DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS

19th August 2025

Topics Covered

- **The path to ending global hunger runs through India**
- **Familiar impasse**
- **How should toll collection practices be reformed ?**
- **Who decides nominations to UT Assemblies?**

The path to ending global hunger runs through India

GS Paper II – Governance, Welfare Schemes, Issues relating to poverty and hunger.
GS Paper III – Agriculture (Food Security, PDS reforms, post-harvest infrastructure), Inclusive Growth.
GS Paper I – Poverty &Developmental Issues.

The path to ending global hunger runs through India

Maximo Torero Cullen

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With global chronic undernourishment now on a downward trend, the world is beginning to turn a corner in its fight against hunger. The United Nations' newly released The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2025 reports that 673 million people (8.2% of the world's population) were undernourished in 2024. This is down from 688 million in 2023. Although we have not yet returned to pre-pandemic levels (7.3% in 2018), this reversal marks a welcome shift from the sharp rise experienced during COVID-19.

India has played a decisive role in this global progress. The gains are the result of policy investments in food security and nutrition, increasingly driven by digital technology, smarter governance, and improved service delivery.

Revised estimates using the latest National Sample Survey data on household consumption show that the prevalence of undernourishment in India declined from 14.3% in 2020-22 to 12% in 2022-24. In absolute terms, this means 30 million fewer people living with hunger – an impressive achievement considering the scale of the population and the depth of disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The transformation of the PDS

At the centre of this progress is India's Public Distribution System, which has undergone a profound transformation. The system has been revitalised through digitalisation, Aadhaar-enabled targeting, real-time inventory tracking, and biometric authentication. The rollout of electronic point-of-sale systems and the One Nation One Ration Card platform have made entitlements portable across the country, which is particularly crucial for internal migrants and vulnerable households.

India's decisive role in the world's fight against hunger is a result of its policy investments in food security and nutrition

These innovations allowed India to rapidly scale up food support during the pandemic and to continue to ensure access to subsidised staples for more than 800 million people.

Now, progress on calories must give way to progress on nutrition. The cost of a healthy diet in India remains unaffordable for over 60% of the population, driven by high prices of nutrient-dense foods, inadequate cold chains, and inefficient market linkages. That said, India has begun investing in improving the quality of calories. For example, the Pradhan Mantri Poshan Shakti Nirman (PM POSHAN) school-feeding scheme, launched in 2021, and the Integrated Child Development Services are now focusing on dietary diversity and nutrition sensitivity, laying the foundation for long-term improvements in child development and public health.

New data in the UN report also shows progress the country has made in making healthy diets more affordable despite food inflation.

What is happening underscores a larger structural challenge: even as hunger falls, malnutrition, obesity, and micronutrient deficiencies are rising. This is especially so among poor urban and rural populations.

The agrifood system needs transformation

India can meet this challenge by transforming its agrifood system. This means boosting the production and the affordability of nutrient-rich foods such as pulses, fruits, vegetables, and animal-source products, which are often out of reach for low-income families. It also means investing in post-harvest infrastructure such as cold storage and digital logistics systems, to reduce the estimated 13% of food lost between farm and market. These losses directly affect food availability and affordability.

In addition, India should further strengthen support for women-led food enterprises and local cooperatives, including Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs), especially those cultivating climate-resilient crops, as these can enhance both nutrition and livelihoods.

India must continue to invest in its digital advantage to drive the transformation of its agrifood systems. Platforms such as AgriStack, e-NAM, and geospatial data tools can strengthen market access, improve agricultural planning, and enhance the delivery of nutrition-sensitive interventions.

A symbol of hope

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) notes that the progress of India in agrifood system transformation is not just national imperatives; they are global contributions. As a leader among developing countries, India is well-positioned to share its innovations in digital governance, social protection, and data-driven agriculture with others across the Global South. India's experience shows that reducing hunger is not only possible but that it can be scaled when backed by political will, smart investment, and inclusion.

With just five years left to meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), including SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) on ending hunger, India's recent performance gives this writer hope. But sustaining this momentum will require a shift from delivering sustenance to delivering nutrition, resilience, and opportunity.

The hunger clock is ticking. India is no longer just feeding itself. The path to ending global hunger runs through India, and its continued leadership is essential to getting us there.

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Key points from article

Global Hunger Trends (FAO Report 2025):
- 673 million people (8.2% of global population) undernourished in 2024.
- Decline from 688 million in 2023; but still above pre-pandemic level of 7.3% (2018).

India's Progress in Reducing Undernourishment:
- Undernourishment declined from **14.3% (2020–22) to 12% (2022–24).**
- 30 million fewer hungry people despite COVID-19 disruptions.

Role of Public Distribution System (PDS):
- Digitalisation, Aadhaar-enabled targeting, biometric authentication.
- Real-time inventory tracking, electronic PoS, **One Nation One Ration Card (ONORC).**
- Ensured food support for **800+ million people** during the pandemic.

Nutrition Challenge Beyond Calories:
- Cost of healthy diet unaffordable for **60%+ population** due to high food prices, weak cold chains, and market inefficiencies.
- Schemes targeting nutrition:
  - **PM POSHAN (2021)** – school feeding with focus on dietary diversity.
  - **Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS)** – maternal & child nutrition.
- Progress in **affordability of healthy diets** despite inflation.
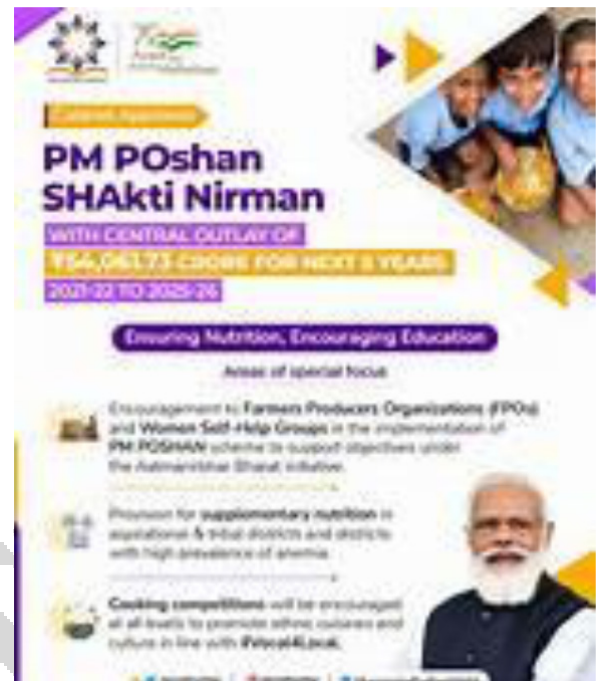
Emerging Issues:
- **Malnutrition, obesity, micronutrient deficiency** rising even as hunger falls.
- Inequity in nutrition access, especially in poor urban & rural households.

Agrifood System Transformation Needed:
- Boost **nutrient-rich foods** (pulses, fruits, vegetables, animal products).
- Invest in **cold storage & logistics** – 13% of food lost post-harvest.
- Promote **women-led enterprises & FPOs,** especially for climateresilient crops.
- Use **digital tools** – AgriStack, eNAM, geospatial mapping – for better planning & delivery.

India's Global Role:
- Success in digital governance & social protection seen as a **model for Global South.**
- India's leadership crucial for achieving **SDG-2 (Zero Hunger)** by 2030.

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Way Forward

- **Shift from food security to nutrition security** – expand dietary diversity in PDS, mid-day meals, and ICDS.

- **Strengthen supply chains** – invest in cold chains, storage, and digital logistics to reduce post-harvest losses.

- **Make healthy diets affordable** – subsidies or incentives for fruits, vegetables, pulses, and protein-rich food.

- **Empower local institutions** – scale up FPOs, cooperatives, and women-led food enterprises to improve access & livelihoods.

- **Global knowledge sharing** – India should lead South-South cooperation on digital agriculture and food security innovations.

Familiar impasse

GS Paper II – International Relations: Multilateral agreements, Global governance on environmental issues.
GS Paper III – Environment & Ecology: Pollution, Waste Management, Climate Change.

Familiar impasse

Talks on limiting use of plastic must be built on mutual trust

Global resistance to a universal treaty on eliminating plastic pollution remains stubborn and huge. Last week, the sixth attempt since 2022 by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to get member-nations to agree upon a treaty to address plastic pollution ran into the familiar vortex of opposition. There was disagreement among the major blocs of countries on whether comprehensively addressing plastic pollution requires eliminating plastic production itself. All countries agree that the ubiquitous polythene bag, despite its immense practicability and affordability as a container, has ballooned into a civic crisis. India generates around 3.4 million tonnes (MT) of plastic waste but recycles only about 30%. Its plastic consumption rose at a compounded annual growth rate (CAGR) of 9.7% from 14 MT in 2016-17 to over 20 MT in 2019-20. India has a production ban on about 20 single-use plastic items – cups, straws, spoons. While this has, to some extent, induced a degree of behavioural change – in greater reliance of paper and cloth bags – it has had little impact on waste management and recycling. This is also reflective of the global picture. According to the UNEP, the world produces more than 430 MT of plastic annually, two-thirds of which are short-lived products that soon become waste. Overall, 46% of plastic waste is landfilled, while 22% is mismanaged and becomes litter. In 2019, plastic, which is a derivate of fossilised crude, generated 1.8 billion metric tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions or about 3.4% of the global total.

Plastic, therefore, can be seen as a waste management problem that can be solved by improving incentives for the market to do a better job of collecting waste and recycling. However, there are countries that point to the decades of attempts made on these lines, with limited gains. To add to that, more evidence has piled up that plastic, non-biodegradable as it is, is making its way into human, animal and marine food systems. Island-nations and territories are swamped by plastic waste washing up on their shores. Then there are granular forms of plastic – or microplastics – with potential for harm. Thus, the only real solution is to reduce at source. However, nations are not all agreed upon this aspect of toxicity. Therefore, in treaty-linked talks, they view calls to cut production as tactics to impose trade barriers and add to the general climate of tariff uncertainty. Unless countries can build greater trust before such talks and hear each other out with an open mind, having more meetings will only be futile. The halcyon days, when some countries could steer resolutions on the environment assuming that the 'common good' was incontrovertible, are long past.

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Global Plastic Crisis:
- UNEP's 6th attempt since 2022 to negotiate a global treaty on plastic pollution failed due to lack of consensus.
- Major dispute: Should the treaty address only waste management or also include reducing plastic production at source?

Scale of the Problem:
- Global production: >430 million tonnes annually.
- Waste outcome:
  - 46% landfilled,
  - 22% mismanaged (becomes litter),
  - Two-thirds are short-lived products (e.g., packaging).
- **Emissions impact:** In 2019, plastic production generated 1.8 billion tonnes of GHGs (3.4% of global total).

India's Plastic Footprint:
- Generates **3.4 million tonnes plastic waste annually.**
- Recycles only **30%.**
- Consumption grew at **9.7% CAGR** (14 MT in 2016-17 → 20+ MT in 2019-20).
- Ban on **20 single-use items** (cups, straws, spoons etc.) showed behavioural shift but **little impact on recycling & waste management.**

Key Concerns:
- Plastic waste infiltrates **human, animal & marine food systems** (including microplastics).
- Island nations are disproportionately affected by **plastic washing up on shores.**
- Debate:
  - Some countries → focus on waste management & recycling incentives.
  - Others → stress **reduction at source** as the only long-term solution.
  - Trade angle: Calls for production cuts seen as **potential trade barriers.**

Diplomatic Challenge:
- Earlier, environmental negotiations could be led under the "common good" argument.
- Now, **geopolitical mistrust & trade concerns** hinder consensus.
- Without trust-building, further meetings risk being **futile.**

Way Forward
- **Trust-building in negotiations** – Balance between developed & developing country concerns; avoid equating environmental measures with hidden trade barriers.
- **Adopt a hybrid approach** – Combine waste management reforms (recycling incentives, circular economy) with gradual production curbs on nonessential plastics.
- **Technology & innovation sharing** – Global cooperation on biodegradable alternatives, advanced recycling, and microplastic mitigation technologies.
- **Financial & capacity support** – Developed nations must support island and developing nations via climate finance & technology transfer.

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- **Strengthen domestic systems** – For India: improve segregation, Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) enforcement, and expand recycling infrastructure

How should toll collection practices be reformed ?

GS Paper II – Parliament & Committees; Accountability of Government; Issues of Governance in infrastructure.
GS Paper III – Infrastructure: Roads, Transport & Economic Development.

How should toll collection practices be reformed?

What has the Public Accounts Committee of Parliament recommended? What was said about FASTags?

Jagriti Chandra

The story so far:

The Public Accounts Committee (PAC) of Parliament has recommended significant reforms to toll collection practices on national highways, such as calling for an end to the perpetual tolling system. The report was submitted before Parliament on August 12.

What are the key recommendations?
The PAC headed by Congress MP K.C.Venugopal has advocated for discontinuing or significantly reducing toll charges on national highways once the capital expenditure and maintenance expenses have been fully recovered. The Committee expressed concern that current toll practices allow for indefinite collection regardless of road quality, traffic volume, or user affordability, creating what it termed a "regime of

perpetual tolling". The panel emphasised that any continuation of toll collection beyond cost recovery should only be permitted with clear justification and approval from a proposed independent oversight authority. It proposed establishing a specialised regulatory authority to ensure transparency and fairness in toll determination, collection, and regulation. The PAC noted that while toll rates currently increase annually by a fixed 3% increment plus partial indexation to the Wholesale Price Index, there exists no institutional mechanism to independently evaluate whether these charges are justified relative to actual operational and maintenance costs or future service requirements. The panel has also insisted that highway users should receive toll reimbursements when construction is in progress and commuters cannot properly utilise the roadways. Regarding FASTags, the panel observed that despite their extensive

implementation, traffic bottlenecks persist on NHs due to malfunctioning scanner readings at collection points, and suggested establishing on-location services for motorists to top up, buy, or exchange FASTags.

How is toll determined?
Section 7 of the National Highways Act, 1956 empowers the Government to levy fees for services or benefits rendered on national highways while Section 9 empowers the Union government to make rules in this regard. Accordingly, the policy for the collection of user fee is formulated and governed by the National Highways Fee (Determination of Rates and Collection) Rules, 2008. The levy of user fee is based on the base rates fixed under the NH Fee Rules across the country and is not related to the cost of construction or its recovery.

The rates of fees have been increasing by 3% each year from April 1, 2008. In

order to cover the impact of variable cost of operation and maintenance, 40% of annual increase of WPI is provided. The fee is to be collected by the Union government if a highway is publicly funded or by the concessionaire if it follows any of these models – Build Operate Transfer (BoT), Toll-Operate-Transfer (ToT) or developed under Infrastructure Investment Trust.

An amendment in 2008 allowed user fees to be collected in perpetuity. So, if the concession period is over, the highway is handed over to the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI), and the toll collected will go directly to the Consolidated Fund of India. The toll collection has gone up from ₹1,046 crore in 2005-06 to ₹55,000 crore in the financial year 2023-24. Of this ₹25,000 crore will go to the Consolidated Fund of India, and the remaining to the concessionaire toll plaza.

How has the Ministry responded?
The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways acknowledged the Committee's concerns and informed the PAC that it has initiated a comprehensive study with NITI Aayog to revise the user fee determination framework. Ministry representatives indicated that the study's scope has been finalised and will cover parameters such as vehicle operating cost, damage to the highway due to vehicle use as well as user's willingness to pay.

THE GIST

▼
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Key points from article

Public Accounts Committee (PAC) Recommendations

- **End perpetual tolling:**
  - Discontinue or reduce tolls once **capital and maintenance costs** are fully recovered.
  - Toll continuation beyond cost recovery only with **clear justification & approval** of an **independent oversight authority.**
- **Regulatory authority:**
  - Proposed creation of a **specialised regulatory body** to ensure fairness & transparency in toll determination and collection.
- **Annual revision critique:**
- Current toll hikes (3% + 40% of WPI annually) lack an **institutional mechanism** to evaluate whether increases reflect actual road costs/quality.
- **Relief for users:**
- Commuters should receive **reimbursement/waivers** when road construction/repairs prevent full usage.
- **FASTag issues:**
  - Despite near-universal rollout, bottlenecks remain due to faulty scanners.
- Suggested **on-location services** at plazas for top-up, purchase, or exchange of FASTags.

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How Toll is Determined (Legal Framework)

- **National Highways Act, 1956:**
  - **Section 7** – Govt. can levy fees for services/benefits.
  - **Section 9** – Centre empowered to make rules.
- **National Highways Fee (Determination of Rates and Collection) Rules, 2008:**
  - Base rates fixed nationally.
  - Fee not linked to actual cost recovery.
  - Annual increase = **3% + 40% of WPI.**
  - Collected either by Govt. (public projects) or
  - concessionaires (BoT, ToT, InvIT models).
- **2008 Amendment:**
  - Allowed user fee **in perpetuity.**
  - If concession ends, NHAI takes over and toll goes to
  - **Consolidated Fund of India.**
- **Revenue trends:**
  - 2005-06: ₹1,046 crore collected.
  - 2023-24: ₹55,000 crore collected (₹25,000 crore →
  - Consolidated Fund of India; balance → concessionaires).

Government's Response

- Ministry of Road Transport & Highways acknowledged concerns.
- Initiated a **study with NITI Aayog** to revise toll framework.
- **Scope includes:**
  - **Vehicle operating costs**
  - **Highway damage costs** due to traffic load
  - **User willingness to pay**

Way Forward

- **Cap toll collection periods** – end tolls after cost recovery, except where justified with transparent oversight.
- **Independent regulatory authority** – for tariff determination, accountability, and user grievance redressal.
- **Dynamic toll pricing** – consider congestion, road quality, and maintenance status (like global best practices).
- **Improve FASTag infrastructure** – seamless scanning, realtime recharge kiosks, and system reliability upgrades.
- **Equity in tolling** – differential pricing for local users, heavy vehicles, or during ongoing construction.

Who decides nominations to UT Assemblies?

GS Paper II (Polity & Governance):
- Structure, organization andv functioning of the Executive and Legislature at Union and State level.
- Comparison of powers and responsibilities of Union and States.
- Federalism – issues and challenges.
- Functioning of Union Territories with Legislatures

Who decides nominations to UT Assemblies?

How should members be recommended to the Jammu & Kashmir Legislative Assembly? What does the Government of Union Territories Act, 1963 state with respect to nominations to the Puducherry Assembly? What was the 'triple chain of command' opined by the Supreme Court in 2023?

EXPLAINER

Rangarajan. R

The story so far:

The Union Home Ministry, in its affidavit before the Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh High Court, has submitted that the power of the Lieutenant Governor (LG) of Jammu & Kashmir (J&K) to nominate five members to the Legislative Assembly of J&K can be exercised by him without the aid and advice of its Council of Ministers.

What does the Constitution state?

The Indian Constitution provides for nominated members in the houses of Parliament and State legislature. The provision for nominating two Anglo-Indian members to the Lok Sabha and one Anglo-Indian member to State Legislative Assemblies was discontinued in 2020. The Rajya Sabha has 12 nominated members. These members are nominated by the President on the aid and advice of the Union Council of Ministers. In the six States with Legislative Councils, nearly one-sixth of the members are nominated. These members are nominated by the Governors on the advice of the States' Council of Ministers.

What about Union Territories?

The composition of the Legislative Assemblies of three Union Territories (UT) are governed by acts of Parliament. Section 3 of the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi Act, 1991 provides for 70 elected members in the Delhi Assembly. There are no nominated MLAs in the Delhi Assembly. Section 3 of the Government of Union Territories Act, 1963 provides for 30 elected members in the Legislative Assembly of Puducherry. It also provides that the Union government may nominate up to three members to the Puducherry Assembly.

Section 14 of the J&K Reorganisation Act, 2019 (as amended in 2023) provides for a total of 90 elected seats in the

Different metrics: Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah during the Budget session of the J&K Assembly, in Jammu on March 7. ANI

Legislative Assembly of J&K.

In addition, Sections 15, 15A and 15B provide that the LG may nominate a total of up to five members – two women, two Kashmiri migrants and one displaced person from Pakistan occupied Kashmir – to the J&K Assembly.

What have courts ruled?

The procedure for nomination of members to the Puducherry Assembly came up before the Madras High Court in the *K. Lakshminarayanan versus Union of India* (2018) case. The court upheld the power of the Union government to nominate three members to the Assembly and that it need not be based on the advice of the UT's Council of Ministers.

Nevertheless, considering the importance of the matter as well as larger principles involved, the court provided certain recommendations for consideration of Parliament. It suggested statutory amendments to lay down a clear and unambiguous procedure for nomination of MLAs. It should provide clarity about where such nomination should emanate from and who/which office will exercise the powers of nomination. However, the Supreme Court on appeal had set aside the recommendations in this judgment of the Madras High Court.

In the *Government of NCT of Delhi versus Union of India* (2023) case, the Supreme Court had delved into the concept of 'triple chain of command' that ensures democratic accountability. In this 'triple chain of command' opined by the court, civil servants are accountable to ministers; ministers are accountable to the legislature; and the legislature is accountable to the electorate. It therefore held that the LG is bound by the aid and advice of the Council of Ministers in all matters except where the Delhi Assembly does not have legislative powers. While this case was related to the appointment of officers to services in the Delhi government, the rationale in this judgment may hold good for nomination of members to the Assembly as well.

What should be done?

A UT does not enjoy the same status of a full-fledged State in our federal set up. However, UTs with Assemblies have their own elected governments that is accountable to its population. The nomination of MLAs does not create any issue when the same party is in power at the Centre and the Union Territory. However, political differences between the Union government and a UT government should not derail the democratic process in the UTs. In smaller assemblies like that of J&K and Puducherry, these nominated MLAs can have the potential of converting a majority government into a minority one and vice versa, thereby rupturing popular mandates.

J&K is a case *sui generis* for it was a State till 2019 with even more autonomy than other States. While the conversion of J&K into a UT has been upheld by the Supreme Court, the Union government has informed the court that it would restore statehood to J&K at the earliest. Considering these factors, it is appropriate that the nomination of five members to the J&K Assembly is made by the LG based on the advice of its Council of Ministers. This would uphold the democratic principle.

Rangarajan. R is a former IAS officer and author of 'Courseware on Polity Simplified'. He currently trains at Officers IAS academy. Views are personal.

THE GIST

▼ The Rajya Sabha has 12 nominated members. These members are nominated by the President on the aid and advice of the Union Council of Ministers.

▼ The composition of the Legislative Assemblies of three Union Territories (UT) are governed by acts of Parliament.

▼ In the *Government of NCT of Delhi versus Union of India* (2023) case, the Supreme Court had delved into the concept of 'triple chain of command' that ensures democratic accountability.

Key points from article

Constitutional background on nomination of members:
- Nominated members exist in **Lok Sabha, Rajya Sabha, State Legislative Assemblies, and Councils.**
- Anglo-Indian nomination (Lok Sabha & Assemblies) discontinued by the **104th Constitutional Amendment, 2020.**
- **Rajya Sabha:** 12 nominated by the President (on aid & advice of Union Council of Ministers).
- **State Legislative Councils:** 1/6th nominated by the Governor (on aid & advice of State Council of Ministers).

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Union Territories (UTs) & Nominations:

- **Delhi Assembly (1991 Act):** 70 elected members, no nominated MLAs.

- **Puducherry Assembly (1963 Act):** 30 elected members + 3 nominated by Union Government.

- **Jammu & Kashmir Reorganisation Act, 2019 (amended 2023):**

  - **90 elected seats.**

  - **5 nominated members by LG** → (2 women, 2 Kashmiri migrants, 1 displaced from PoK).

Current Controversy (J&K):

- Union Home Ministry submitted before J&K & Ladakh HC that **LG can nominate 5 members without aid and advice of Council of Ministers.**

- Raises issue of democratic accountability & Centre–UT power dynamics.

Judicial Precedents:

- **K. Lakshminarayanan vs Union of India (2018)** – Madras HC upheld Union Govt's power to nominate MLAs in Puducherry; suggested statutory clarity.

- **Supreme Court (on appeal)** – set aside HC's recommendations, upheld Centre's direct power.

- **Government of NCT Delhi vs Union of India (2023)** – introduced concept of **'Triple Chain of Command':**

1. Civil servants accountable to Ministers.
2. Ministers accountable to Legislature.
3. Legislature accountable to Electorate.

- Court held: LG must act on **aid & advice** of Council of Ministers except in reserved subjects (Delhi context).

Concerns:

- In small assemblies (like J&K and Puducherry), **3–5 nominated members can alter majority →** risk of destabilising popular mandate.

- Smooth when same party rules at Centre & UT, but contentious during political differences.

- J&K's unique case – formerly a **State with special autonomy** (till 2019). Union Govt has promised restoration of statehood.

Suggested Way Forward:

- Nomination in J&K should be based on **LG acting with aid & advice of Council of Ministers.**

- Ensures democratic accountability, respects electoral mandate, and maintains federal spirit.

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