), potentially impairing broader market functioning.
- **Currency Substitution:** Widespread adoption of foreign-denominated stablecoins in countries with high inflation/ weak institutions could undermine monetary sovereignty and weaken effectiveness of domestic monetary policy.
- **Banking Disintermediation:** They might reduce banks' stable funding sources, potentially impacting lending capabilities.
- **Financial Integrity:** The pseudonymity of blockchain transactions creates risks for money laundering and terrorism financing.

Way Forward

- **Promoting Central Bank Digital Currencies (CBDCs):** CBDCs operate within a regulated framework, ensuring consumer protection, etc. unlike many stablecoins which lack regulatory oversight.
- **Develop Macrofinancial Safeguards:** For issues like currency substitution, volatile capital flows, and payments fragmentation.
- **Strengthening International Cooperation & Harmonizing Regulatory Implementation across globe:** Fragmentation in regulation could lead to arbitrage, where issuers move to jurisdictions with weaker oversight.

President condoles loss of lives in North Goa's Night Club Fire

According to National Crime Records Bureau, a total of **7,054 cases of fire accidents** were reported in the country **during 2023, causing 6,891 deaths.**

❯ More than 50% of these incidents were reported in residential/dwelling buildings.

Reasons for fire in India

❯ **Natural factors** - Hot and dry climate, prevailing winds, Seismic vulnerability etc.
  ⊙ E.g. **Brahmapuram waste plant fire** in Kochi (2023) due to high heat.

❯ **Design and Density:** High-rise building block density, Substandard and illegal Construction. Use of Flammable Materials for construction etc.
  ⊙ E.g. **Kumbakonam School fire of Tamil Nadu (2004)** due to flammable material.

❯ **Inadequate compliance:** E.g. lack of fire exits , narrow staircase etc.
  ⊙ E.g. **coaching center Mukherjee nagar (Delhi) fire (2023).**

❯ **Limited Resources:** In 2019, there was a shortage of 5,191 fire stations and 5, 03,365 personnel than required.

❯ **Others** - Lack of awareness, lack of centrally maintained data set, electrical failures etc.

Way ahead

❯ **Technological Integration:** AI-based risk assessments, mobile applications for reporting incidents etc.

❯ **Optimize Fire Station Placement:** Reflecting realities of road networks and traffic congestion.

❯ **Secure Funding:** Eg. Introduction of **Fire Tax** for upgrading equipment, infrastructure etc.

❯ **Ensure compliance:** Proper scrutiny before sanctioning NOCs, Accountability mechanisms for officials involved in sanctioning licenses etc.

❯ **Follow best practices:** Eg. China's strict enforcement and community-based fire prevention programs to educate residents about risks and emergency response.

Existing Fire Safety Regulations in India

❯ **Constitutional provisions:** Fire service is a **State subject** and included in the **12th Schedule** under Article 243 which specifies the authority of Municipalities.

❯ **National Building Code (mandatory for states):** By Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) provides guidelines regarding fire safety of buildings.

❯ **Model Building Bye Laws 2016:** By the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs act as a guide to States and UTs.

❯ **Scheme for Expansion and Modernization of Fire Services in the States under ministry of Home affairs has been rolled** out in line with 15th finance commission report.
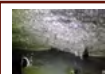

Also In News

🔬 International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)

The IAEA has confirmed that the **protective shield around the Chernobyl** nuclear disaster site in Ukraine has stopped working after being damaged in drone strikes.

About International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)

❯ **Headquarters:** Vienna, Austria.

❯ **Established:** In **1957** as an autonomous international organization **within the UN.**

❯ **Members:** 180 (India is a member).

❯ **Mandate:** It helps countries use **nuclear technology safely and peacefully,** provides **technology transfer,** promoting **strict nuclear safety standards,** and **verifying that nuclear materials** are not used for weapons.

❯ **Jurisdiction** doesn't include **Military facilities;** Non-NPT members (such India, Pakistan & Israel) are **not obliged to place all their nuclear material** under IAEA's safeguard.

❯ **Recognition:** Awarded the **Nobel Peace Prize (2005)** for promoting peaceful nuclear use and global safety.

Sulfur Caves

Scientists discovered **world's largest spider web** and **spider megacity inside** a sulfur cave on border between Greece and Albania.

❯ **Discovery challenges** assumptions about **spider's Solitary behaviour** and shows that they can display social tendencies and even form cooperative colonies.

❯ The colony is composed of only 2 species- common house spider) and sheet-weaver spider.

About Sulfur Cave

❯ Sulfuric acid caves are caves formed when groundwater containing sulfuric acid comes into contact with rock, creating a void in the rock.
  ⊙ Usually microbial action converts hydrogen sulfide gas into sulfuric acid, which then dissolves the rock.

❯ Instead of sunlight, life here is powered by sulfur springs that nourish bacteria and dense swarms of midges (spiders' main food).

UNSC Resolution 2803

The **United Nations Security Council (UNSC) adopted Resolution 2803** which endorses the US backed **Comprehensive Plan to end the Gaza Conflict.**

About Resolution 2803

▶ **Establishes Board of Peace (BoP):** As a **transitional body to oversee Gaza's redevelopment** until the Palestinian Authority undertakes reforms.

▶ **Humanitarian Aid:** It calls for the **resumption of aid to Gaza** with safeguards to prevent diversion and ensure peaceful use.

▶ **International Stabilization Force (ISF):** It authorizes a **temporary force** to secure Gaza, assist demilitarization, protect civilians, and work with Israel, Egypt, and Palestinian police.

Shyok Tunnel

Defence Minister inaugurated 125 border infrastructure projects including Shyok Tunnel in Ladakh.

About Shyok Tunnel

▶ **Location:** Situated on the Durbuk–Shyok–Daulat Beg Oldie (DS-DBO) Road in eastern Ladakh.
  ↪ Road connects Leh to the high-altitude Daulat Beg Oldie (DBO) military outpost near China border (LAC)

▶ **Features:** 920-metre cut-and-cover tunnel built by the Border Roads Organisation (BRO).

▶ **Significance:** Provides all-weather connectivity in a region prone to heavy snowfall, avalanches, and extreme temperatures.

NATGRID

The **National Intelligence Grid (NATGRID)** gains traction as the platform gets 45000 requests a month.

About NATGRID

▶ NATGRID is an **attached office of the Ministry of Home Affairs.**

▶ It is **an IT platform** for the **police and investigating agencies to securely access government and private databases** in real time to **counter terror.**

▶ **Accessibility: 11 Central Agencies** (IB, RAW, DRI, ED etc.) and State Police.
  ↪ **Superintendent of Police (SP) rank officers in States** can access NATGRID.

▶ **Scope:** Allows access to **driving license, Aadhaar registration, airline data, bank records,** and also **details of social media accounts** which share posts on a particular issue.

Washington Accords for Peace and Prosperity

Recently, the washing accord for peace and prosperity was signed between **Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Rwanda,** facilitated by the **United States.**

▶ **Background:** Earlier **Rwanda-backed M23 rebels** launched new attacks in eastern DRC, fuelling displacement and regional tensions.

About the accord

▶ **Aim** - To restore trust between these two countries and ensuring lasting peace in **mineral rich Eastern DRC regions** such as Katanga, Kivu, Ituri, etc.
  ↪ DRC is known for its mineral such as **copper and cobalt, tin, tungsten, tantalum, gold and diamond.**
  ↪ It's the world's largest **cobalt producer,** (70 % of global supply chain).

Hindu Rate of Growth

Prime Minister criticized the expression "Hindu rate of growth" which linked India's slow economic performance in earlier decades to the faith and identity of people.

Hindu Rate of Growth

▶ The **term "Hindu rate of growth"** was coined by economist Raj Krishna in 1978.

▶ Used to describe **India's slow economic growth** after independence, mainly from the 1950s to the 1980s, when the country's GDP grew only about 3.5-4 per cent per year.

▶ **The phrase suggested** that this slow growth came from the **"Hindu way of life,"** implying a cultural habit of accepting fate or being content with little.

Prison Reforms

Chief justice of India was speaking on correctional reforms and suggested four "thoughtful proposals".

Four proposals given by CJI

▶ Align **prison training with the "economy of tomorrow";** inmates must be equipped with digital competencies, logistics expertise, & modern vocational skills.
  ↪ **Deeper industry collaboration,** proposing a model where companies "adopt" prisons, offer apprenticeships, & eventually recruit trained inmates.

▶ Introduce **UK-Style Electronic Monitoring of Convicts** (Chip-based Tracking).

▶ Expand and Create More **Open Prisons** in India.

▶ **Establish a Data-Driven Rehabilitation** Tracking System.

Place in News 📰 Benin (capital: Porto-Novo)

Recently, **Contonou** (Benin's largest city and seat of government) witnessed a **failed coup attempt** by a group of soldiers (Military Committee for Refoundation).

Political Features

▶ **Land boundaries** - Niger, Nigeria ,Togo, and Burkina Faso (see map)

▶ **Maritime boundaries:** To south, It has a coastline on the **Bight of Benin** (part of the Gulf of Guinea, Atlantic Ocean).

Geographical Features

▶ **Plateaus** - Its **sandy coastal area transitions** to the **La Terre de Barre Plateau.**

▶ **Mountains - Atakora Mountains** (northwest), a branch of the **Togo Mountains.**

▶ **Highest point:** Mt. Sokbaro

▶ **Major rivers:** Niger and Ouémé